

In this issue of the Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) Listserv – January 10, 2020

1. 25 Steps to a Safer Office
 2. Office Safety Initiative
 3. Safe Snow Shoveling & Snow Blowing
 4. Safety Shorts – Snow Blowing and Snow Shoveling Safety
 5. Poster: Eye Injury Prevention Month
 6. Revised Safe Operating Procedure
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1. 25 Steps to a Safer Office

There are a number of hazards that can be present in an office setting. Office workers do get injured but many injuries can be prevented by recognizing risks and implementing simple workplace modifications to mitigate them.

Here are 25 steps to reduce injury in an office setting:

Falls. Slips, trips and falls are the most common type of office injury according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

- Stay clutter free. Items piled in walkways create a tripping hazard. Store things in the proper location and put away supplies promptly when received. Don't stretch electrical cords across walkways or under rugs. Use a commercially available cord saver.
- Step on up. Never stand on chairs, especially rolling office chairs. Use a step stool or step ladder that is in good condition. Step stools or ladders must be fully opened and placed on a level, firm surface. Never stand on steps higher than the designated 'safe standing' height.
- Maintain a clear line of vision. Avoid collisions when navigating blind corners. Stay alert when walking down hallways; don't be distracted by texting, reading, or other activity.
- Get a grip. Tile can be slippery when wet. "Walk off" moisture on the entrance mat when entering buildings with feet wet from rain or snow.
- Use handrails. When going up/down stairs use handrails. Don't carry heavy/awkward loads.
- Wear sturdy, supportive, slip-resistant shoes.

Struck/caught by. Another major type of injury in an office setting.

- Shut the drawer. It is easy to forget/not notice a desk or file cabinet drawer is open and walk into it. Shut drawers immediately after inserting/removing items. Avoid file cabinets that allow more than one drawer to be open at a time, or secure them to prevent tipping.

- **Safe stacking.** Stacks of equipment or heavy items can cause serious injury if they fall/are knocked over. Store heavy objects close to the floor. Be aware of shelving capacity and do not exceed the recommended load.

Ergonomic Injuries. If the majority of the day is spent at a desk and working on a computer strain can result.

Here are items to consider: Use adjustable equipment/know how to adjust your desktop items for optimal positioning; Keep your feet on the floor and maintain good posture; Use document holders if type from hard copy frequently; Correctly position your mouse.

Guidelines and recommendations are available through the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and the National Institute for Safety and Health (NIOSH). NIOSH provides a Computer Workstation Ergonomic: Self-Assessment Checklist which includes questions and suggested actions if adjustment is needed.

At UNL more in depth ergonomic guidance is available through the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance.

Vision problems. Avoid dry eyes and eyestrain.

- Dim the lights or use task lamps. Fluorescent lights are often too bright for optimal vision.
- Correctly position monitors. Computer monitors should be slightly below eye level and 20-26 inches from the eyes.
- Minimize screen glare. Avoid positioning monitors opposite open windows or close blinds/shades.
- Wear the right glasses. Let your eye doctor know if you spend a large portion of the day working on the computer.
- Increase font size on computer. Small font sizes can strain both your vision and your neck.
- Take a break. OSHA recommends that workers give their eyes a 10-minute break for every hour on the computer by switching to a task that requires your eyes to focus at a further range.

Fire safety. Routine inspections around the office can help reduce the likelihood of fire.

- Maintain cords in good repair. Damaged and ungrounded power cords pose a serious fire hazard. Remove any from service with frayed cords/exposed wires. Make sure cords are not overloading circuits. Do not use extension cords as permanent wiring.
- Do not use space heaters.
- Never block fire sprinkler heads. Never place anything higher than 18 inches below sprinkler heads to allow full range of coverage.

- Do not block escape routes or prop open fire doors. Never store items in an emergency exit route.
- Do not use “power strips” to energize high amperage devices (e.g., refrigerators, coffee pots, microwaves, etc.).
- Avoid excessive accumulation of ordinary combustibles (e.g., paper, cardboard, etc.).

Administrative Controls. Besides employee training, hazard recognition can help workers eliminate potentially dangerous situations.

- Conduct walk-throughs. Periodically tour your office area as if you have never been there, looking for potential hazards.
- Know your office emergency procedures.
- Be aware of symptoms of muscle strain. Pay attention to any physical symptoms so the offending situation can be remedied early.
- Talk to others. When co-workers share concerns you might be able to steer them to a useful resource: their supervisor, online guidelines, etc.
- Use employee reporting systems. Don’t hesitate to share potential safety concerns with your supervisor. If you or others experience a “near miss” use the EHS Near Miss/Close Call Reporting Tool to share the experience widely for the benefit of all UNL workers. If you almost had an injury, it is likely someone else has experienced something similar and can benefit from raised awareness.

