

Voluntary Code of Practice for  
Health and Safety Issues in  
**New Zealand  
LIBRARIES**



**New Zealand Library &  
Information Association**  
Te Rau Herenga o Aotearoa

DEPARTMENT OF  
**LABOUR**  
TE TARI MAHI

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# Foreword

It gives me great pleasure to write this foreword to the *Voluntary Code of Practice for Health and Safety Issues in NZ Libraries*. Members of the Association will know that the development of this code was a project Rebekah Wards, a former head librarian for OSH, held very dear to her heart and it is so pleasing to see it come to fruition. At the memorial service for Rebekah, I offered every assistance to your Association in the development of this code. Its production is a credit to all her colleagues who have contributed to what is a very timely and appropriate initiative in health and safety.

Your Association is to be congratulated on completing this code. I am pleased that OSH has been able to assist in its production. I know how much effort is required to bring a project like this to a satisfactory conclusion. The completion of this code is a credit to your Association. What has been produced is a preferred work practice document of high quality which will lead to higher sustainable levels of health and safety in libraries.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "R J M Hill". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "R".

R J M Hill  
General Manager  
Occupational Safety and Health Service

## DEDICATION

This Voluntary Code of Practice is dedicated  
to the memory of

**Rebekah Wards**

Head Librarian, New Zealand Occupational  
Safety and Health Service,  
who initiated the project in 1995.

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# Contents

<i>FOREWORD</i> .....	3
<i>NZLIA HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICY STATEMENT</i> .....	7
<i>1. WHY A VOLUNTARY CODE OF PRACTICE?</i> .....	9
<i>2. HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICY AS IT AFFECTS LIBRARY AND INFORMATION WORKERS</i> .....	10
2.1 Objective of Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992	10
2.2 Coverage of the Act	10
2.3 Duties of Employers	10
2.4 Duties of Employees	11
2.5 Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Representative	11
<i>3. COMMON HAZARDS IN THE LIBRARY OR INFORMATION CENTRE</i> .....	12
3.1 Architectural Features	12
3.2 Noise	13
3.3 Occupational Overuse Syndrome (OOS)	14
3.4 General Health and Fitness and Stress Management	14
3.5 Dangerous Equipment and Substances	14
<i>4. OOS: RESPONSIBILITIES OF MANAGERS AND EMPLOYEES</i> .....	15
4.1 Responsibilities of Managers	15
4.2 Responsibilities of Employees	16
4.3 Reporting Systems	17
<i>5. ROLE OF OSH IN THE WORKPLACE</i> .....	18
5.1 Management of Hazards	18
5.2 Record of Accident/Incident/Serious Harm	18
<i>6. RECOMMENDED WORK PRACTICES</i> .....	19
6.1 Recommended Work Practices for all Situations	19
6.2 Working at Desks and Workstations	19
6.3 Task Variety	21
6.4 Handling Books	21

6.5	Trolleys and Work Benches	22
6.6	Shelving	22
6.7	Moving Book Stock	23
6.8	Set up of Multi-Purpose/Person Workstations/Service Desks	24
6.9	Work at Public Service Desks	25
6.10	Keyboard Operation	26
6.11	Work at Photocopy Machines	26
 <i>7. MAKING THE CODE WORK IN YOUR ORGANISATION</i>		 <i>27</i>
 <i>REFERENCES</i>		 <i>28</i>
 <i>DEFINITIONS</i>		 <i>29</i>
 <i>HOW TO CONTACT OSH</i>		 <i>30</i>

# NZLIA Health and Safety Policy Statement

The New Zealand Library and Information Association, Te Rau Herenga o Aotearoa, is committed to promoting a safe and healthy work environment for its members. To this end, the Association has prepared guidelines for its members about working with the Occupational Safety and Health Service, Department of Labour, to identify hazards in the library workplace, assess these hazards and suggest how they should be eliminated, isolated or minimised.

As an employer, the NZLIA also recognises its duty to its employees under the Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992 and undertakes to discharge all obligations under that Act.

The NZLIA will promote to its members the OSH codes of practice, and, in particular, this voluntary code, as part of its commitment to promoting a safe and healthy working environment for its members in their various workplaces.

The NZLIA expects that its members will be familiar with the Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992 and its accompanying codes of practice and regulations. The NZLIA expects its members to participate in and contribute to OSH programmes and systems established in their wider funding organisation. The NZLIA also expects that its members who are library managers will take all necessary steps to ensure that in the various departments and sections under their management, the recommended practices of the Act, codes and regulations will be followed where appropriate.

