

G.19 Offices and Buildings Safety Management

1.0 INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

Mercy Services maintains buildings for use as offices, training facilities, day centres, outpatient nursing, counselling and group work. These buildings have the potential to be environments that increase the physical and emotional comfort of staff, volunteers, clients and visitors. They also pose a unique set of hazards that must be identified and addressed in accordance with Mercy Values and legal requirements.

2.0 SCOPE

The purpose of this procedure is to minimise the risk associated with commonly found hazards in Mercy Services office and building environments.

3.0 POLICY STATEMENT

Mercy Services will make all reasonable efforts to provide office and other building facilities that enhance the comfort and wellbeing of staff and others. Part of this effort will be assessing and appropriately controlling any risks to the safety and welfare of Mercy Services workers and others.

4.0 PROCEDURE

4.01 Identifying hazards in the office/building environment

- Mechanical hazards, such as filing cabinets that tend to tip when heavily laden top drawers are open; hot components of photocopiers; poorly designed chairs that do not provide the user with adequate back support.
- Physical hazards, like glare or reflections from screens; tripping hazards; poorly designed jobs and tasks that demand prolonged work in a fixed posture.
- Chemical hazards, such as vapours in the atmosphere – for example, paint, solvents or airborne particles like photocopier toner.
- Psychological hazards, like the need to perform excessive workloads under pressure, lack of satisfaction from a job where there is inadequate recognition of work performed or repetitive work and insufficient task variety.
- Electrical hazards such as damaged electrical cords or overloaded power points that may lead to the risk of electric shock.

All personnel are required to work towards preventing accidents and ill health within the workplace by reporting hazards as soon as possible.

4.02 Controlling hazards

a. Lighting

Mercy Services will ensure an adequate amount of light is provided to match the needs of the task being undertaken.

Figure 1. Recommended illuminance levels for various types of office tasks, activities and interiors. From: Worksafe Victoria (2006:23) Officewise – A Guide To Health & Safety in the Office

CLASS OF TASK	RECOMMENDED MAINTENANCE ILLUMINANCE (LUX)	CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ACTIVITY AND INTERIOR	REPRESENTATIVE ACTIVITIES & INTERIORS
Intermittent use	80	Interiors requiring intermittent use with visual tasks limited to movement and orientation	Staff change rooms
Simple	160	Occasional reading of clearly printed documents for short periods	Waiting rooms
Ordinary or moderately easy	240	Continuously occupied interiors where moderately easy visual tasks with high contrasts or large detail are required	Computer usage
Moderately difficult	400	Areas where visual tasks are moderately difficult with low contrasts	Routine office work
Difficult	600	Areas where visual tasks are difficult with low contrasts	Drawing offices (boards), proof reading

b. Temperature

In Australia, most people work comfortably at temperatures between 20°–26° Celsius. The preferred winter temperature is usually about two degrees lower than in summer. When air conditioners are used to regulate the summer temperature the recommended setting for Mercy Services’ buildings is 23° Celsius.

Some general suggestions for improving thermal comfort include:

- regulate air conditioning for temperature and humidity;

- avoid locating workstations directly in front of or below air conditioning outlets and other draughts;
- install measures to prevent staff being annoyed by draughts;
- control direct sunlight (radiant heat) with blinds, louvers and window treatments;
- minimise draughts and thermal differences between the head and the feet (thermal gradients); and
- ensure adequate air flow. Feelings of stuffiness can result when air flow is low, and draughts occur when air flow is high. An air flow rate of between 0.1 and 0.2 metres per second is desirable.

Mercy Services will contract with a specialist service to regularly inspect and maintain air conditioners at its buildings.

c. Noise

Within office environments the most common negative consequences of noise are annoyance or privacy breaches. Noise in an office environment can be controlled by:

- adjusting the layout to add barriers and separate noise generating activities or equipment from tasks requiring concentration; and
- isolating noisy equipment such as printers or photocopiers by placing them in separate rooms.

d. Air quality (smoke free environment)

All buildings, vehicles and other areas under the control of Mercy Services are deemed “smoke free”. Smoking is permitted outside and away from vehicles and premises, taking care to be away from windows and doors. It is a requirement of service provision that clients refrain from smoking in the presence of Mercy Services staff and volunteers. Anyone found smoking in designated non-smoking areas will be subject to normal disciplinary procedures.

