



Employers obligations and Employee entitlements when using Display Screen Equipment in Ireland

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What are the Display Screen Equipment Regulations?

These detail the minimum safety and health requirements for work with display screen equipment. In effect, the provisions relate to the safety and health requirements for employees who habitually use display screen equipment (VDUs) as a significant part of their normal work.

Regulations

Who is covered by the Display Screen Equipment Regulations 2007?

The following will help as regards deciding if the Display Screen Equipment Regulations are applicable to an employee:

- if the employee has no choice but to use the VDU to carry out her/his work
- if the employee normally uses the VDU for continuous periods of more than one hour
- if the VDU is generally used by the employee on a daily basis

What is not covered by these Regulations?

The Regulations provide for the exclusion of:

- drivers' cabs or control cabs for vehicles or machinery
- computer systems on board a means of transport
- computer systems mainly intended for public use
- portable display screen equipment not in prolonged use at a workstation
- calculators, cash registers and any equipment having a small data or measurement display required for direct use of the equipment
- typewriters of traditional design, of the type known as "typewriter with window"

Workstation

Under the Display Screen Equipment Regulations what constitutes a workstation?

"workstation" means an assembly comprising display screen equipment, which may be provided with a keyboard or input device or software, or a combination of the foregoing, determining the operator and machine interface, and includes:

- (a) a work chair and work desk or work surface,*
- (b) any optional accessories and peripherals, and*
- (c) the immediate work environment of the display screen equipment.*

Should the analysis of a workstation be documented?

Yes. A documented analysis or risk assessment of a work station should include the following:

- Brief overview of the tasks completed at the workstation
- Evidence that all aspects detailed in Schedule 4 were taken into account as part of the analysis
- Details of issues that need to be followed up
- Details of an action plan to address outstanding issues which stipulates who is responsible, what actions will be taken and when they will be completed.
- A copy of the completed analysis should be given to the employee for their records and for further follow up where required, to ensure all outstanding actions are addressed.

If I move from one desk to another am I entitled to a new workstation assessment?

Yes. There will be situations where employees will move to a new workstation due to changing work commitments. The employer needs to carry out a new workstation assessment at the employees new workstation. A system should exist that when changes such as this take place a formal request is submitted to have a new workstation assessment carried out. The analysis should take account of any changes in equipment or technology.

Laptops

Do the Display Screen Equipment requirements of Chapter 5 of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007 apply to laptops?

Regulation 71 (d) states that *"this Chapter does not apply to... portable display screen equipment not in prolonged use at a workstation"*

Guide to the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007 Chapter 5 of Part 2: Display Screen Equipment says

"A laptop is not covered by these Regulations due to the fact that under these Regulations the keyboard shall be tiltable and separate from the screen so as to allow the user to find a comfortable working position which avoids fatigue in the arms or hands. A laptop does not have a separate keyboard and should not be used for long periods of time and a risk assessment must be carried out to assess the usage of the laptop and the set up of the temporary laptop workstation."

Provision of a laptop does not remove the need to comply with the Regulations.

Where a laptop is not in prolonged use at a workstation, Chapter 5 does not apply but a risk assessment must be carried out. Prolonged use could be more than one hour at a time. If you use a laptop at a workstation for more than one hour at a time you must fully comply with Chapter 5. The assessment under Schedule 4 is likely to reveal the need for a tiltable keyboard.

If you use a laptop at a workstation for less than one hour at a time you must complete a risk assessment and Chapter 5, in particular schedule 4, will assist with this.

Employers Duties

What are the employer's duties in providing health and safety protection for employees who habitually use display screen equipment?

The employer is required to perform an analysis of individual workstations in order to evaluate the safety and health of employees, with particular reference to eyesight, physical difficulties and mental stress. A competent person with the necessary skills, training and experience must complete this analysis. Steps must be taken to remedy any risks to safety and health identified.

A documented analysis or risk assessment of a work station should include the following:

- Brief overview of the tasks completed at the workstation
- Evidence that all aspects detailed in Schedule 4 were taken into account as part of the analysis
- Details of issues that need to be followed up
- Details of an action plan to address outstanding issues which stipulates who is responsible, what actions will be taken and when they will be completed.