The NZLIA recommends that there be clear responsibilities assigned to appropriate persons to ensure the prevention of harm to employees at work.

## *Occupational Safety and Health Officer*

The NZLIA supports the appointment of an occupational safety and health officer in each workplace. This may be the Librarian-in-Charge or, in the case of large libraries, it may be a delegated responsibility.

The role of the occupational safety and health officer is:

- to assist library management to meet the principal objective of the Act, namely, to prevent harm to employees at work (Section 5(1));
- to contribute to the fulfilment of the responsibilities of the employer and the employees as laid out in the Act and its accompanying regulations and codes of practice;
- to provide advice and assistance to employees on hazard identification and management.

The occupational safety and health officer may communicate directly and freely with the NZLIA for advice or referral if it were felt that their particular library had not met the responsibilities required under the Act, voluntary code or regulation. Where the library is part of a larger organisation, e.g. a city council, then failure to meet these responsibilities should be addressed to the health and safety officer of the larger organisation in the first instance.

The NZLIA will:

- Maintain and distribute an up-to-date Code of Practice on Health and Safety in Libraries, including advice on approaching OSH;
- Maintain a watching brief on health and safety issues and inform members of any new developments;
- Maintain liaison with OSH to stay abreast of any changes to its mandate and procedures.



# I. Why a Voluntary Code of Practice?

The *Voluntary Code of Practice for Health and Safety Issues in New Zealand Libraries* is intended to promote the health and safety of library and information workers by:

1. Providing guidance to employers and employees about identifying potential hazards;
2. Emphasising the need for managerial and personal responsibility in the prevention of injury; and
3. Providing guidelines on safe work practices which will minimise common injuries such as OOS.

Advances in technology are transforming the development and management of library collections, and facilitating access to expanding and diverse sources of information. At the same time, use of printed material, with its many associated traditional work tasks, continues. These factors, together with the requirements and expectations of today's information consumers, have increased the complexity and volume of work faced by information providers and contributed to increasing levels of risk to their safety and health.

In recent years there has been a significant increase in reported cases of work-related injuries and disorders within the library profession. The *Voluntary Code of Practice on Health and Safety Issues in New Zealand Libraries* recognises Occupational Overuse Syndrome (OOS) as a significant hazard under the terms of the Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992 (HSE Act), so special emphasis has been placed on the prevention of OOS in this code of practice.

The New Zealand Library and Information Association (NZLIA) is committed to promoting a safe and healthy work environment for its members. To meet this aim, the NZLIA will encourage awareness of the Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992 in New Zealand libraries. In addition, the NZLIA will suggest general guidelines on health and safety practices in libraries.

In meeting its commitment to the health and safety of its members, the NZLIA expects that senior managers of libraries will take all practical steps to ensure that in the various departments and sections under their management the recommended practices of this code are followed where appropriate.

# 2. Health and Safety Policy as it Affects Library and Information Workers

## 2.1 Objective of Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992

The principal objective of the HSE Act 1992 is to prevent harm to employees at work. This is to be achieved by:

- Promoting excellence in health and safety management by employers;
- Imposing obligations and duties in relation to the prevention of harm to employees;
- Providing for the development of codes of practice relating to hazards to employees.

## 2.2 Coverage of the Act

The Act covers all work environments. It places the responsibility for health and safety right throughout the organisation, with responsibility being shared by management and employees.

## 2.3 Duties of Employers

Employers must prevent, as far as possible, their employees suffering harm. Part II of the Act outlines the general duties of employers under the Act. These are:

1. To take all practicable steps to ensure the safety of employees.
2. To ensure equipment is safe to use, and that employees receive adequate training in its use (and maintain individual training records to ensure all staff have participated, and provide ongoing training where appropriate).
3. To eliminate hazards, or where that is impossible, to minimise them.
4. To develop emergency procedures/early reporting systems.

To prevent employees suffering harm, it is recommended that employers ensure there are effective and systematic methods for identifying, and eliminating where possible, hazards. If there are no practicable steps that can be taken to eliminate the hazard, then the employer must take all

practicable steps to isolate the hazard, minimise it, and ensure employees are protected from it.

Under the Act, managers must also:

1. Maintain a register of accidents and serious harm which may occur in the workplace.
2. Notify the Department of Labour as soon as possible of serious harm.
3. Co-operate with the Department's investigation into serious accidents.

For recommendations relating to specific conditions, see section 5.

