

Health
& Safety

Checking Out Health and Safety in Shops



Legal
Plus

Usdaw
Union of Shop, Distributive
and Allied Workers

Checking Out Health and Safety in Shops

Shopwork can be dangerous and unhealthy. Many people don't realise how serious the hazards are. Nor do they realise that the problems are not an inevitable part of the job. Hazards can be reduced if working conditions are improved.

Employers have a legal duty to identify the significant risks and to introduce preventive and protective measures to control those risks. They also have duties to inform staff about the risks and to consult with staff or their representatives on the arrangements for controlling them.

As the largest trade union in retailing, Usdaw campaigns for better health and safety for shopworkers. Usdaw Health and Safety Reps play a key role in that campaign in the shops where they work.

Under the Safety Representative and Safety Committee Regulations they have legal powers to consult with the members they represent; to investigate potential hazards; to inspect the workplace and to take up issues with management.

This leaflet has been prepared to help Usdaw Health and Safety Reps make the most of their legal powers. It contains checklists on some of the main health and safety issues which concern shopworkers.

Health and Safety Reps can use the checklists to:

- Get people talking about health and safety in shops.
- Identify problems in their own workplace.
- Draw up their own checklists for use when doing workplace inspections.

Too Hot – Too Cold

Many shops are cold and draughty in winter or hot and stuffy in summer. The employer has a legal duty to maintain a reasonable temperature in the shop – Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992, Regulation 7. They must also provide thermometers so that staff can determine the temperature where they work. 16°C (60.8°F) is normally the minimum temperature which is reasonable in shops.

The law does not specify a maximum reasonable temperature but research shows that above 25°C (77°F) problems of heat stress may begin to occur. HSE guidance on thermal comfort is available on the HSE website – www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/thermal

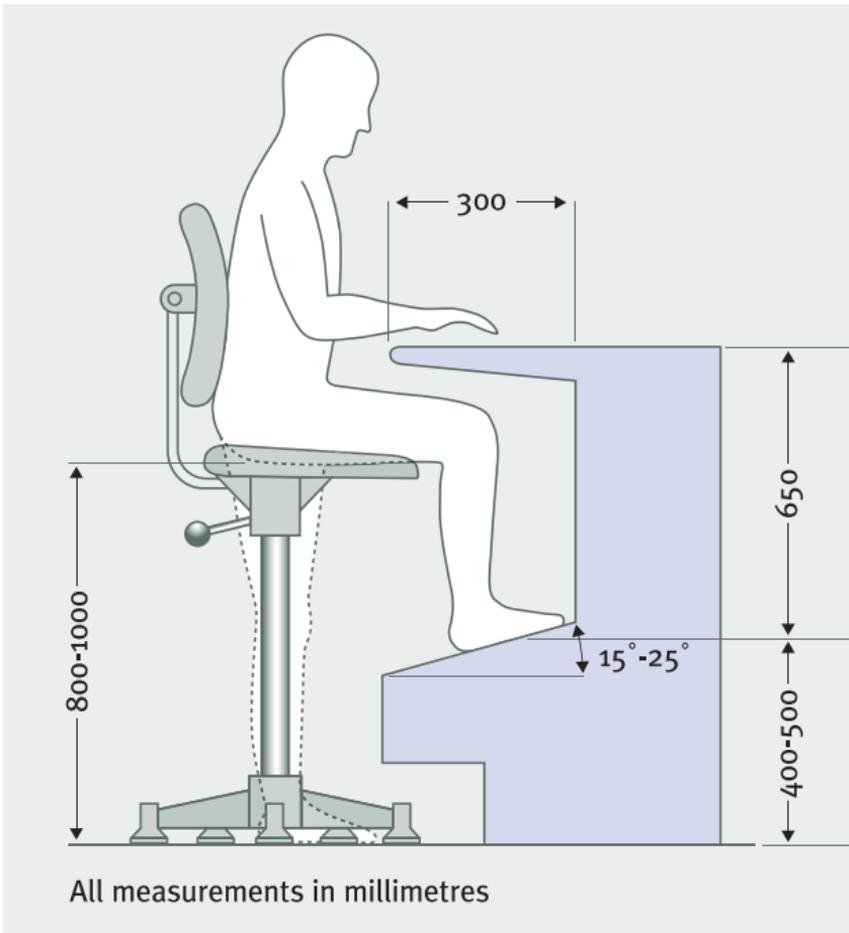
Employers must also provide effective and suitable ventilation – Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992, Regulation 6. Air conditioning and ventilation systems must be professionally designed, installed, regularly maintained and cleaned so that they do not themselves cause health hazards.

