

Display Screen Equipment (Visual Display Units)

Policy

The Occupational Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations (Cap 509B, 2003) require the University to carry out risk assessments for all the legally defined 'users' of Display Screen Equipment (DSE). Where the risk assessment indicates that improvements need to be made, appropriate measures are to be taken to reduce the risk of injury or ill health to the user.

Furthermore, the general sections of the Occupational Health and Safety Ordinance place an obligation on the employer "to provide or maintain a working environment that is, so far as is reasonably practicable, safe and without risks to health". As there are a significant number of computer users who fall outside the definition of DSE user and yet who work at the computer for some considerable time, risk assessments will also be carried out for these personnel.

Responsibilities

Department Heads must:

- Appoint a departmental Display Screen Equipment Risk Assessor (DSERA) who needs to receive appropriate training and competency assessment. (Training can be arranged through the Safety Office). In cases where the appointment of a DSERA may be considered excessive, alternative arrangements can be made for another DSERA to complete the assessments.
- Allow the DSERA sufficient time to complete all the risk assessments for DSE users as a priority.
- Enable the DSERA to assess the work stations of other staff in the department over a reasonable period of time.

- Ensure that the matters raised by the risk assessments are dealt with expeditiously.
- In the event of new furniture being required the request should be accompanied by the completed risk assessment.

DSE Risk Assessors should:

- Determine which computer users fall within the legal definition of DSE User.
- Perform DSE risk assessment for DSE Users by using the online DSE risk assessment forms <http://www.hku.hk/safety/DSERA>.
- Review the risk assessment with the DSE User and convert the information in the risk assessment to the "official" risk assessment required by law.

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DSE Policy v. 0.2	Page 1 of 4	Review Date: Oct. 2008

- Once all the legally defined DSE users have undergone a risk assessment, the DSERA will continue to identify regular users and based on use will continue to provide risk assessments for other computer users in the department.

Computer Users should:

- Access the webpage on computing usage <http://www.hku.hk/uhs/he/worker/main.htm> and use this to review their own posture and workstation (this will not only be useful for the DSERA but also acts as a self training tool since all questions in the checklist are supported by examples and guidance).
- Keep their working area clear of personal belongings and other items which would prevent them from adopting an optimum ergonomic working position.

Safety Office will:

- Arrange training for DSE risk assessors.
- Consult with UHS and EO regarding suitable furniture for use with DSE's.
- Arrange with Computer Centre the continuation of the online risk assessment programme.

University Health Service can:

- Offer additional expertise in ergonomics and advice on workstations.

Estates Office will:

- Supply standard issue furniture only if request is supported by a risk assessment prepared by an authorized DSERA.

Prepared by: Safety Office	Approved by: Safety, Health & Environment Committee	Issue Date: Oct. 2006
DSE Policy v. 0.2	Page 2 of 4	Review Date: Oct. 2008

Guidance

Legal Definition of a DSE User

The legal definition of a DSE User has been confirmed by the Labour Department to be:

"an employee who, by reason of the nature of his work, is required to use DSE for a prolonged period of time almost every day" and

"an employee would be a DSE user if he, by the nature of his work e.g. data processing, telecommunications, computer graphic design etc. is required to use DSE almost every day, continuously for at least 4 hours during a day; or cumulatively for at least 6 hours during a day.

Breaks not exceeding 10 minutes in an hour away from the DSE shall not be regarded as breaking the continuity of use of the DSE."

Following a visit to the University by an Occupational Hygienist in August 2003, the Labour Department has confirmed in writing that the majority of staff at HKU are considered to be *non DSE users* under this legislation.

OSH (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations

The regulations are not primarily about the provision of furniture. The fundamental requirement of the regulations is for the employer to perform a risk assessment of each workstation that is being used by an employee who falls within the legal definition of a DSE user.

The purpose of the risk assessment is to:

- identify and assess the risk, if any, to the DSE user;
- decide whether existing precautions are adequate; and
- record the findings.

The risk assessment will indicate what action needs to be taken to reduce the risks that are identified.

This action can be as simple as reorganizing a desk, clearing away stored items under the desk, or adjusting the chair. Our experience, to date, has shown that in the majority of cases risk assessments have not required the provision of additional furniture.

Arrangements at HKU

The current arrangements at HKU introduced to address these issues and to ensure compliance is as follows.

DSERAs will review staff usage of computers and identify those that come within the legal definition of DSE users and others who may benefit from risk assessment

DSERAs will perform a risk assessment for DSE users and use the online DSE risk assessment form available at: <http://www.hku.hk/safety/DSEra> to electronically record the findings of the assessment exercises. The online DSE risk assessment form is a checklist embedded with explanation and suggestions that can be

Prepared by: Safety Office	Approved by: Safety, Health & Environment Committee	Issue Date: Oct. 2006
DSE Policy v. 0.2	Page 3 of 4	Review Date: Oct. 2008

displayed interactively to enable the DSERA to assess each facet of the DSE work station.

DSERAs will review their findings recorded in the online DSE risk assessment form with the DSE users and confirm or amend as necessary to convert the information recorded on the online DSE risk assessment form to the "official" DSE risk assessment record that HKU is legally obliged to record and keep.

Note: It is important for the DSE user to understand that the fundamental requirement of the legislation is the risk assessment. The legislation does not necessarily require new or different furniture to be provided.

The risk assessment will identify points for further action, which may or may not require changes to the workstation, work environment or work method.

If additional furniture is required, a completed risk assessment form should be printed and accompany a request for furniture (also available at <http://www.hku.hk/safety/DSERA>).

Note: Estates Office will not accept any request for standard issue furniture relating to computer use without an accompanying risk assessment.

Problems and Queries

Only authorized DSERAs are eligible to provide 'official' risk assessments.

If Departments, Centres or Units have no DSE risk assessor and are unable to obtain assistance

from another Department, they will need to send a member of staff to the Occupational Safety and Health Council for training and present the certificate of competence to the Safety Office (Tel: 28592400 or email: safety@hku.hk) before he/she can become an authorized DSERA.

Alternatively if there is a demand (minimum 30 candidates) another course can be arranged on campus. If staff need training, please contact the Safety Office.

Risk assessments, by their very nature, need to take into account the interrelationship between users and their equipment. Therefore, it is not possible to carry such an exercise for a new member of staff who has yet to arrive.

If any member of staff is suffering from ill effects which may be the result of working at a computer, the DSE risk assessor should be requested to carry out a risk assessment even though that person may not be legally defined as a DSE user. If the assessment indicates that changes need to be made, such adjustments can be made accordingly.

Nothing in these procedures prevents a department from purchasing furniture from its own budget. Nevertheless, if the furniture is to be purchased for use with computers, advice from the DSE risk assessor is necessary.

If a department experiences difficulty in completing a DSE risk assessment, Ms. Kamela Ma, Health Education Officer of the University Health Service and the Safety Office should be able to assist.

Prepared by: Safety Office	Approved by: Safety, Health & Environment Committee	Issue Date: Oct. 2006
DSE Policy v. 0.2	Page 4 of 4	Review Date: Oct. 2008