What is Schedule 4?

Schedule 4 details the minimum requirements for all Display Screen Equipment that should be in place for Display Screen Equipment workstations. These regulations cover a range of elements which include the following:

- Display Screen Equipment
- Keyboard
- Work desk or work surface
- Work chair
- Environment (space requirements, lighting, radiation, noise, heat and humidity)
- Employee computer interface (software should be suitable for the task and easy to use)

Common Complaints

What are other common complaints arising from working with VDUs which should be taken into account?

Other common complaints include:

Upper limb pains and discomfort (WRULDs). A range of effects on the arm, hand and shoulder areas linked to work activities is now described as work related upper limb disorders (WRULDs). These range from temporary fatigue or soreness in the limbs, to cramp, to ongoing pain in the muscles or nerves.

These effects are probably due to a number of factors rather than any single cause. Holding a part of the body rigid for a long time such as the back, neck and head may cause discomfort in the muscles, bones and tendons. Awkward positioning of the hands and wrist relative to the work being carried out is another likely factor.

These effects can be avoided by using proper equipment, suitable furniture, through training and changing the way in which the work is carried out. Problems can be avoided by good workplace design so that one can work comfortably and by good working practices. Prevention is easiest if action is taken early through effective analysis of a workstation having regard to the minimum requirements in Schedule 4.

Effects on the Eyes

Some employees may experience temporary eye fatigue, with such symptoms as failure to see clearly, red or sore eyes and headaches. Eye fatigue may also lead to employees adopting awkward postures which may cause discomfort of the limbs. Medical evidence shows that using VDUs does not cause damage to eyes or eyesight, nor does it make existing defects worse.

Eye fatigue may be caused by:

- Staying in the same position and concentrating for a long time,
- Poor positioning of the VDU,
- Poor legibility of the screen or source documents,
- Poor lighting, including glare and reflections,
- A drifting, flickering or jittering image on the screen.

While using a VDU does not cause eye damage, it may make employees with pre-existing vision defects, which are not corrected, more aware of them. Such uncorrected defects may make working with a VDU more tiring or stressful than would otherwise be the case.

Fatigue and Stress

The volume of VDU work to be carried out by employees can vary widely between different employments and activities. The work may range from air traffic control to accounting, stock recording and control, or documentation creation and revision. Some tasks may require a very high degree of concentration and vigilance. More routine tasks can even give rise to boredom. Some tasks can result in stress or fatigue.

Several symptoms, including fatigue, described by VDU users can also be caused by stress arising from broader aspects of their work. They are more likely to be caused by poor organisation of the work, lack of control by the employee over the pace of the work, under-utilisation of skills, high-speed repetitive work or working in isolation. The onset of fatigue and stress can be minimised by careful design, selection and location of VDUs, good design of the workstation, its environment and the task involved as well as training, consultation and involvement of the employee.

If I have a complaint arising from working with VDUs what can I do?

You should approach your employer initially and express your concern. Your employer is obliged to carry out a risk assessment as outlined in the regulations.

Eyesight Tests

Am I entitled to an eye and eyesight test?

The employer must inform employees that they are entitled to be provided with an appropriate eye and eyesight test, which would be carried out by a competent person. The employer may do this in a number of ways including the following

- Consultation with the safety representative(s) and formulate a memo to be placed on a notice board,
- Inform the Human Resource manager/specialist and request that they inform all relevant employees of the availability of such tests,
- Inform the employee while carrying out the analysis of the workstation,
- Other appropriate means of effective communication.

Who is entitled to eye and eyesight tests?

Every employee who habitually uses a VDU as a significant part of normal work has a right to opt for an appropriate eye test and an eyesight test which must be made available and paid for by the employer, except where there may be a social welfare entitlement.

Who can carry out an eyesight test?

A doctor or optometrist can carry this out. It may also be carried out by a person (including a nurse) trained to use a vision-screening machine. The person operating the machine must know when to refer employees who do not pass the eyesight tests at the screening level to a doctor or optometrist.