- Are there parts of the shop where staff consider it is too hot or too cold or where cold draughts are a problem?
- Does the heating/ventilation system work effectively?
- Is it regularly maintained and cleaned?
- Where there are problems has the employer sought the advice of a qualified heating and ventilation engineer?
- Do workers complain of coughs, sore throats, sneezing or eye irritation when the ventilation/air conditioning is switched on?
- Where temperature extremes cannot be avoided (for example, in freezers or chillers or working outdoors) does the employer provide:
 - Appropriate protective clothing?
 - Frequent rest breaks?
 - Hot drinks for cold work or cold drinks for hot work?
 - Training in special procedures such as first aid, escape procedures if locked inside a freezer, etc?

Are You Sitting Comfortably?

According to the law, if staff can sit while they are working the employer must provide suitable seating – Workplace (Health Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992. This applies even where it is only possible for them to sit some of the time. Some shop staff, for example checkout operators, are expected to sit for long periods. Others such as floor staff in department stores may be expected to stand for long periods, even though most jobs could be arranged so that they have some time when they can sit and take the weight off their feet.

Workstation where workers can sit or stand



Standing for several hours can cause backache and pain in the legs. But sitting for long periods in a badly designed chair can also be very unhealthy.

The law says that chairs provided must be suitable for the purpose. They must be well-designed and comfortable and should be regularly maintained and replaced when damaged.



The questions in this checklist are mainly for chairs used in sedentary work such as checkout work. Common sense should tell people whether chairs provided for occasional use are suitable:

- Can the back rest be adjusted to support the small of the back?
- Is the seat covered with comfortable non-slip material?
- Is the seat cushioned?
- Is the front edge rounded to avoid pressure on the backs of the thighs?
- Can the height of the chair be adjusted easily?
- Does the chair swivel so that staff can turn without twisting?
- Where the height of the work surface cannot be adjusted, for example a checkout counter, is a separate and adjustable foot rest provided?
- Is the chair stable but easily moved when necessary? A five legged 'star' with friction rollers is good for this purpose.

Checkouts

In a busy supermarket, several tonnes of goods will be passed through a single checkout in an average day. The physical effort for staff can cause strain injuries to the back, shoulders and arms. Under the Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992, employers have a duty to assess all manual tasks which can cause injury and to reduce the risk to the lowest level they can.

Mental stress can also be a problem for checkout staff because they have to work fast and accurately while dealing with many different customers. Headaches and eye strain from reflected glare from store lighting and noise can also cause problems. High temperatures in summer and cold draughts in winter are common complaints. Good design of the checkout and organisation of the workload are essential to reduce these problems.

- Is there room at the checkout for the operator to work comfortably?
- Is it designed to prevent cold draughts on the legs, back and shoulders?
- Can the different pieces of equipment be adjusted to suit different operators?
- Is the seat provided adequate?
- Are all electrical cables securely tucked away?
- Are electricians regularly checked and inspected to make sure that connections are sound and there are no exposed live wires?
- Do operators have to bend or stretch to reach customers goods?
- Are there other tasks such as weighing produce or reaching for carrier bags which require awkward stretching or twisting?
- Is the work organised so that the operator can have frequent breaks?
- Is there a procedure to stop cash building up in the till?



Scanning Tills

Most retailers have laser scanning tills in which barcodes on individual items are read electronically to record the price rather than the operator keying the price into the till. In supermarkets, the scanner is normally set into the checkout counter itself. In some other stores a hand held scanner is used. If these checkouts are badly designed, operators are more at risk of injury because of the increased intensity of the work.

- Is the scanner window within easy reach of the operator?
- Can the operator use both hands to pass heavy items past the scanner?
- Are operators allowed to stand up to move heavy items past the scanner?
- Are operators trained to slide rather than lift heavy items past the scanner?
- If a hand held scanner is used, is the checkout designed so that all the items can be reached without stretching or lifting?
- If not, is a list of barcodes provided at the checkout so that prices for awkward items can be scanned in easily?
- Does management use the technology to monitor how fast each individual operator is working?
- Do members feel that the scanning rates demanded are too high?
- Does the scanner work well or do many items have to be re-scanned or price codes keyed into the till by hand?
- Are members given training in the best way to use the scanner?
- Do people find scanner tills cause them more mental stress or physical aches and pains?



Slips, Trips and Falls

Slipping and tripping accidents are the single most common cause of injuries to shopworkers and to customers. Causes include wet or uneven floors, obstructions and spillages. Slips and trips can cause serious injuries or even deaths.

The law says that all floors should have suitable surfaces, should be free of holes, obstructions or other slipping or tripping hazards and should be kept clean. Stairs should normally be provided with suitable handrails.

Usdaw Health and Safety Reps can use the Usdaw Risk Mapping Tool to tackle serious slipping and tripping risks. Copies are available on Usdaw's website.

- Are all floors reasonably flat and level?
- Is the floor covering appropriate, for example no shiny or highly polished materials?
- Are all carpets/tiles etc, sound and well maintained?
- Is there a reliable system for reporting and clearing up spillages?
- Is there also a regular cleaning schedule particularly for high risk areas such as self-service fresh produce or entrances to freezers?
- Is the cleaning procedure arranged to reduce the risk of people slipping on freshly cleaned wet floors?
- Are all aisles and passageways kept free from obstructions?
- Are all glass doors clearly marked so that customers and staff can see when they are shut?
- Are outside areas such as car parks, loading bays and entrances well maintained and well lit?