Where possible, open windows will be used to ensure the circulation of fresh air. Exhaust fans and other equipment may be used as a second option.

Suitable plants can also be placed in the building to improve air quality (see Appendix 1).

e. Floor surfaces

Generally carpet is preferred in office areas to provide a comfortable walking surface and to reduce noise, reflected light from polished floor surfaces and the risk of slips and falls. Wool mix carpets reduce the build-up of static electricity which can give a mild electric shock. Carpets should be repaired if they show signs of loose edges or ripples.

Where there are tasks requiring pushing and pulling of wheeled equipment, lino or carpet with a low profile should be the flooring used to prevent unnecessary resistance.

f. Walkways

It is essential that walkways and exits provide safe access and egress at all times. The use of walkways for temporary storage should be avoided as it introduces trip or fall hazards and blocks emergency exits.

g. Manual handling issues in office environments

Points to consider include:

- joints should be in relaxed and comfortable positions - where extreme positions must be used, they should be held for as little time as possible and not repeated often;
- the work should be kept as close as possible to the body to minimise the stress on the body when reaching to perform a task;
- commonly accessed items should be stored between hip and shoulder height, where possible to avoid bending over or reaching up;
- exertion of force should be avoided or done in an upright posture, without twisting the spine and preferably using both hands equally;
- as the working day progresses it becomes more important to provide work with different mental demands, changes in posture and more frequent work breaks;
- repetitive tasks such as using a keyboard and mouse should be performed for short periods. They are best interspersed with other tasks requiring different postures and movements, e.g. collecting work at the printer, reviewing, photocopying and distributing documents;
- job design should provide the opportunity for people to sit, stand or walk a short distance as a normal part of their duties;
- even short pauses, collecting a document from the printer provides an opportunity to vary muscle use; and
- where a variety of alternative tasks are not available, it is important to have more work breaks away from the task.

h. Storage

Storage facilities need to be maintained and reviewed periodically to ensure that they are safe and suitable to the storage needs. Where a compactus is used to store records it should not require significant force to operate the handle. Proper installation and regular maintenance of the unit should ensure ease of operation.

Cleaning products should be stored in an appropriate container and clearly labelled with the product name.

Some common problems and solutions with the use of filing cabinets include:

- tightly packed files – may contribute to muscle soreness and holding awkward postures. Periodic review of the contents can help reduce overcrowding;
- access to lower drawers – users should use their legs to squat or alternatively adopt a kneeling posture in preference to bending; and
- where a cabinet is not level, the drawers may be difficult to open or close or even remain in an open position when not in use.

i. Function of the space

In choosing a position for equipment, work areas and storage facilities consideration should be given to the other activities and traffic that occur in the area. For example, a filing cabinet requires approximately 1.2 metres of space in front of it to enable someone to access a fully opened bottom drawer.

Figure 2. Relaxed and comfortable work positions. From: Worksafe Victoria (2006:23) Officewise – A Guide To Health & Safety in the Office



l. Reception or counter areas

Wider bench surfaces may be required for the placement of delivery items and to improve staff security, but care should be taken to avoid the need for reception or customer service staff to have extended periods of reaching up and forward. Security features, such as screens or emergency buttons, may be required. When the reception desk/counter is high, thought needs to be given to whether staff need to be seated up high, possibly on a high adjustable chair with a footrest, or perhaps a false floor is required to raise the staff to the level of the customer.

m. Eye strain

Reading without adequate light or reading small print over long periods of time can sometimes cause eye strain. Some computer operators may suffer headaches associated with eye strain, particularly if the head and neck muscles are held in a static position. Looking away from the computer to a far spot, walking away from the screen and giving the eyes some exercise, such as blinking, can decrease the effects of long periods of concentrating on a screen. Computer users with bifocal or multifocal lens should seek advice from an optometrist to ensure their glasses do not cause them eyestrain or unnatural postures.

p. Cleanliness

All premises will be cleaned regularly and maintained in a clean and orderly state. Premises must be free from infestations of vermin, cockroaches, fleas, spiders and other pests. Quarterly pest control should be scheduled, ensuring that concerned persons, such as pregnant women, are alerted to

the pest controllers visit so they may choose to absent themselves from the building and environs if necessary.