## 2.4 Duties of Employees

Like managers, employees must minimise the risk of injury to themselves or their colleagues. This can be done by:

- Working safely, in a manner which will not harm themselves or anyone around them;
- Using the safety equipment provided;
- Reporting any safety hazards in their work area;
- Participating in health and safety committees at work, sharing ideas and knowledge;
- Reporting health conditions such as OOS, back strain or muscle strain;
- Following advice from doctors, physiotherapists and other health professionals;
- Working with employers and colleagues to find solutions to hazards in the workplace.

For recommendations relating to specific conditions, see section 5.

## 2.5 Occupational Safety and Health Representative

The NZLIA recommends that each library identify its occupational safety and health representative to all staff. For example, in the case of a government library, this would be the departmental occupational safety and health representative; for a public library, the city council should have an occupational safety and health officer; and schools and universities otherwise have the responsibility to appoint an occupational safety and health representative. Special libraries operating in private enterprise may need to bring this question to the attention of their managers.

# 3. Common Hazards in the Library or Information Centre

Managers and employees alike have a duty to identify hazards and to work together to minimise potential for injury. For each identified hazard, the library must take practical steps to prevent injury to employees. Employers should follow the recommendations of the code of practice specific to the hazard, such as the *Approved Code of Practice for the Use of VDUs in the Place of Work*.

This voluntary code of practice cannot include mention of every potential source of hazard in the library. Managers and employees must use the basic principles evident in these examples to deduce what may constitute a hazard in their own workplaces. This section lists, therefore, examples of potential hazards or factors which may contribute to harm.

Hazard identification must be ongoing. As workplaces change, for instance through building reconstruction, the introduction of new equipment or changes in work practices and workflow, managers and employees must be aware of the potential for new hazards to arise. For this reason, monitoring must be continuous.

It is noted that the HSE Act considers a ‘hazard’ to be defined in terms of the current state of knowledge about the likelihood of its causing harm. As our knowledge changes, it may be that some work practices and equipment will come to be considered potentially harmful, even though they are not currently considered so. For example, the consensus of current knowledge about radiation from VDUs is that there is no convincing evidence that it is harmful. If, however, this consensus changes, radiation may need to be considered a hazard. Managers must maintain an awareness of changes in the current state of knowledge of potential hazards in their workplaces.

## 3.1 Architectural Features

### 3.1.1 Stairwells

If stairs are steep or narrow, or if lighting is poor, these are a hazard. As total reconstruction is often out of the question, managers should reduce the risk by installing better lighting, improving handrails, adding grips to stairs, and placing warning notices in work areas. Exits to areas such as stairwells must be kept free of book trolleys and other equipment.

### 3.1.2 Heaters

Check placement of all heaters in order to avoid the danger of fire, and to ensure employee comfort. Individual heaters should have adequate wiring

and power outlets to avoid overheating. Work areas near heaters must be free of potential fire hazards such as loose papers and other flammable materials.

### *3.1.3 Lighting*

Lighting should be between 200 and 550 lux in general office areas, with local lighting where necessary.

### *3.1.4 Computer Monitors*

Place the computer screen at right angles to windows and address any reflected glare onto screens. It may be necessary to use curtains or blinds on windows, and/or to fit diffusing screens to monitors.

### *3.1.5 Cables and Wires*

Cables and wires should not be running across floors, or left tangled up under work desks. They should either be removed or minimised, by taping down or running through a sturdy conduit.

### *3.1.6 Air Quality*

#### *3.1.6.1 Ventilation*

At least 10-20% fresh air from outside the building is recommended. Dust and fumes must be eliminated or minimised as much as possible. Laser printers should be placed as far away from workstations as possible. Rooms housing such equipment should be well-ventilated. When buildings are air-conditioned, expert advice may be needed to resolve problems of stuffiness.

#### *3.1.6.2 Temperature and Humidity*

Thermal comfort is just as important as ventilation. Temperatures should be within a comfortable range for all employees, generally within 17-22°C. Drafts of cold air must be eliminated or minimised as much as possible. Air humidity should be within the range of 45-75%.

## **3.2 Noise**

A noisy office is not likely to cause deafness, but may be a source of stress, resulting in increasing muscle tension and fatigue. Attention should be paid to printers. Standard methods of controlling noise include:

- padding under machines;
- enclosure of noisy machines in acoustic hoods;
- carpet on the floor;

- sound-absorbing partitions;
- acoustic ceiling tiles;
- the replacement, isolation or relocation of noisy equipment.

