



THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES
Mona Campus
Human Resource Management Division (HRMD)

SECTION I – GENERAL SAFETY

EOHS 01-004 Office and Classroom Safety

Introduction

Though offices and classrooms are thought of as relatively safe working environments, they can present potential risks that are often overlooked. Blocked exits, tripping hazards, improper storage practices, and electrical hazards are some of the potential safety concerns that could be found in any office or classroom.

+ Purpose

+ Definitions

+ Responsibilities

Department

- Perform annual safety surveys of departmental spaces.
- Correct deficiencies or refer to Estate Management as appropriate.

Supervisors

- Ensure unsafe conditions are corrected in a timely manner.

EOHS

- Provide guidance to Departments on conduct of safety surveys and assessment of results.
- Assist in developing solutions to problems identified during surveys.

Individuals

- Report unsafe conditions to supervisors.

Procedures

Office and classroom environments, like laboratory, shop, or industrial settings, have associated hazards that may potentially cause accidents or injuries. Good housekeeping, attention to the safe use of electrical equipment and office chemicals, and attention to how employees move themselves and materials in an office area will go a long way in reducing potential hazards in the office.



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University employees should observe the following general guidelines for identifying and reducing hazards in office and classroom environments:

- Be aware of the emergency procedures for your office and building. Prominently post a copy of the **Emergency Information Guide** in your classroom, office or department;
- Be familiar with the location of emergency equipment in your classroom, Lecture Theater or office, such as fire extinguishers, first-aid kits, emergency phones, etc. Report any deficiencies in this equipment;
- Report slippery, damaged, or uneven floor surfaces, torn carpet, or broken tile to Estate Management for repair;
- Report poor lighting or missing handrails on stairs to Estate Management for repair;
- Check container labels and MSDSs before using office chemicals;
- Do not block emergency exits or emergency equipment with desks, filing cabinets, or office equipment;
- Carefully stack cartons, boxes, and supplies to prevent tipping or falling;

Office Equipment Safety

Many hazards associated with office environments often involve such equipment as office furniture, supplies, and machines.

Office Machines

Office areas generally maintain many different types of machines such as copiers, computers, printers, shredders, paper cutters, etc. To safely operate office machines and equipment, University employees should observe the following hazards and guidelines:

- Always read the instructions or receive training from a qualified employee before operating an unfamiliar machine;
- Ensure that machines with moving parts are guarded to prevent accidents. Do not remove these guards. Exercise extreme caution around machines with unguarded moving parts, and secure your loose belts, jewelry, long hair, scarves, and neck ties, if necessary;
- Do not use any machine that smokes, sparks, or appears defective in any way. Immediately remove damaged or defective office machines from service and have them repaired immediately;
- Take care when using paper cutters, razor blades, scissors, staplers, letter openers, and other sharp objects that could potentially cause injury. Close hand-operated paper cutters after each use and replace the blade guard;
- If it is necessary to open a copy machine or computer printer to remove a paper jam or for troubleshooting, remember that some parts may be hot. Always follow the manufacturer's instructions for troubleshooting;
- Unplug paper shredders before conducting maintenance, repair, or troubleshooting. Exercise extreme caution with loose belts, jewelry, long hair, scarves, and neck ties;

File Cabinets and Shelves

University employees should observe the following hazards and guidelines regarding



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office file cabinets and shelving units:

- To prevent toppling of the cabinet, do not open more than one file cabinet drawer at a time;
- Secure top-heavy file cabinets by bolting them to the floor or to the wall;
- Keep the bottom drawer full--this will help stabilize the entire cabinet;
- Do not leave file cabinet drawers open while unattended;
- Ensure that file cabinet drawers cannot easily be pulled out of the cabinet;
- Do not block vents with file cabinets or shelves;
- Close drawers slowly using the handle to avoid pinching fingers;
- Secure shelving units by bolting them to the floor or wall;
- Place heavy objects on the bottom shelves. This will keep the entire structure more stable;
- Maintain at least 18 inches from the top shelf or file cabinet and the ceiling. This space will allow ceiling sprinkler systems to function properly in the event of fire;
- Never climb or step on shelves--use an approved ladder;
- Report any deficiencies to Estate Management for repair.

Desks

University employees should observe the following hazards and guidelines regarding office desks:

- Keep desks in good condition (i.e., free from sharp edges, nails, etc.);
- Ensure that desks do not block exit-ways or emergency exit doors;
- Ensure that glass-top desks do not have sharp edges or broken glass;
- Do not climb on desks--use an approved ladder;
- Close desk drawers when not in use;
- Report any deficiencies to Estate Management for repair.