All clients are required to be dressed in clean clothing. Family or other informal carers or Mercy Services or other personal care staff should attend to these matters. Volunteers and any other personnel with concerns about the cleanliness of others should report this to their Program Co-ordinator.

q. Toilets

The Building Code of Australia specifies the number of toilets required in workplaces. In most workplaces it is 1 toilet per 15 females or 20 males.

r. Washing Facilities

The Chief Executive Officer will ensure the provision of suitable hand-washing facilities to enable personnel to maintain standards of personal hygiene. Hand washing basins should be separate from sinks used in connection with work processes.

The washing facilities will be provided with an adequate supply of non-irritating soap, from a soap dispenser, and hygienic hand drying facilities such as paper towels. The ratio of hand washing basins to people depends on the number of users, the type of building and the nature of the work. The Building Code of Australia provides specific information for certain workplaces such as health care facilities but for most workplaces an adequate ratio is 1 wash basin per 30 people.

Where possible, showering facilities will be provided. Ideally a separate shower will be provided for men and women with each shower area having a lockable door and non-slip flooring.

s. Lockers and Storage of Personal Belongings

Personnel will be provided with space at work to store personal belongings and Personal Protective Equipment.

t. Rest/sick room

Mercy Services will provide access to rest rooms in the main workplaces, for short-term respite while at work which may be needed due to injury, illness or fatigue.

These rest rooms are:

- clean, hygienic and comfortable;
- separated from the main working area (though not necessarily a separate room);
- quiet and well-ventilated; and
- conveniently accessible to toilets and washing facilities.

u. Lunch room

Mercy Services personnel will be provided with hygienic facilities for eating their meals and for preparing and storing food and with a system for the removal of rubbish associated with eating and dining areas.

Food hygiene will be maintained to prevent illness/discomfort from spoiled food/drink, poorly cleaned eating utensils and unwashed dishcloths. Each site will develop a system for checking that bins are emptied and unwanted food is thrown away at the end of the working week and that dishes are washed.

v. Drinking Water

An adequate supply of clean drinking water will be provided at all workplaces and be readily accessible for all personnel. Drinking points will be separate from toilet or washing facilities to avoid contamination of drinking water. To avoid the spread of germs, drinking water taps should not come in contact with: a person's mouth; with cups/containers that have had contact with a person's mouth and people should not share drinking containers.

4.03 Training

Personnel will be provided with relevant training in the appropriate set up and use of any equipment, as well as in the required rest breaks and exercises to be undertaken.

4.04 Emergency situations

All Mercy Services' office and activity centres will have a first aid officer and first aid kit.

All Mercy Services' office and activity centres will have a building warden and emergency action plans.

4.05 Review and monitoring

A site inspection to identify hazards will be carried out every three months in accordance with the Mercy Services' WHS Risk Management Policy.

Incident reports highlighting hazards outside and/or within Mercy Services' buildings will be investigated and the Health & Safety Committee will receive a report on the outcome.

Mercy Services Strategic and Operational planning, quality improvement processes and satisfaction surveys will allow staff/volunteers/clients to comment on the adequacy of Mercy Services buildings and facilities.

4.06 Compliance

Compliance with this policy is being measured by:

- a) workplace site inspections carried out every three months, check that regular maintenance is completed as per the schedule: e.g.,
 - exit/emergency lighting = every six months
 - fire fighting equipment = every six months
 - air conditioners = every three months
 - pest control = every three months

- rainwater tank maintenance = every month

4.09 Evaluation

The performance indicator for the evaluation of this policy is:

- 100% compliance with scheduled maintenance.