### 3.3 Occupational Overuse Syndrome (OOS)

OOS is a collective term for a range of conditions (including injury) characterised by discomfort or persistent pain in muscles, tendons and other soft tissues. Every case of OOS has the potential to cause “serious harm” according to the definition contained in the Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992. Therefore the risk factors for OOS need to be controlled, either by eliminating the hazard if at all possible, or by isolating or minimising the hazard. (See section 5.2)

### 3.4 General Health and Fitness and Stress Management

All employees are encouraged to maintain their personal health and fitness. Individuals are more vulnerable to injury if they are unwell or tired.

While some stress can be stimulating, over a concentrated period it can rise to levels where action may need to be taken to reduce it. Muscles can become tense, making the individual more vulnerable to injury at this time. Relaxation techniques and regular exercise are recommended.

### 3.5 Dangerous Equipment and Substances

#### 3.5.1 *Equipment*

Despite their innocuous reputation, libraries can often contain hazardous equipment. In a bindery, for example, potentially dangerous equipment is usually present, including blades, rollers, etc. Such hazards must be shielded, and managers must minimise the risk by displaying adequate warning notices, and training employees to use tools safely.

#### 3.5.2 *Chemicals*

Preservation units may store hazardous chemicals. These must be stored properly with adequate warning signs. Employees must be thoroughly trained in the safe use of these substances. Chemicals which are no longer used should be safely disposed of. In addition, Material Safety Data Sheets should be displayed prominently near the chemical storage areas.

# 4. OOS: Responsibilities of Managers and Employees

## 4.1 Responsibilities of Managers

Managers must periodically make a careful review of the building, all equipment and operations, and prepare a plan to deal with all identified hazards. This plan should be reviewed periodically. Sufficient time and resources must be allocated for complying with the responsibilities placed upon organisations by the HSE Act.

Managers must also have the resources and authority to:

- Identify any hazard under the terms of the HSE Act and deal with it in accordance with the Act;
- Ensure that the impact of new technology is considered and planned for to eliminate or minimise hazards;
- Ensure that reporting systems are in place (see section 5.4).

### 4.1.1 *Occupational Overuse Syndrome*

Managers have a responsibility to:

- Plan and organise workflow, incorporating job rotation, task variation, the establishment of even workloads and workflows, the provision of clear and appropriate job descriptions, and adequate resources to meet sudden changes in workload.
- Provide a supportive environment and procedures that encourage the early reporting of discomfort that may lead to OOS, an early diagnosis of the problem and its causal factors, provide advice and support for the employees, and for an assessment of the individual's workplace, workload, tasks, and work practices.
- Provide a supportive environment that allows and encourages formal relaxation and exercise breaks, in addition to the micro-pauses and minibreaks that employees should take throughout their work shift.
- Ensure that the library is aware of advances in the prevention and treatment of OOS, that employees are kept informed, and that information is readily available on the condition and on its management.

- Ensure all employees and supervisors attend an appropriate training session on the causes and prevention of OOS in their first month of employment, with refresher training as required.
- Ensure equipment and furniture meet the required standards set out in the *Approved Code of Practice for the Use of VDUs in the Place of Work*.
- Facilitate an early return to work for any employee who has been absent through an OOS injury.
- Educate all employees, permanent, temporary and part-time, to be aware of OOS as a condition, of the hazards associated with this condition in library work, and of good work practices, at the time of their induction.
- Stress the role of personal responsibility in avoiding, or at least minimising, and managing the condition.
- Make readily available and publicise the contents of the Department of Labour's *Approved Code of Practice for the Use of VDUs in the Place of Work*. This must be adhered to when purchasing or modifying workstations.

## 4.2 Responsibilities of Employees

Individuals have a responsibility to do all they can to avoid injury. An employee should not assume that any harm can be blamed upon management.

- Employees must report any problems with their equipment, work flows or personal health to the appropriate person.
- Having been trained in the correct use of equipment, employees must use it correctly.
- If after exhausting the normal reporting procedure, an occupational safety and health issue has not been resolved, the employer or the elected safety and health representative may bring the matter to the attention of the occupational safety and health representative.
- No employee, employer representative or safety and health representative should notify an Inspector to attend the workplace unless the resolution procedure has been followed.
- If a dangerous situation arises, the employee has the right to, and must, cease the activity giving rise to it. He or she must immediately notify the employer and the safety and health representative of his or her action. If the matter cannot be resolved, the employee must undertake alternative duties while the matter is being resolved.



### 4.2.1 Occupational Overuse Syndrome

Employees should attend any information programmes that are offered in the workplace.

