Durham County Council
Employee Health, Safety and Wellbeing Handbook

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Health and Safety

Durham County Council

Contents

Foreword 3
Statement of Intent 4
Employee Responsibilities.....6
Safety Signs 7
Know Your Working Environment 7
Accidents/Incidents/Ill-Health/Near Misses 8
First Aid 8
Mental Health and Wellbeing 8
Stress 9
Fire Safety 9
Electrical Safety 11
Hazardous Substances 11
Asbestos 12
Restrictions on Alcohol Consumption 12
Suspicious Packages/Bomb Threats.....13
Display Screen Equipment (DSE) 13
Driving at Work.....13
Machine/Equipment Safety.....14
The main hazards are as follows:.....15
Manual Handling.....15
Mobile Telephones 16
Noise at Work.....17
Vibration at work.....17
Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).....18
Lone Working 18
Personal Safety 18
Slips, Trips and Falls 19
Smoking.....20
Working at Height.....20
Food Safety and Hygiene.....20
Useful Contacts and Sources of Information.....21

Foreword

I am delighted to endorse our refreshed Employee Handbook and encourage all employees to read it. Health, Safety and Wellbeing is a priority area for me as it's important that we all work to promote our health, safety and wellbeing and in doing so avoid accidents, injuries and ill health.

We have made a lot of progress in this area in recent years, although it's really important that we all take an active role in looking after ourselves and others within our organisation.

I will continue to spend time with our Health & Safety Team to learn about our work across all areas of our organisation, although all of us need to do everything we can to keep ourselves healthy and safe.

If you see anything that you consider could be dangerous in any area of the Council, please report this as soon as possible to your Line Manager or the Health & Safety Team.

We need to do everything we can to keep all of our team well; please do what you can to help.

John Hewitt

Chief Executive

June 2025

Statement of Intent

Durham County Council's vision is to be an exemplary employer in all matters relating to the health, safety and wellbeing and prevent injury and ill-health to those at work and those affected by work activities.

Durham County Council (the council) acknowledges and accepts its statutory duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety at work of all its employees and those why may be affected by its work activities, as defined by the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, whether on council premises or carrying out council business elsewhere.

Elected Members, Directors, Heads of Service, managers, supervisors and all employees are encouraged to develop a culture, which promotes healthy and safe working environments; by working together we can create a safer and healthier environment for ourselves and others.

In particular, the authority will ensure, in so far as reasonably practicable:

- Plant, equipment, places of work and working environments that are safe and without risks to health;
- Safe systems of work are established, implemented and adequately supervised;
- The provision of such information, instruction and training as is necessary to ensure health, safety and wellbeing at work;
- Safety and the absence of risks to health in connection with the use, handling, storage and transport of articles and substances used at work;
- Adequate welfare facilities and arrangements.

Furthermore, to achieve our objectives we will:

- Prioritise our work and work on the principal that work related accidents, injuries, dangerous occurrences and ill-health conditions can be prevented and risks shall be managed both effectively and proportionately;
- Recognise the vital importance of the continued commitment of all employees and elected members to the highest standards of health, safety and wellbeing, and ensure that they have the necessary skills and support to achieve this;
- Actively promote employee and elected member participation and co-operation in establishing and maintaining measures to improve health, safety and wellbeing at work;
- Ensure, through systematic risk assessment programmes, that risks associated with the council's activities are identified and then eliminated, reduced or adequately controlled and that all such assessments are reviewed as appropriate;
- Provide and promote adequate means for effective communication, co-operation and consultation with recognised trade unions and employee representatives;
- Provide sufficient finance and resources to successfully achieve our aims and objectives.
- Recognise that effective health and safety management will benefit the council, reducing financial and resource losses;
- Require that any organisation or individuals contracted to work with the council applies health and safety standards that are fully consistent with our own.

The council recognises that for this policy to be effective, management of health, safety and wellbeing must be fully integrated into, and treated with at least equal status to, any other area of work. It is our intent to demonstrate an ongoing and determined commitment to the continuous improvement of health and safety at work throughout the council.

The Director of Resources undertakes the lead role for Health, safety and wellbeing on behalf of the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) and will ensure that Elected Members, Chief Executive and Directors are informed of the ramification of any significant health and safety issues and will keep the council appraised of relevant changes to best practice and legislation.

In addition to the provision of competent technical advice to the council and its officers, the Director of Resources will ensure that an annual report is produced on the overall safety performance of the Council for corporate governance and assurance purposes.

Andrew Husband

Leader of the Council

John Hewitt

Chief Executive

Employee Responsibilities

All employees must:

- Take reasonable care for the health and safety of themselves and of any other person who may be affected by their actions or omissions at work;
- Report to their line manager any unsafe practices or systems of work, unsafe working conditions, near misses, damage to plant, machinery or equipment, accidents, violent incidents or dangerous occurrences;
- Adhere to the requirements of risk assessments, safe working procedures, training information and instruction in relation to their work;
- Make full and proper use of the appropriate equipment, personal protective equipment and all safety devices;
- Co-operate with the council, managers and supervisors so as to enable them to carry out their own responsibilities as defined in this policy;
- Not intentionally or recklessly interfere with or misuse anything provided in the interests of health, safety and welfare;
- Attend Health, Safety and wellbeing training and health surveillance commensurate with their role and activities undertaken;
- Act upon any instances of serious or imminent danger in a timely manner and report to senior management and the council Health and Safety Team.