Office Chairs

University employees should observe the following hazards and guidelines regarding office chairs:

- Do not lean back in office chairs, particularly swivel chairs with rollers;
- Do not climb on any office chair. Use an approved ladder;
- Office desk chairs should have adjustable back supports and seat height. Make sure that your chair's back support position and seat height are comfortable;
- Take care when sitting in a chair with rollers to ensure that it does not roll out from under you when you sit down;
- Do not roll chairs over electrical cords or wires;
- Report any deficiencies to Estate Management for repair.

Elevators

The following section contains guidelines for the safe use of elevators at Mona:

- Never interfere or tamper with elevator controls or interlocks. Never block elevator doors open;
- In the event of a fire, never use an elevator to exit a building;



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- Only University emergency and authorized personnel are permitted to use elevators during an emergency;
- Observe the manufacturer's safe load requirements for passengers and freight for the elevator;
- Items such as large packages, equipment, mail bags, rubbish bags, tool boxes, construction materials, etc. are not permitted on passenger elevators or escalators, and are restricted to freight elevators;
- Only authorized personnel are permitted to use freight elevators. Passengers in addition to authorized personnel are not permitted to use freight elevators while freight is being hauled;
- Smoking is **STRICTLY PROHIBITED** in elevators;
- Do not post signs, posters, etc., in elevators, except for those required by law or for the safe use of elevators;
- An emergency phone is installed in each elevator to contact the University Police in event of emergency. In case of emergency in an elevator, the following procedure should be observed:
 - ⇒ In the event of elevator trouble or emergency, press the call button, and clearly state your name and location;
 - ⇒ University Police will summon emergency help;
 - ⇒ Try to remain calm, and **do not exit the car through the emergency hatch or through the doors when between floors;**
 - ⇒ Wait for help to arrive.

For additional information regarding elevators or escalators, please contact Estate Management.

Exit-ways

An "exit-way" is a passageway that is used by building occupants to safely exit a building in a direct, continuous, and unobstructed route to a discharge point outside the building. Exit-ways are intended to provide protection to exiting building occupants from harm along the entire length of the exit-way. This protection is derived from the specific characteristics of the building, including construction materials, interior finishes, and the control of all doors and openings into the exit-way. The exit or discharge point of an exit-way must open into a safe area of refuge outside the building, such as the sidewalk, courtyard, or an adjoining building.

Occupants of University buildings should consider the following guidelines regarding exit-ways:

- In the event of fire or other building emergency, do not use elevators to exit a building;
- Also, care should be taken when using escalators as a means of exiting a building in the event of fire due to the open, exposed space around the escalator;
- Exit Signs:
 - ⇒ Do not place decorations, furnishings, or equipment on or near an exit sign or exit door that may block or diminish its visibility;
 - ⇒ An exit-way door that cannot be used to exit from the building should be clearly labeled "NOT AN EXIT" so that it will not be confused during an emergency as an exit door. Such doors should also be labeled to designate the use of the space within, such as "storage room," "equipment room," etc.;



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- Fire Doors or Exit-way Doors:
 - ⇒ A “fire door” is a special fire rated door and frame that is installed in a corridor or exit-way to provide protection from the spread of smoke and fire throughout a building. This is achieved by compartmentalizing the floor areas and isolating stairways from floor corridors;
 - ⇒ Fire doors must swing open in the direction of egress (exit) and should be equipped with a self-closing device;
 - ⇒ No lock or fastening device of any type (e.g., padlocks, chains, etc.) should be installed on exit doors that would prevent the free escape from any University building;
 - ⇒ An exit-way door should be provided with opening hardware that is simple and obvious to operate, even in darkness, such as a “panic bar,” handle, or thumb bolt;
 - ⇒ Do not block open a fire door. An exception to this rule is permitted when such a fire door is equipped with an automatic releasing device which closes the door when activated by a smoke detector or by the building fire alarm system;
 - ⇒ All electrically locked doors in an exit-way must release immediately upon the activation of the building fire alarm system or activation of the emergency release mechanism;
 - ⇒ A power operated sliding or swinging door of an exit-way must be designed to be manually overpowered and opened to permit egress through it (e.g., handicapped use, power doors);
 - ⇒ Doors of exit-ways are designed and located to be clearly recognizable. Do not conceal or obscure an exit door by hanging draperies or decorations, or otherwise covering the door or associated emergency signs;
 - ⇒ Do not place mirrors on or adjacent to an exit door in such a manner as to confuse the direction of exit;
 - ⇒ Do not cut or alter fire doors in any way that may compromise the integrity of the door’s fire rating.

For additional information on Office and Classroom Safety please see the **Office and Classroom Safety Self-Audit Checklist**.

References

- Texas A&M University, Safety Manual, Office Safety, 1994
- BLR Supervisor’s Safety Meetings Handbook, Business and Legal Reports, Inc., 1995