In addition to attending training on the dangers and avoidance of OOS, employees are encouraged to do the following:

- report symptoms early and to seek professional help for the condition;
- keep physically fit by engaging in sports or physical education;
- learn relaxation techniques;
- maintain good posture;
- maintain a balanced diet;
- report suspected problems.

## 4.3 Reporting Systems

Any employee who identifies a hazard in the workplace is to report the hazard using the organisation's hazard report form as soon as possible to his or her immediate supervisor and their health and safety representative. The majority of hazards can be dealt with at this stage.

If the matter cannot be resolved, it is to be reported by both the supervisor and the safety and health representative to the next level of management. This procedure should continue until the issue is resolved.

In general, only on matters of extreme urgency or where the hazard is life-threatening will the issue need to be reported to senior managers. Managers are expected to follow up on problems, and either eliminate the hazard or take steps to minimise the risk of injury.

No safety and health representative, employee or supervisor should bypass the chain of reporting procedures, except in an emergency.

# 5. Role of OSH in the Workplace

## 5.1 Management of Hazards

Under the HSE Act 1992, the initial responsibility for resolving an issue is with the employee and the supervisor. However, the Occupational Safety and Health Service (OSH) will provide advice and assistance to all employees on hazard identification and resolution.

Employers must identify existing and new hazards, which means systematically evaluating new situations to assess their potential for harm. The next requirement is to eliminate, or at least minimise, all hazards.

## 5.2 Record of Accident/Incident/Serious Harm

Employers must maintain a register of accidents and serious harm, on a prescribed form (section 25 of the Act). All serious harm should be reported to the Department of Labour (OSH) as soon as possible after the occurrence, with a follow-up written report, on the prescribed form, within seven days. If an employee must stop work, or is unable to carry out normal duties because of severe work-related pain, then serious harm may have occurred. As a guide, being unable to carry out normal duties for seven days should be taken as evidence of serious harm and should be reported.

# 6. Recommended Work Practices

The following is a non-exhaustive list of hazards commonly found in libraries or information centres, with guidelines offered as practical examples to help avoid causing harm.

As mentioned in section 2 of this code, managers must take all practicable steps to ensure the safety of employees. Employees are also responsible for attending training and following recommended safe work practices. Managers must, therefore, identify any potential hazards in their place of work and take steps to minimise risk of injury.

## 6.1 Recommended Work Practices for all Situations

- Good housekeeping is a standard safety and health practice — this means keeping floors tidy, drawers and filing cabinets closed.
- Avoid reaching and stretching, by having your work close to you.
- Position yourself straight on to the task.
- Move with the workflow; align “nose and toes”, and swivel in chair if reaching is unavoidable.
- Bend your knees when lifting, not your back.

## 6.2 Working at Desks and Workstations

### 6.2.1 General

Follow equipment and workstation set-up guidelines from the *Approved Code of Practice for the Use of VDUs in the Place of Work*, paying special attention to the following points:

- Keyboard and mouse must conform to a suitable standard, and should be at the same level and closely adjacent.
- Arms should be at 90 degrees when keyboarding (consider footstool and adjustable chair height options if desk height is fixed).
- Keep wrists straight for mouse/trackball use.
- Where possible, use keystrokes as an alternative to using the mouse.
- Have copyholders especially designed to hold a book open, if necessary.

- Have clear desk space within your ‘work arc’ to place materials that you are working on, and maximise your workspace by reducing clutter on your desk or workstation.
- Do not write on paper held on a copyholder; instead, lift the paper down to annotate.
- Chairs can be higher when you are writing than when you are keyboarding.
- Use ink roller point pens rather than ball point pens.
- Use pens grips to widen and soften pinch grip when writing.
- Shared workstations, chairs and accessories should be adjustable to accommodate employees of differing height and vision (refer to the *Approved Code of Practice for VUDs in the Place of Work*).
- Practice recommended muscle relaxation techniques, including micropauses and hanging your arms down frequently to let the blood flow freely.

