

Display Screen Equipment (DSE)

The Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992, as amended by the Health and Safety (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2002, place a number of requirements on employers to minimise the risks in the use of DSE. The regulations apply where there are “users” (people who habitually use DSE as a significant part of their work).

DSE includes conventional and flat panel computer screens (VDUs), microfiche screens and CCTV screens. Some of the minimum requirements may not be applicable to microfiche and CCTV screens.

1. Decide who is covered by the regulations

Users are:

- a) people who use DSE more or less continuously on most days, and
- b) people who:
 - *normally use DSE for continuous or near continuous periods of an hour or more at a time, and*
 - *do this more or less daily, and*
 - *have to transfer information to and from the screen quickly***and either**
 - *need high levels of attention and concentration, or*
 - *are highly dependant on DSE to do their work or have little choice about using DSE , or*
 - *need special skills or training to use the DSE.*

You may wish to simply decide that all employees who use DSE will be treated as users. This can save effort and allow your resources to be concentrated on identifying, prioritising and remedying risks.

2. Carry out a risk assessment

These workstations should be assessed to identify and reduce any risks. You should also assess organisational and individual factors, including things like workloads and working patterns, provision of breaks, training and information, and any special needs of individuals (such as people with a disability).

To do this you need to provide suitable training for users and assessors. Users need to know how to set up the workstation and use it safely. Assessors need to be able to identify risks arising from poor workstation layouts, environments and work practices.

Checklists (see the example) can be a useful tool in carrying out assessments. After suitable training users can complete checklists but a properly trained assessor should go over them with the users in order to sort out any problems that users can't resolve.

This assessment should be reviewed if there are any significant changes e.g. the workstation is moved, new lighting is installed, a new screen is provided or changes are made to the organisation of work.



3. Make sure that workstations and equipment comply with minimum standards

The Schedule to the regulations specifies the minimum ergonomic requirements for workstations. The questions and information on the example checklist cover the requirements of the Schedule. If you can answer "yes" to all the questions and have taken account of the "Things to consider" you will be complying with the minimum requirements.

4. Look at work organisation

The Regulations require employers to plan the work of users to include breaks or changes of activity. The timing or length of breaks required depends on the nature and intensity of the work. For example short, frequent breaks are better than longer, less frequent ones. Ideally individuals should have some discretion over when to take breaks.

5. Arrange eye and eyesight tests

Users can ask their employer to provide and pay for an eye and eyesight test (carried out by an optometrist or doctor). Regular further tests, as recommended by the optometrist or doctor, must also be arranged and paid for by the employer.

Employers only have to pay for spectacles if special ones (e.g. prescribed for the distance at which the screen is viewed) are needed and normal ones cannot be used.

Possible effects on Health

Temporary Visual Fatigue: Extensive research has found no evidence that DSE can cause disease or permanent damage to eyes. But long spells of DSE work can lead to tired eyes and discomfort. Also more demanding visual tasks may make existing eyesight problems more noticeable.

Upper Limb Pains and Disorders: Some users may get aches and pains in their hands, wrists, arms, neck, shoulders or back, especially after long periods of uninterrupted DSE work. These may range from temporary fatigue and soreness to chronic soft tissue disorders. Problems of this kind may have a physical cause, but may also be more likely if a user feels stressed by their work.

Problems can often be avoided by good workplace design, so that you can work comfortably, and by good working practices (like taking frequent short breaks from the VDU). Prevention is easiest if action is taken early, before the problem has become serious.

Epilepsy: Most people with epilepsy are completely unaffected by display screens.

Only 5% of people with epilepsy are photosensitive (susceptible to flickering lights, flashing images, strong contrasts or geometric patterns). But even they can often work successfully with display screens without provoking an attack.

To minimise any risk it is important to consider both the display screen and the software package.

Further information and guidance on reducing risk can be found at www.epilepsy.org.uk/info/photo.html - Epilepsy Action's website. They also have a Freephone Helpline: 0808 800 5050.

Stress: DSE users sometimes feel stress, but this usually arises from increased pace of work or pressure to meet deadlines, not the DSE itself. This can happen when users have not been adequately trained, do not feel in control of their work or where computer systems etc do not work well. Employers can help overcome stress by providing the right training, and by ensuring that DSE work matches the abilities of the users.

Effects on Pregnancy: Many scientific studies have been carried out and, taken as a whole, these do not show any link between miscarriages or birth defects and working with DSE.

Employees that are anxious about DSE work or about work generally during pregnancy should be advised to talk to their doctor or someone who is well informed about current scientific information and advice on DSE.

Further Information

Further help can be found in the following Health and Safety Executive publications: (a) "Work with Display Screen Equipment. Guidance on Regulations", L26, 2nd edition 2003, ISBN 0-7176-2582-6; (b) "The law on VDUs. An easy guide", HSG90, 2nd edition 2003, ISBN 0-7176-2602-4. Available from HSE Books (Tel. 01787 881165) www.hsebooks.co.uk and other booksellers.