How frequently should eyesight tests be carried out?

Employees have the right to an eye and eyesight test before taking up work if it is habitual work with a VDU as well as at regular intervals thereafter. In determining the intervals, factors such as the ages of the employees and the intensity of VDU work should be taken into account in deciding the frequency of repeat tests. Additionally, an appropriate eye and eyesight test must be made available to an employee who experiences visual difficulties which may be due to display screen work.

When is an employer liable for the costs of providing glasses?

Where eye tests carried out by the doctor or optometrist reveal that particular lenses are required for VDU work, the costs of minimum requirement frames and lenses must be borne by the employer, taking account of any social welfare entitlement that might apply. Where an employee already wears glasses to correct a visual defect (normal corrective appliances), and routine change of lenses arises, if these glasses are adequate also for VDU work, the employer is not liable as regards meeting the cost. The cost of dealing with more general eye problems which are revealed as a result of the tests and which are not directly related to working with a VDU is a matter for the employee as part of his or her general health care, taking account of health care entitlements.

Training

Am I entitled to any form of training if I work at a Display Screen Equipment Workstation?

Employers should provide training in the use of the workstation before an employee commences work on a VDU and, again, should the organisation of the workstation be altered. Training should include:

- A general appreciation of the computer system to which the VDU may be linked,
- Appropriate induction training. Employees should understand how the work is organised so as to comply with Chapter 5 of Part 2 of the General Application Regulations. This could include a written record of the changes made to the workstation and information on rest and posture breaks. The employees should be informed why the changes were made and the benefits of such changes.

- Instruction on the general principles of ergonomics, the proper adjustment of furniture, screens, keyboard, lighting etc. so as to suit individual employee's height, reach etc. This should include a general understanding of the use of different adjustments on the work chair and correct positioning of such accessories as the mouse, document holder and telephone. If an employee spends a lot of time on the phone during the workday consideration should be given to the provision of telephone headsets.

A general understanding of how to adjust brightness and contrast controls on the screen to suit lighting conditions in the room.

Lighting

What level of lighting should be used when working at display screens?

Correct lighting arrangements are essential if eye fatigue is to be avoided. Suitable background lighting is required for VDU work to provide an appropriate contrast between the screen and the background environment and to avoid problems of reflection and glare. As a general rule, a level of lighting of 300 - 500 lux should be appropriate. If more light is required for reading documents, local lighting should be used. However the light from a table lamp etc. must not shine on the VDU or the immediate surrounding area.

What instrument is used to measure the level of light?

A lux meter is an example of an instrument to measure light.

Breaks

How often should I take a break from working at a VDU?

Employers must plan work so that daily work at VDUs is interrupted periodically by breaks or changes in activity which reduce the work at the screen. Although the Regulations set no frequency for breaks, no single continuous period of work at a screen should, in general, exceed one hour.

The regulation does not specify the frequency and duration of work breaks when working with VDUs, nor is there any generally accepted standard. In some countries, including Ireland, there are employer trade union agreements on work breaks at company level.

The flow of work to a VDU user should be designed to allow natural breaks to occur. Alternatively, a change in the pattern of work by combining VDU and non-VDU work could be introduced. However, rest breaks are essential where continuous VDU work, requiring sustained attention is likely to result in fatigue. Ideally, the length of the rest should reflect the intensity of the individual job. However, there are four important points:

- Rest breaks or changes in the pattern of work, where they are necessary, should be taken before fatigue sets in. Some employees suffer symptoms from the effort used to keep up performance while fatigued.
- The employee should not sit in the same position for long periods and make sure to change posture as often as practicable.
- Short frequent rest breaks are more satisfactory than longer breaks taken occasionally.
- Rest breaks should be taken away from the VDU. Other duties may be assigned during this period, provided they are not too intensive

Further Information

Where can I get further guidance on the requirements of the Display Screen Equipment Regulations?

A Guide to the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007) is available on the HSA website, www.hsa.ie

Additional Questions

What does habitual and significant use mean?

This could mean using a VDU for one continuous hour or more as part of every day work.