5.0 REFERENCES

1. Current issues	a) None identified
2. Australian Standards	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> AS/NZS 4804: Occupational health and safety management systems — General guidelines on principles, systems and supporting techniques AS/NZS 4801: Occupational health and safety management systems — Specification with guidance for use. AS/NZS 4360:2004 — Risk Management
3. Legislation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (NSW) Work Health and Safety Regulations 2011 (NSW)
4. Professional guidelines	a) None identified
5. Codes of Practice	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Safe Work Australia (2011) Code Of Practice: How to Manage Work Health and Safety Risks http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/AboutSafeWorkAustralia/WhatWeDo/Publications/Documents/633/How_to_Manage_Work_Health_and_Safety_Risks.pdf Safe Work Australia (2015) Code Of Practice: Managing the Risk of Falls at Workplaces http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/sites/SWA/about/Publications/Documents/632/managing-risk-falls.pdf Safe Work Australia (2011) Code Of Practice: Managing Noise and Preventing Hearing Loss at Work http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/AboutSafeWorkAustralia/WhatWeDo/Publications/Documents/627/Managing_Noise_and_Preventing_Hearing_Loss_at_Work.pdf Safe Work Australia (2011) Code Of Practice: Managing the Work Environment and Facilities http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/AboutSafeWorkAustralia/WhatWeDo/Publications/Documents/626/Managing_the_Work_Environment_and_Facilities.pdf
6. Codes of Ethics	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Australian Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics http://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/1201 Australian Psychological Association Code of Ethics http://www.psychology.org.au/Assets/Files/Code_Ethics_2007.pdf The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia. Registration Requirements http://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/Registration-Standards.aspx Integrity in the Service of the Church https://www.catholic.org.au/media-centre/media-releases/cat_view/10-organisations/38-national-committee-for-professional-standards Mercy Services Code of Conduct
7. Evidence	a) Comcare (2008) Officewise – A Guide To Health & Safety In The Office https://www.comcare.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/39570/Officewise_OHS1_Apr_10.pdf
8. Mercy Services Values	a) Justice, Respect, Care, Unity, Service

6.0 OTHER RELATED POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

- A.03 Code of Conduct
- A.04 Environmental Responsibility
- C.01 Management Roles and Responsibilities
- C.02 Strategic Planning
- C.03 Operational Planning
- C.05 Quality Improvement
- D.07 Asset purchase and maintenance
- D.09 Use of Facilities & Equipment
- D.10 Security
- F.3 Learning and development
- G.04 WHS Training
- G.05 Risk Management
- G.08 Infection Control
- G.09 Manual Handling
- G.10 Hazardous Substances
- G.11 Security at Mercy Services Centres
- G.12 Stress Management
- G.14 WHS for Contractors
- G.15 First Aid
- G.16 Emergency Response
- G.17 Incident Investigation
- G.22 Personal Protective Equipment
- G.24 Plant and Equipment

7.0 RELATIONSHIP WITH STANDARDS

<i>Aged Care Accreditation Standards</i>	<i>Home Care Standards</i>	<i>Disability Standards</i>	<i>EQUIP Standards</i>
1.1, 1.2, 1.7, 1.9, 2.1, 2.2, 3.1, 3.2, 4.1, 4.2, 4.6, 4.7, 4.8	1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 1.8, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.5	3.4, 6.3	1.3.1, 1.5.2, 1.5.4, 2.1.1, 2.1.2, 2.1.3, 3.1.1, 3.1.2, 3.2.1, 3.2.2, 3.2.4, 3.2.5