Resources

- Claussen, Laretta. “Recognizing Hidden Dangers: 25 Steps to a Safer Office.” *Safety Health Magazine*, National Safety Council Safety Health Magazine, 18 Sept. 2019, <https://www.safetyandhealthmagazine.com/articles/recognizing-hidden-dangers-25-steps-to-a-safer-office-2>.
- NIOSH “Office Environment” resources <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/officeenvironment/default.html>
- NIOSH Computer Workstation Ergonomics: Self-Assessment Checklist <https://www.ors.od.nih.gov/sr/dohs/Documents/Computer%20Workstation%20Ergonomics%20Self%20Assessment%20Checklist.pdf>
- OSHA “Ergonomics: <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/ergonomics/identifyprobs.html>
- Chacon, Raul. “Ways to Improve Your Office Safety.” *EHS Daily Advisor*, BLR, 8 May 2019, <https://ehsdailyadvisor.blr.com/2019/05/ways-to-improve-your-office-safety/>.
- *Near Miss/Close Call Incident Reporting Form* <https://ehs.unl.edu/near-missclose-call-incident-reporting-form>

2. Office Safety Initiative

EHS has undertaken an Office Safety Initiative to help disseminate information specific to safety in offices and common spaces such as classroom, conference rooms, etc. There is a different focus every quarter. The October – December emphasis was on electrical safety, with distribution of “Too Many Wires” posters.

January – March the emphasis is “Walking in Winter” safety. You may see paper posters or digital signage in your work areas as EHS has conducted preliminary outreach to selected building BMRs.

If you don't see any materials like these in your work area and would be interested in finding out more, being a representative for your area, or facilitating the process of finding someone in your area willing to be a contact, please notify Elizabeth (Betsy) Howe, 402.472.5488 or ehowe2@unl.edu.



If you would like hard copies of the above posters for your work area, contact ehs@unl.edu or 402.472.4925 with your name, campus mailing address including Zip+4, and quantity desired.

Resources

- Safety Posters <https://ehs.unl.edu/safety-posters>

3. Safe Snow Shoveling & Snow Blowing

Snow shoveling and use of a snow blower present a number of hazards. Here are some tips to help keep you safe while shoveling snow.

Preparation:

- **Dress appropriately.** Wear water-repellent clothing, layered to allow removal of a layer to prevent overheating. Cover your head, hands, and

feet with weather-appropriate gear. Wear shoes/boots with slip-resistant soles.

- **Timing matters.** Start snow removal when there is a light covering and repeat. Do not wait for the snow to stop/accumulate. Do not plan to shovel immediately after eating and avoid caffeine before beginning.
- **Clear vision is important.** Be sure your cold weather clothing does not obstruct your vision so you can watch for icy spots/uneven surfaces. Maintain awareness of your surroundings so you do not inadvertently find yourself in a traffic path as vehicles may not have good traction on the snow/ice.
- **Prepare yourself.** Shoveling snow can raise your heart rate and blood pressure. Warm up before shoveling, stretching as you would for any workout. Walking a few minutes or marching in place is one suggestion for a 'warm-up.' Cold, tight muscles are more likely to result in a sprain or strain. If you have a history of heart or other medical problems or do not exercise regularly, check with your doctor before shoveling.

While shoveling:

- **Pace yourself.** Snow shoveling is an aerobic activity. Take frequent breaks and drink plenty of water to prevent dehydration. STOP shoveling immediately if you experience pain or difficulty breathing or become fatigued.
- **Use proper equipment.** Use a shovel comfortable for your height and strength. Sometimes a smaller blade is better as it avoids the risk of trying to pick up too much snow at once.
- **Use proper technique.** When gripping the shovel position your hands 12 inches apart. This increases leverage and reduces the strain on your body. If possible, push the snow rather than lift to avoid back strain.
- **Push the snow, if possible. Lift only when necessary. If you must lift, lift properly.**
 - Lift with your legs and tighten your stomach muscles.
 - Keep your back straight and do not bend at the waist.
 - Scoop small amounts and walk to where you want to dump the snow.
 - Never remove deep snow all at once, rather shovel an inch or two and repeat.
 - Do not twist your body to shovel or empty the load. Never throw snow over your shoulder.

If possible, use a snow blower instead of shoveling by hand. However, recognize that a snow blower presents unique hazards. These are a few tips to help prevent injury:

- **Never wear loose pants, jackets, or scarves.** Loose clothing can become entangled in moving parts and pull you in with them.
- **Operate snow blowers only when there is good visibility.**

