OPTOMETRIC PRACTICES
POTENTIAL WORKPLACE HAZARDS

Under the new WorkCover regulations which come into force on 1 September 2003, employers are required to assess the presence of workplace hazards and, in consultation with staff, decide on how they will eliminate or minimise the dangers posed by these hazards.

The following is a list of potential workplace hazards which could be found in a typical optometric practice, together with suggestions which could be considered to remove or minimise the injury risk posed by the hazard. Whilst the list has been compiled by viewing actual optometric practices, each practice will need to make their own assessment of the actual risks at their work place and decide on remedial actions which need to be undertaken at those actual locations.

This information is provided as a general guide to the types of hazards which might exist in an optometric practice. Note that it is impossible for the Association to determine if any of these risks or advice will apply to a particular practice, or the extent to which they may apply. Accordingly, neither the Association, nor its officers, employees, servants or agents accepts any responsibility for any damage or injury caused to any person or property as a result of this advice or the absence of advice.

Potential Optometric Practice Hazards

1. ***Air Conditioners***
   The filters for smaller, room-type air conditioners should be serviced regularly – typically every 6 months. Central air conditioners or larger cooling towers must be cleaned on a regular basis by qualified air conditioning service personnel. Appropriate air conditioning service companies can be found under "Air Conditioning – Commercial and Industrial" in the Yellow Pages.

2. ***Chairs, tables, magazine racks etc***
   Ensure these are not positioned in walkways or in other areas where they might readily pose a trip hazard.

3. ***Consulting room equipment***
   Review your consulting room equipment to ensure that it does not pose a hazard to either staff or patients.
   For example, ensure that equipment does not have loose screws or edges which might catch. Ensure that routine maintenance is carried out so as to make sure that, for example, heavy equipment such as the refractor head are firmly and securely affixed to the wall or floor.

4. ***Desk work spaces***
   Work spaces should not be cluttered. Computer users should be seated in a manner which ensures that they are comfortable and ergonomically correct.

5. ***Display Cabinets***
   Cabinets should be fixed to the floor or counter on which they are mounted so that they cannot be pulled or knocked over.

6. ***Display posters/objects***
   Should be fixed or restrained so that they cannot be pulled down or fall.

7. ***Door Guides/Runners***
   In premises where the front door is a roller-shutter type of door, there is often a removable centre guide which is put into place when the door is shut and removed during opening hours. This guide can be fairly heavy and should be stored in a place where it is not likely to pose a trip hazard to staff or patients.

8. ***Door Steps***
   Ensure steps are non-slip, with edge marked in a way which is highly visible and contrasts with the surrounding colours.
   Ensure lighting over steps is adequate.
   Some commercial doors utilise large, floor mounted hinges. Ensure that such hinges are flush with the floor so as not to pose a trip hazard.

9. ***Edgers – automated***
   Automated lens edging machines are inherently dangerous. Staff should be instructed in their safe use, in accordance with the instructions provided by the manufacturer. A generic guide to the safe use of edgers is attached to this document.
   The dust generated by edgers can be hazardous. Staff operating edgers should wear protective eyewear and a particle mask.

10. ***Edgers – Hand***
    Hand edging machines are inherently dangerous. Staff should be instructed in their safe use, in accordance with the instructions provided by the manufacturer. A generic guide to the safe use of hand edgers is attached to this document.
    The dust generated by edgers can be hazardous. Staff operating edgers should wear protective eyewear and a particle mask.

11. ***Edger Sediment***
    Sediment created by the operation of edgers cannot be put into the waste water system. It must be either collected in a settling tank and disposed of or filtered out to create water of an acceptable standard.
    Settling tank systems can be obtained from Briot Weco (02) 9790 3119.
    Filter systems can be obtained from Designs for Vision (02) 9550 6966

12. ***Electrical Cords***

Cords should not run across floors where they are likely to pose a trip hazard. In circumstances where cords must travel across floors, they should be routed to follow walls or otherwise diverted away from walking areas.