## 6.2.2 Posture

### 6.2.2.1 General Guidelines

- Non-ergonomic furniture and equipment can cause poor posture, which can be associated with OOS.
- Make a habit of checking your posture before commencing keyboarding, and adjust your furniture to enable you to work comfortably and safely.
- Adjust the height of the backrest to support the lumbar curve (small) of your back.
- Adjust your seat depth so that you are firmly supported by the backrest and can still fit three fingers between the front of your seat and your calves.
- It is recommended that the top of your monitor is approximately level with your eyes, giving a line of vision of 30 degrees. Position the screen at a comfortable viewing distance, usually between 500-800mm, an arm’s length. Font size can be adjusted to make it readable if you prefer working at a distance from your screen.
- When using a document holder, adjust the top to eye level and ensure the viewing distance is the same as to the screen
- Fully adjustable chairs, footstools and copy holders are considered essential equipment for keyboard operators. Other furniture and equipment such as adjustable tables, forearm supports, task lighting, screen adjusters, screen filters and appropriate dividing screens may be necessary in some cases. Refer to the *Approved Code of Practice for the Use of VDUs in the Place of Work*. It is recommended that

the vendor be approached to trial new items of furniture before purchase.

#### 6.2.2.2 *Fixed Height Desks*

- Adjust the height of your chair so that your elbow tips are at the same level as the home row (ASDF) of keys.
- Adjust the height of your footrest so that your hips are slightly lower than your knees.
- Adjust your chair height so that your feet are flat on the floor and your hips are slightly lower than your knees.

### 6.2.3 *Health Care*

An employee who experiences continued pain and discomfort which might reasonably be considered to be caused by daily work tasks is required to consult a doctor for advice and diagnosis, and to follow that advice.

#### 6.2.3.1 *Symptoms of Occupational Overuse Syndrome*

Stage 1 may be consistent pain in the wrist, arm, elbow, shoulder, neck or other areas subject to repetitive activity. Pain may subside when at rest at night and start again when repetitive tasks are resumed.

N.B. It is important to obtain early treatment before stage 2 is reached.

Stage 2 may be a persistent pain which does not subside after rest.

Stage 3 may be severe and/or constant pain restricting mobility of the affected limb.

Particular care should be taken when returning from periods of leave as this is a time of increased risk. During the first week of resuming duties, the employee is advised to avoid long periods at the keyboard and high-speed entry.

## 6.3 Task Variety

Alternate tasks as much as possible to allow groups of muscles to relax.

## 6.4 Handling Books

- Wrists should be straight at all times (avoid bending or arching).
- Avoid prolonged grip.
- Avoid handling too many books at one time.
- Whenever possible, slide rather than lift books.

## 6.5 Trolleys and Work Benches

### 6.5.1 Design

Where possible, have the bench at a convenient height, so that employees need neither stoop nor raise their shoulders when working. Staff should be consulted to determine a comfortable height and the best means of providing it.

Trolleys should have handles fitted at each end. The handles should be at different, or adjustable heights to accommodate the needs of short and tall employees. Arms should be at approximately 120 degrees when moving a trolley. Staff should be consulted to determine a comfortable height. Ensure they are kept well-maintained for ease of movement.

### 6.5.2 Loading, Moving and Unloading Trolleys

- Keep wrists straight when pushing trolleys.
- Start trolleys moving with body weight, not wrists/arms.
- Do not overload the trolley.
- Do not pack books in too tightly.
- Avoid loading bottom shelves.
- Sit on foot stool if spending some time working at low height.

### 6.5.3 Use of Trolleys when Seated at a Desk/Workstation

As a rule, the practice of using trolleys while seated at a desk or workstation is not recommended.

- If taking a book from a trolley to work with at a desk/workstation (or vice-versa), have the trolley close to you.
- Work at waist height — do not reach down or up.
- Move your body when replacing a book.
- Do not lift too many books at one time.
- Do not have a pile of books on your desk where the height means you must reach up and hold the full weight of a book when taking from or replacing onto the pile.

## 6.6 Shelving

### 6.6.1 General Guidelines

- Carry only as many books as you can safely handle at one time.
- Always work with straight wrists.

- Stay close to your work.
- Do not shelve books too tightly together.
- Do not close book ends up too firmly,
- To make a shelving space, loosen off the book- end and ease books along shelf to make a space. DO NOT try to move the entire shelf length of books at one time.
- Use a foot stool to reach high areas, and if possible do not shelve above shoulder height.
- Place pile of books to be shelved spine up, on empty shelf space near shelving area, then shelve one book at a time.
- Let the shelf carry the weight of the book as soon as possible. Rest bottom edge of book on shelf and slide the book in. Use hands to ease book onto shelf and keep wrists straight. Avoid letting the weight of the book fall back on your hand, bending it back at the wrist.
- If large or floppy volumes have fallen over, making it difficult for shelving, use one hand to ease the new item in edge first resting it on the shelf, while lifting fallen volumes up with the other.