Lifting and Carrying

Lifting and carrying is the second most common cause of injuries for shopworkers and causes some of the most serious and long-lasting injuries such as back pain and work-related upper limb disorders. Under the Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992, employers have a legal duty to eliminate, if possible, lifting and carrying tasks which can cause injury. Where this cannot be done they must do a detailed assessment and reduce the risk to the lowest reasonably practicable level.

The weight of the load is not the only factor they must consider. The size and shape of the object; the height it has to be lifted; the ease with which it can be carried; the amount of twisting and stretching involved; the stability of the load; the space available; the suitability of the person; and the frequency of lifting are all equally important.

- Are there jobs which involve dangerous or awkward lifting in the shop?
- What causes the risk of injury – the size, shape or weight of the load; the area where lifting is done; the ability of the worker; the frequency of lifting, etc?
- If mechanical aids, trolleys etc, are provided to reduce the risk are they regularly maintained and suitable for the job?
- Does your employer provide training relevant to the handling jobs involved?
- Is racking and shelving where goods are stored secure and well maintained?
- Are ladders, kick steps, etc, suitable for the job and well maintained?

In many stores, roll cages are used to deliver goods. Many accidents occur when handling these cages:

- Are cages overloaded or badly packed when they reach the shop?
- Are loading bays and passageways free from obstruction?
- Are cages well maintained and replaced when damaged?
- In particular, are the wheels in good condition?

Living in the Shadow of Violence

Fortunately serious physical violence is still not very common in shops. However it does happen. Other more common forms of violence such as verbal abuse and intimidation cause health problems and the fear of violence causes a great deal of anxiety and stress. Just as for any other foreseeable hazard, employers have a legal duty to do what they can to reduce the risk. Since 2002, Usdaw's Freedom From Fear Campaign has raised awareness and spells out what responsible employers should do to control the risk. Details are on Usdaw's website.

- Does your employer understand that violence is a health and safety issue for shopworkers?
- Does your employer have a system for reporting and monitoring violent incidents?
- Are the results of the monitoring discussed with staff and Usdaw Health and Safety Reps?
- Does your employer provide training on procedures to deal with potentially violent incidents – shoplifting, robberies, threats and intimidation, sexual or racial harassment?
- Does your employer make it clear that no-one should risk their safety, or the safety of others, to protect goods or cash?
- Is there a safe system for banking cash?
- Is there a safe system for collecting cash from tills before it builds up?
- Are staffing levels arranged to ensure that people do not work on their own at times of high risk?

Further Information

A short leaflet like this gives only a brief introduction to some of the important health and safety issues which affect shopworkers. These checklists will help Usdaw Health and Safety Reps to get members talking about the issues and to make a start at drawing up their own lists of questions to ask management and to use during their regular inspections of their shop.

Udaw provides more detailed information on these and other hazards in articles in *Network*, the Union's activists magazine, and in circulars, booklets and leaflets.

Copies of guides on topics such as violence to staff, manual handling and slips and trips are available from the Stationery Department at Central Office.

Copies of all Usdaw health and safety publications and other information are available on Usdaw's website – www.usdaw.org.uk/healthandsafety. Usdaw Health and Safety Reps should visit the site to sign up for our regular email alert service.

All Usdaw Health and Safety Reps should also have a copy of Usdaw's Health and Safety Reps' Handbook which gives practical advice on the Usdaw Health and Safety Rep's job.

Any Usdaw Health and Safety Rep who requires further information or advice on any particular health and safety issue should contact their Area Organiser (see over for telephone numbers) or contact:

The Health and Safety Officer
Legal Department
Udaw, 188 Wilmslow Road
Manchester M14 6LJ

Tel: 0161 249 2441

email: healthandsafety@usdaw.org.uk

website: www.usdaw.org.uk/healthandsafety

Contacts

Wherever you work, an Usdaw Area Organiser is not far away. For further information or assistance contact an Area Organiser at the Usdaw office nearest to you.

South Wales and Western

Cardiff – 029 2073 1131

Bristol – 0117 931 9730

Plymouth – 01752 765930

Eastern

Waltham Cross – 01992 709280

Bury St Edmunds – 01284 775700

London – 020 7323 5550

Midlands

Redditch – 01527 406290

Kegworth – 01509 686900

North Eastern

Leeds – 0113 232 1320

Newcastle – 0191 296 5333

Scottish

Glasgow – 0141 427 6561

Aberdeen – 01224 652820

Edinburgh – 0131 556 5242
– 0131 557 9109

Southern

Morden – 020 8687 5950

Andover – 01264 321460

Faversham – 01795 532637

North West

Warrington – 01925 578050

Belfast – 028 9066 3773

Preston – 01772 704003



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www.usdaw.org.uk/healthandsafety

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