Cords which carry significant voltages (eg 240v) should not be coiled or folded as this can cause heat to build up.

Cords should not be run around or near sinks or other places where they might come into contact with water.

13. ***Evacuation***

Each workplace should have an evacuation plan in place. Staff should be instructed in evacuation procedures and where to assemble once outside the premises. An illustration of the exits from the workplace should be prominently displayed within the workplace.

14. ***Exit & Entry Doors***

The entry and exit points from premises must be clearly identified and readily openable at all times whilst staff are on the premises. The general rule is that external doors must be able to be opened from inside by a single handed action. If doors are deadlocked or padlocked, these must be opened whenever staff are on the premises. They can still be locked to prevent unauthorised access, but anyone inside must be able to open it readily. If a key is used, it should be kept within ready reach of the door.

15. ***Exit Signs***

All exits from the premises must be clearly marked with illuminated signs which will operate independently of mains power. These signs can usually be obtained through licensed electricians or from fire protection companies (see Fire Extinguishers). Alternatively, you could contact Stanilite (02) 9749 8444, Wormald (02) 9202 0333 or Safetyman Signs (02) 9502 2300.

16. ***Fire Extinguishers***

Each workplace should have an operational fire extinguisher or other fire control device (eg a fire hose or a fire blanket).

The type of extinguisher must be suitable for the potential type of fire (eg electrical, oil or chemical). Never install a water-based extinguisher in areas where an oil or electrical fire is likely to occur.

Fire extinguishers must be serviced regularly – typically every 6 months. There are many extinguisher companies listed under “Fire Protection Equipment and Consultants” in the Yellow Pages. Regular extinguisher agreements are inexpensive and will save you the trouble of remembering to have the extinguisher serviced.

Staff must be instructed in the operation of fire extinguishers or other fire control devices.

Regarding the placement of extinguishers, you should identify places where fires are more likely to occur (eg. kitchen areas, around electrical appliances). If a fire breaks out in one of these places, staff must be able to get to a fire extinguisher – this may necessitate several extinguishers being placed around the workplace.

17. ***First Aid Kit***

Each workplace should have a first aid kit which complies with the WorkCover standard for such kits. A list of the required item for each type of kit can be found on the OAA (NSW) website: www.optometristsnsw.com.au.

18. ***Floor surfaces***

Hard surfaces should be non-slip. This could be achieved through the floor material itself or through the application of a non-slip coating. A paint-on product called "Sure Tread" works well on surfaces which are prone to becoming slippery. Contact: K&H Surface Technologies (03) 9792 5927.

Carpets & rugs should be firmly attached to the floor. Loose rugs are a trip hazard. Carpets in high traffic areas should be inspected regularly to ensure that they are not developing holes or frays.

19. ***Lighting***

Lighting generally should be adequate so as to ensure that people can see where they are walking and can easily see steps or other trip hazards. Lighting around work spaces should be adequate for the operator's needs. Faulty lights should be replaced immediately they are noticed. In areas where shadows pose a trip hazard, additional lighting should be installed.

20. ***Office Machines***

Many office machines (such as photocopiers, laser printers) generate fumes. Ventilation around these machines should be adequate so as to ensure that fumes do not build up. If necessary, exhaust fans should be installed in work areas to remove such fumes.

21. ***Replacement of Lens/Frame Screws***

Often the screws used to repair frames or lenses are too long and need to be cut. Some cutting pliers cause the screw off-cut to fly off, posing a risk to the repairer's eyes. When cutting screws or other similar materials, the repairer should wear protective eyewear or you could obtain pliers which catch the off-cut and prevent it flying away. Such pliers are obtainable from orthodontic supply companies. Dentsply is one of the largest dental supply companies – 1300 552 929.

22. ***Sound equipment/speakers***

Should be located such that they cannot fall or be pulled down. If necessary, they should be attached to walls or otherwise restrained.

23. ***Storage***

Boxes or other storage should be kept in areas where they do not pose a trip hazard. Further, boxes should not be stacked in a way where they might fall if knocked or bumped.

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