### 6.6.2 *Length of Shelving Shifts*

- Shifts of 4 hours maximum may be acceptable, depending on both the individual and the environment, as long as a formal 10-minute relaxation and exercise break and a 20-minute tea break is taken during that time.
- Employees are encouraged to take micropauses during their work shift, and to follow the techniques recommended by this Code.
- The shelver does not also have desk duties
- Employees are trained in good work practices and have adequate equipment in good order i.e. foot stools, trolleys.
- Each employee shelves for a maximum of 16 hours per week, with only one shift per day.

## 6.7 Moving Book Stock

- Avoid working in pairs or teams as there are potential problems in not being able to choose an individual body position when retrieving material, the amount of material received, or the pace at which the work is done.
- Work at your own pace, with a hand load that is comfortable, and with body/hand positions that suit you and that are safe.

- Take relaxation and exercise breaks more frequently than when doing 'normal' shelving (see guidelines for length of shifts when moving stock).

### 6.7.1 *Length of Shifts when Moving Stock*

Shifts of 2.5 hours are acceptable if 2 hours of work are separated by a formal 10-minute relaxation and exercise break and a 20-minute tea break.

- two 2.5 hour shifts can be worked in one day if there is a 3-hour break between shifts;
- maximum of 12 hours is worked in any one week;
- employees are encouraged to take micropauses during their work shift;
- employees are aware of the potential dangers if they choose to work in pairs (see item 7.7);
- employees are provided with adequate equipment in good order, i.e. foot stools, trolleys.

## 6.8 Set up of Multi-Purpose/Person Workstations/Service Desks

### 6.8.1 *General*

- Employees involved should be consulted about desk height, and whether tasks will be performed while sitting or standing.
- VDU height and distance should be adjustable.
- Desks should not be so wide that employees have to reach forward to receive books from users.
- The base of electronic book scanners should be flush with the desk surface, enabling books to slide over the desk for scanning, avoiding the need to lift them.
- Ideally scanners should be moveable; however, meeting the preceding criteria may prohibit this.
- Scanners rather than wands are preferable in high-use areas; employees need to be consulted.

### 6.8.2 *Seated*

- Chairs should have a five-point base, and be on castors if they need to be moved often.
- Linoleum floors make chair movement easier.



- High chairs with footrests should be provided for work at high desks.
- Ensure adequate leg/knee room when seated and chair is close to the desk.

### 6.8.3 *Standing*

- Carpet with rubber underlay is more comfortable for prolonged periods of standing.

## 6.9 Work at Public Service Desks

### 6.9.1 *General Guidelines*

- Stand if you are not able to perform all tasks comfortably within your natural ‘work arc’ while seated.
- Avoid reaching.
- Slide rather than lift books.
- Avoid turning books around and over.
- Ensure equipment is in good working order, for example that date stamps operate smoothly.
- Staffing should be sufficient to avoid problems associated with stress and pressure.
- Employees should be well trained to avoid experiencing additional stress when dealing with clients.

### 6.9.2 *Day Shifts*

- When the task is repetitive, desk duties should be for no more than 1 hour, with at least a 2-hour break doing other tasks.

### 6.9.3 *After Hours*

- An after-hours shift should not exceed 4 hours.
- Relief support staff should be available.
- Job variety should be provided.

### 6.9.4 *Circulation Desk*

- All equipment used at the circulation desk, including laser pens and date stamps, should be ergonomically designed and well-maintained

- The light pen must be kept clean to avoid multiple passes to read a bar code label.
- Alternative methods of circulation, such as self-check machines, should be considered.

## 6.10 Keyboard Operation

- Adjust your furniture to maintain a good posture while keying.
- Organise your work area in the most efficient way to ensure all materials, equipment and controls can be easily reached without stretching or twisting.
- Always use the correct keyboard technique.
- Report breakdowns or malfunctions of your equipment immediately to your supervisor.
- Micropauses of 3 seconds every 3 minutes are recommended, as well as the following:
  - 2-3 minutes in each 15-20 minutes; or
  - 5 minutes in each 30 minutes; or
  - 10 minutes in each hour.

NOTE: non-repetitive work may be performed during these breaks.

- Where possible, use keystrokes as an alternative to using the mouse.
- Take work breaks regularly — never accumulate work breaks.
- Start keyboard work slowly each day to warm up to the task and cool down by reducing your keystroke rate at the end of each day.
- Gradually build up keying speed to your normal rate after any absence from keying, including holidays.
- Negotiate a realistic workload with your supervisor.
- During intensive periods of typing or other keyboard work, breaks **MUST** be taken.
- Intersperse keyboard work with non-repetitive tasks where possible.