- **NEVER stick your hands in the snow blower!** To resolve jams, shut-off the engine and wait more than five seconds to ensure all moving parts are still. Use a solid object to clear the chute.
- **Do not leave the snow blower unattended.** Shut off the engine if you must walk away.
- **Add fuel before starting the machine, never while the engine is running or hot.** Be sure to fuel the snow blower outside not in a garage, shed or another enclosed area. Do not operate in an enclosed area to avoid being overcome by engine fumes (carbon monoxide).
- **Avoid the engine.** The engine becomes hot during use and can burn unprotected flesh.
- **Use the pull-cord safely.** Hold cord firmly, stand with feet wide apart. Do not force cord if it does not move freely. Sharply pulling can cause upper body/back injury.
- **Watch the power cord.** For electric snow blowers, remain aware of power cord location. Entangled/severed power cords can lead to shock or electrocution.
- **Do not remove safety devices and keep hands and feet away from moving parts.** Safety devices, shields, guards, and interlocks are there for operator protection.
- **Watch out for motor recoil.** After the machine is turned off there is a brief recoil of motor and blades.
- **Keep others away, including children.** Snow blowers can pick up and shoot objects such as rocks and other debris with significant force. Take care to properly position the discharge chute.
- **Wear earplugs.** Gas-powered models typically run about 85 decibels so protect your hearing.
- **Wear goggles.** Protect your eyes from small stones or other items that can be thrown up by a snow blower.
- **Understand the machine.** Read the instruction manual prior to use and be familiar with all features. Do not attempt to operate, repair, or maintain the snow blower without reading the instruction manual.

Resources

- National Safety Council “*Why do People Die Shoveling Snow?*”
<https://www.nsc.org/home-safety/tools-resources/seasonal-safety/winter/snow-shoveling>
- American Association of Orthopedic Surgeons “*Orthoinfo: Prevent Snow Shoveling and Snowblowing Injuries*”
<http://orthoinfo.aaos.org/topic.cfm?topic=A00060>
- Consumer Reports “*Commensense tips for safer snow blowing*”
<http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/news/2013/12/common-sense-tips-for-safer-snow-blowing/index.htm>

- Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety “Landscaping – Snow Blower”
https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/safety_haz/landscaping/snow_thrower_s.html

4. Safety Shorts – Snow Blower & Snow Shoveling Safety

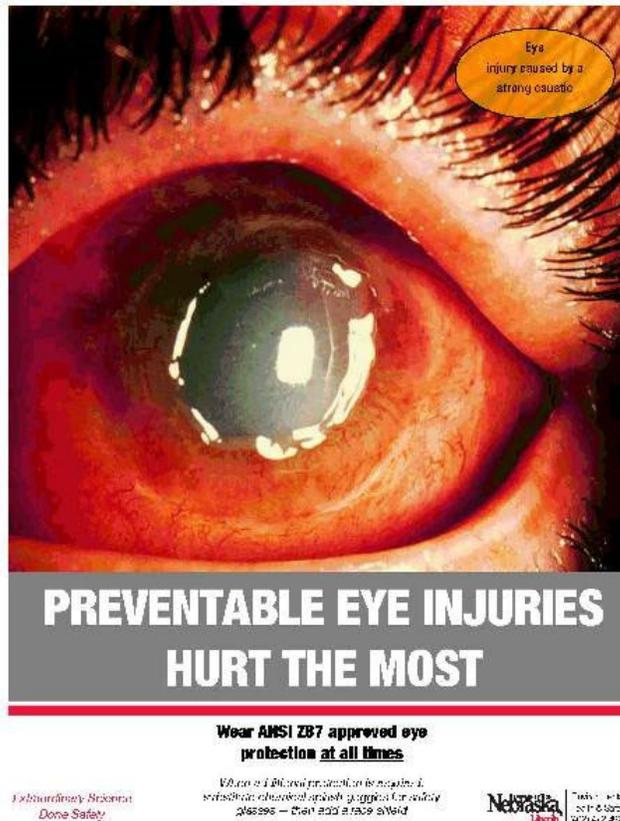
This series features links to short safety resource(s) each month. Provided this month are resources related to snow shoveling safety.

- **Snow Shoveling Safety** (Cleveland Clinic, 2:06 minutes)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-IMXSElabMM>
- **Easy Snow Shoveling Techniques – LSTraining.com** (LS Training System, 2:26 minutes)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hX6uaTivlcQ>
- **Snowblower Safety** (Grabow Hand to Shoulder Center, 2.47 minutes) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G00z3F_lmeY
- **Snow Blower Safety** (Cleveland Clinic, 1.33 minutes)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DbgHyC3Z85s>

NOTE: Resources are provided for informational purposes only. Publication does not in any way endorse a particular company or product or affect current UNL policies and procedures.

5. Poster: Eye Injury Prevention Month

January is the American Academy of Ophthalmology “Eye Injury Prevention Month.” Here is a poster to help workers remember to wear the eye protection designated for the task at hand because preventable eye injuries hurt the most.



For a FREE poster(s) contact ehs@unl.edu or 402-472-4925 with your name, campus mailing address including Zip+4, and quantity desired.

Resources

- Safety Posters <https://ehs.unl.edu/safety-posters>

6. Revised Safe Operating Procedure

- **Microtome Safety** https://ehs.unl.edu/sop/s-microtome_safety_1.pdf
Revised with updated guidance about safe procedures when using a microtome. Pictures of several types of microtomes have also been added to help illustrate various safety features.

Remember...SAFETY IS AN ATTITUDE!

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