

The Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992

The Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 lay down minimum health and safety standards for the design and use of visual display units (VDUs), also known as display screen equipment (DSE).

The key definitions are given in Regulation 1:

- **display screen equipment** - including microfiches and process control screens, but excludes screens for which the main use is to show television or film pictures;
- **workstations** - including all the equipment and furniture associated with the VDU, including the mouse, telephone, printer, chair and desk and aspects of the immediate working environment, including noise, lighting, temperature, humidity and space; and
- **VDU users** - employees who habitually use a VDU as a significant part of their normal work. This is likely to include word process operators, typists, journalists, data-input operators, and those working on a VDU while taking telephone enquiries. The regulations also cover **operators**- self-employed people who use VDUs habitually as a significant part of their normal work.

Employers must carry out a suitable and sufficient analysis of workstations used by users or operators in order to assess the health and safety risks and reduce them to the lowest extent reasonably practicable (Regulation 2). Note that the Regulations apply to both homeworkers and agency workers where they meet the definition of VDU user.

Health and Safety Executive (HSE) guidance to the regulations outlines the main risks associated with VDU work as:

- Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs);
- Fatigue – including eye health; and
- stress.

Assessments should be reviewed if it is suspected that they are no longer valid because:

- health problems are being reported;
- There have been changes to the workstation, such as new equipment, different workers, or changes in the working environment; or
- research indicates significant new risks.

The minimum standards that each part of the workstation must meet cover:

- the equipment itself - the screen, keyboard, work desk, and chair;
- the work environment - space requirements, lighting, noise, heat radiation, and humidity; and
- the interface between computer software and the worker (Regulation 3).

Under Regulation 4, the employer must plan work activities so that there are periodic breaks or changes in activity in order to reduce the workload at the screen. HSE guidance to the regulations advises that;

- breaks should be taken before the onset of fatigue;
- breaks or changes of activity should be included in working time
- breaks should be taken away from the screen;
- short frequent breaks are more satisfactory than occasional longer breaks. A five to 10 minute break after 50 minutes continuous work is likely to be better than a 15-minute break every two hours;
- informal breaks appear to be more effective than formal breaks; and
- breaks should be under the control of the worker.

Employers must provide users with free eye and eyesight tests on request and with further tests at regular intervals (Regulation 5). The HSE guidance to the regulations says that employers should take account of the clinical judgement of the optometrist or doctor on the regularity of testing. GMB advises Safety Representatives to seek agreement for repeat testing at specified intervals, such as two years, or on the advice of the optometrist.

Additional tests must be provided on request for users who experience visual difficulties such as headaches. Where the tests show that spectacles are needed for DSE work a basic pair must also be paid for by the employer. Employers must also allow paid time off to attend eye and eyesight tests or arrange for proper tests to be carried out in working time at the workplace.

Employers must provide health and safety training and retraining when the workstation is substantially modified (Regulation 6) and under Regulation 7, the employer must provide adequate information on all aspects of health and safety relating to workstations, and measures taken to comply with the regulations. This should include information to reinforce training and include diagrams showing correct working postures.

Further information is available from the HSE guidance to the Regulations, "*L26 - Work with Display Screen Equipment*", which can be freely downloaded from the HSE website at www.hse.gov.uk.