## 6.11 Work at Photocopy Machines

- Avoid double-handling of books/papers.
- Avoid a seated position at a photocopier unless you can sit straight on and close to your work.
- Work with straight wrists; avoid wrist deviation, bending or arching.
- Avoid overreaching, especially when holding books.

## 7. Making the Code Work in Your Organisation

1. Find out what occupational safety and health practices exist in your organisation. Talk to your health and safety co-ordinator about the health and safety practices in your area.
2. Work with your colleagues and manager to obtain a workplace assessment, including furniture and equipment in use. Address any shortcomings.
3. If no action is taken, inform your manager that you will advise senior management of any unresolved issues, and follow up on this.
4. If issues that concern you continue to remain unresolved, notify OSH in writing. Be specific about the hazards you have identified.

# References

## Publications

NZ Department of Labour, Occupational Safety and Health Service, *Guidelines for the Prevention and Management of Occupational Overuse Syndrome*, 1991.

NZ Department of Labour, Occupational Safety and Health Service, *Occupational Overuse Syndrome: Checklists for the Evaluation of Work*, 1991.

NZ Department of Labour, Occupational Safety and Health Service, *Approved Code of Practice for the Use of Visual Display Units in the Place of Work*, 1995.

NZ Department of Labour, Occupational Safety and Health Service, *How to Use Your VDU Safely*, 1996. (Booklet)

*New Zealand Libraries* Vol. 48 No. 4. December 1995.

University of Waikato, Policies and Practices, 1996.

Edith Cowan University, Western Australia, OOS Prevention Policy Statement, 1996.

## Legislation

Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992.

# Definitions

**Occupational Overuse Syndrome (OOS)** - this term has officially replaced that of Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI) in New Zealand.

*Definitions as described in the Health and Safety In Employment Act 1992:*

**“Accident”** means an event that—

- (a) causes any person to be harmed; or
- (b) in different circumstances might have caused any person to be harmed.

**“Employer”** means a person who or that employs any other person to do any work for hire or reward: and, in relation to any employee, means an employer of the employee. This means anyone who supervises others is effectively an employer.

**“Employee”**, subject to subsection 2(3) of the Act, means a person employed by any other person to do any work (other than residential work) for hire or reward; and, in relation to any employer, means an employee of the employer.

**“Harm”** means illness, injury or both; and “to harm”, “harmed” and “unharmd” have corresponding meanings.

**“Serious harm”**, subject to subsection (4) of this section, means death, or harm of a kind or description declared by the Governor-General by Order in Council to be serious for the purposes of this Act; and “seriously harmed” has a corresponding meaning.

**“At work”**, in relation to any person, means present, for gain or reward, in the person’s place of work.

**“Hazard”** is an activity, arrangement, circumstance, event, occurrence, phenomenon, process, situation or substance, that is an actual or potential cause of harm.

**“All Practicable Steps”**, in relation to achieving any result in any circumstances, means all steps to achieve the result that it is reasonably practicable to take in the circumstances, having regard to—

- (a) the nature and severity of the harm that may be suffered if the result is not achieved; and
- (b) the current state of knowledge about the likelihood that harm of that nature and severity will be suffered if the result is not achieved; and
- (c) the current state of knowledge about harm of that nature; and
- (d) the current state of knowledge about the means available to achieve the result, and about the likely efficacy of each; and
- (e) the availability and cost of each of those means.

# How to Contact OSH

OSH has branch offices in the following centres, and you can contact any office for more information or advice (phone numbers are as at December 1997):

Manukau Ph: (09) 277 7415

Whangarei Ph: (09) 438 0552

West Auckland Ph: (09) 827 8550

Penrose Ph: (09) 525 0268

North Harbour Ph: (09) 443 3460

Hamilton Ph: (07) 838 1381

Rotorua Ph: (07) 347 9656

Tauranga Ph: (07) 578 2090

Palmerston North Ph: (06) 359 1919

New Plymouth Ph: (06) 758 0516

Napier Ph: (06) 835 7017

Wellington Ph: (04) 385 7771

Lower Hutt Ph: (04) 566 8962

Christchurch North Ph: (03) 365 2600

Christchurch South Ph: (03) 366 5500

Nelson Ph: (03) 546 8180

Dunedin Ph: (03) 455 0855

Invercargill Ph: (03) 218 2126

For information on OSH products and services, visit the *Safety Net* Web Site at <http://www.osh.dol.govt.nz>