

# Occupational Health and Safety

## WORK RELATED GRADUAL PROCESS

Work Related Gradual Process is a collective term for a range of conditions (including injury) characterised by discomfort or persistent pain in muscles, tendons and other soft tissues. Every case of Work Related Gradual Process has the potential to be classified as a significant hazard because the condition may cause "Serious Harm." Therefore the risk factors for Work Related Gradual Process need to be controlled by eliminating the hazard if at all possible, or else by isolating or minimising the hazard.

## RESPONSIBILITIES

Senior Managers and other managers will take all practical steps to ensure that in the departments, centres and sections under their management:

- there is compliance with the Department of Labour Code of Practice (COP) for Visual Display Units.

NOTE Laptop computers should not be chosen for continuous use at work unless they are plugged into a conventional monitor and/or keyboard.

- all staff at risk and relevant line managers attend a Work Related Gradual Process Awareness training session in their first month of employment and as may be required;
- staff are encouraged to report any work related pain to their line manager as early as possible;
- the work environment of any staff who do develop symptoms is monitored and all practicable steps are taken to remedy any deficiencies; and
- an early return to work for any staff member who has been absent through a Work Related Gradual Process related injury is facilitated where possible.

Staff members are responsible for:

- attending the required Work Related Gradual Process awareness training;
- adjusting workstation equipment to maintain a comfortable body position;
- taking breaks away from the workstation and practising micro pauses as appropriate;
- reporting early symptoms to the line manager (preferably before visiting a doctor); and
- participating in an early return to work programme if applicable.

## PROCEDURES

### Pre-employment Procedures

Managers who plan new jobs or evaluate current jobs should assess them for risk factors, and take actions to remedy actual or potential problems. Where appropriate, health and safety should be incorporated into new position descriptions and as a measurable outcome of an individual's performance appraisal. Managers will seek to establish if the prospective staff member suffers from any gradual process injury that the particular job may aggravate or contribute to, by checking the statement on the Application form.

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## Induction of New Staff Members

Managers will require all new staff to attend a Work Related Gradual Process Awareness Training Course within the first month of employment. In most cases this session is incorporated into the Introductory Session provided by the Human Resource Management Division.

## Procedures for Current Staff Members

- Current staff members who have not already attended a Work Related Gradual Process Awareness training session (or successfully completed an [on-line alternative](#)), are required to do so as soon as possible. The training is provided to decrease the incidence of Work Related Gradual Process type conditions by teaching safe working techniques, optimum use of the body, awareness of the risk factors, and how to get help if problems arise.
- Individual staff members should adjust their own workstation to maintain a comfortable working position, vary tasks, practise micro pauses and take other breaks. They must report any problems to the line manager who in turn may request a full workstation assessment from a properly trained Workstation Assessor. The Workstation Assessor will work with the staff member to recommend changes or adjustments, and will provide a brief summary of findings to him/her, the line manager and the Health and Safety Representative for the School/Division (if that happens to be someone other than the Assessor.)
- If new or different workstation furniture or equipment is required, the Guidelines to the Selection and Purchase of Workstation Furniture and Equipment should be used prior to any replacement. Further details of the standard are outlined in the Department of Labour Code Of Practice for Visual Display Units. NOTE. Laptop computers should not be chosen for continuous use at work unless they are plugged into a conventional monitor and/or keyboard.
- Early warning symptoms should not be ignored in the hope that the pain will go away. If discomfort during work activities persists for more than a few days the following actions should be taken. By taking these steps individuals will be making important decisions about stopping the symptoms from worsening and developing into a possibly serious and long-term condition.

Staff should ask themselves the following questions:

- Has my workload (physical or mental) changed recently?
- Could this be a cause of my discomfort/pain?
- Can I stop or reduce the activities that are causing the discomfort/pain?
- What other proven self-help strategies can I use? Can I:
  - attend a refresher training session;
  - apply what I have been taught in training sessions;
  - take all allowed tea and lunch breaks;
  - take short relaxation breaks often (micro pauses and macro pauses);
  - re-negotiate deadlines;
  - vary tasks during the day;

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- defer unnecessary tasks temporarily and assess any overtime work (if currently required);
- avoid doing similar tasks at home;
- adjust my equipment and make sure my equipment is well maintained;
- change my body position frequently;
- improve my rest and relaxation including sleep time;
- improve my general fitness (eg go walking, use the stairs);
- do stretching exercises and exercises to promote blood flow;  
drink more water; or
- let my diaphragm "go" when my breathing is shallow.

If your symptoms have not improved, report them to your line manager and apply the following steps:

- request an assessment from a Workstation Assessor (as outlined above);
- in partnership with the assessor, discover ways of doing things that do not cause discomfort and make the recommended changes; and
- monitor progress

The line manager should review the situation after two weeks. If the symptoms have not improved, the following steps should be taken:

- complete the [Report of Accident/Incident/Serious Harm form](#), have it signed by his/her line manager and send a copy to the [Health and Safety Co-ordinator](#);
- complete an ACC Claim form and forward it to the line manager and the Health and Safety Co-ordinator within 2 days of receiving it from the treatment provider, (Doctor, physiotherapist etc.) so that any claim for treatment costs can be processed promptly; and

### Notes

- All parties should avoid labelling any discomfort/pain during these early stages as a Work Related Gradual Process condition. A self-diagnosis of Work Related Gradual Process condition may be premature and incorrect.
- A staff member has the right to visit a doctor at any stage.
- If symptoms worsen or have been present for some time prior to reporting them, then the doctor should be seen within one week of the initial report.
- The [Health and Safety Co-ordinator](#) may be contacted for further information or advice on all these procedures.