8.0 DOCUMENT CHANGES RECORD

<i>Dates of change</i>	<i>Section altered</i>	<i>Natures of changes made</i>
04/02/09	Creation of document	
04/11/09	a) 1.0 Introduction b) 2.0 c) 3.0 Policy Statement d) 4.1 Hazard Identification e) 4.2 Hazard control f) Old section 5.2.4 g) 4.3 h) 5.0 References i) 6.0 Related Policies j) Relationship to Standards k) 8.0 Document Changes l) Old Appendix 1 Site Inspection checklist m) New Appendix 1	a) Section added b) Section added with previous section 1.0 c) Section added d) Section added using part of old 5.1 e) Largely new instruction with parts of old 5.2.2, 5.2.3, 5.2.5, 5.2.6, f) Section deleted as it deals with client homes which are covered in Policy G.06 g) Section added h) Section added using Old section 3.0 i) Section added j) Section added k) Section added l) Deleted as checklist is already in G.05 m) Added

28/03/2011	a) 7.0 Relationship to Standards	a) Updated Community Care Common Standards and EQulP5 Standards
02/11/2011	a) Title b) 4.02 b air conditioners c) 4.02 v d) 4.02 J,K, N, O e) 4.06 and 4.07	a) Minor change b) Added maintenance requirement c) Reworded sentence about avoiding spread of germs d) Moved to new G.24 Plant & Equipment Policy e) New sections
06/02/2012	a) All sections b) 4.8 Compliance c) 5.0 References	a) Updated with how new WHS laws and Codes of Practice apply at Mercy Services b) Updated c) Updated with new WHS laws and Codes of Practice
27/11/2012	All Sections	Organisation name updated
04/11/2015	a) 5.0 References b) 7.0 Relationship to Standards	a) Update: Codes of Ethics, Code Of Practice: Managing the Risk of Falls at Workplaces b) Add Aged Care and update Disability Standards
Review due 04/11/2018		

Appendix 1 Workcover NSW (2004) Health and Safety in the Office

Available at: M:\Shared\WHS\Office issues\health_and_safety_in_the_office_1319

Plants in the office

United States NASA studies have shown that plants reduce the levels of toxic substances such as formaldehyde, benzol and carbon monoxide in the air. Some useful plants for the office are:



Chinese Evergreen



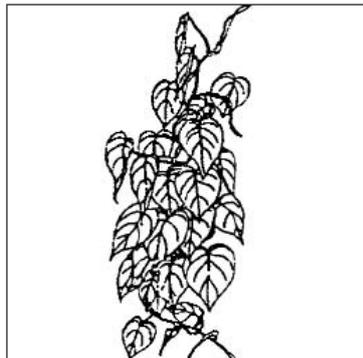
Madonna lily



Wrenkii



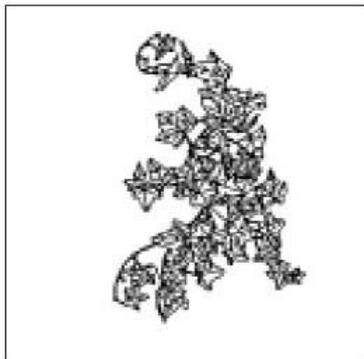
Mother-in-laws tongue



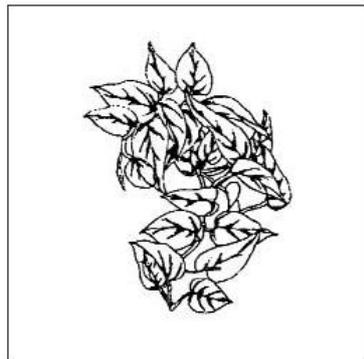
Heart leaf



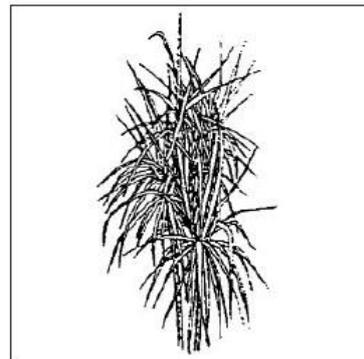
Corn plant



English ivy



Pothos



Madagascar dragon tree

Further information is available on the NASA website: <http://www.colormegreenco.com/NASA/nasa2.htm>