Health and Safety Terminology

Risk Assessment

Risk assessment is about identifying and taking sensible and proportionate measures to control the risks in your workplace, not about creating huge amounts of paperwork.

A risk assessment is a careful examination of work activities and tasks. The aim is to eliminate or minimise the likelihood of anyone including yourself becoming ill or getting injured as a result of the hazards that arise from performing the activities and tasks.

The council is responsible for ensuring suitable and sufficient control measures are in place.

Hazard: Is something with the potential to cause harm – e.g. lifting large, heavy equipment.

Risk: Is the likelihood that harm from a particular hazard will happen – e.g. the likelihood that a back injury would occur.

Control measures: What method is put in place to reduce the risk – e.g. providing lifting equipment.

- Your supervisor/manager is required to keep written risk assessments where significant hazards are present in relation to work activities.
- This information and instruction on elimination/control measures must be shared with you. Arranging any necessary training needs is also a responsibility of your supervisor/manager. Any in-house risk assessments should be held in a risk register.
- From time to time a situation may arise where an emergency risk assessment has to be written to cover the change in working systems, e.g., a fire service strike.
- Your supervisor/manager should consult employees when carrying out risk assessments and communicate the findings to all employees and others identified as being directly affected.
- Specific and more detailed risk assessments may also need to be undertaken such as for new and expectant mothers or those with temporary physical impairments.

Safety Signs

In the interests of health and safety, there are various safety signs throughout council premises which warn and instruct employees. These are as follows:

Prohibition Signs: 'Do not' or 'No' Round shape with red border, white background and a black picture. A sign prohibiting behaviour likely to increase or cause danger.

Warning Sign: 'Danger' Triangular shape with black border and picture on a yellow background. A sign giving warning of a hazard or danger.

Mandatory Sign: 'Must' Round shape with a blue background and a white picture. A sign prescribing specific behaviour.

Safe Condition: Safe Condition, Green background with a white picture. A sign giving information on emergency exits, first aid, or rescue facilities.

Know Your Working Environment

Your Building, Your Safety, Your Responsibility – Help us by helping yourself

You should attempt to answer or find the answers to all of the following questions. When you have completed this, you will have greatly increased your safety awareness and reduced the likelihood of having an accident whilst at work.

Fire

- Where are the nearest fire exits?
- Is there clear access to fire exits, fire extinguishers and hose reels?
- Where is the nearest firefighting equipment?
- Where is the allocated fire assembly point?
- How do I activate the alarm if necessary?
- What does the alarm sound like?
- Where are safe refuge areas located?

Housekeeping

- Are the corridors and work areas clear and free from spillage and obstruction including waste?
- Is all equipment stored/located in a designated area?
- Is all material stored in a safe manner?
- Is waste material disposed of in a correct manner?

Hazardous Substances

- What hazardous substances are used or stored in the area?
- If you use hazardous substances, have you been trained in the use of these?
- Are the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) assessments available for all hazardous substances in use? If so, where are they held?

Electrical

- Are items of electrical equipment tested?
- Are pre-use checks looking for obvious signs of visible damage to electrical equipment carried out before use?
- Are there any trailing cables?
- Where appropriate, is all electrical equipment switched off when leaving site?

Risk Assessments

- Do you know, where the risk assessments are kept for your work activities and workplace, and have you been provided with them?

Machinery and Equipment

- Are all necessary guards fitted and used?
- Have you had adequate training in the use of machinery/equipment?
- Do you know how to stop all machinery/ equipment in use?
- Are you authorised and confident about using the machinery/equipment?

Manual Handling

- What manual lifting and carrying i s being undertaken?
- Can any difficult tasks be eliminated or redesigned?
- Have you tested the weight of the items you need to carry?
- Have manual handling assessments been carried out?
- What are the control measures (e.g. are there some mechanical aids, a need for team lifting, or training requirements)?

First Aid

- Where is the nearest first aid box?
- How do you contact a first aider?
- Who are the first aiders?

Training

Your individual health and safety training requirements will be identified through a number of processes such as appraisal, risk assessment and training needs analysis.

Anyone commencing employment with the council will receive induction training covering areas such as health and safety procedures and fire drill etc. from a nominated person i.e. supervisor/manager or person from within their section/place of work. Where identified a corporate induction will be provided which will include aspects of health and safety.

Your training needs are also identified through the completion of personal development review process around the general and specific health and safety requirements of your work, its activities and the environment in which you work i.e. office, construction site, highway, public building or clients' home etc. Any gaps in the actual training you require will be picked up in this process. Your supervisor/ manager should ensure that you receive any necessary training identified in this training needs analysis.

Refresher training will be required at various stages throughout your career with the council to update your skills and knowledge i.e. first aiders.

Accidents/Incidents/Ill-Health/Near Misses

All employees are encouraged to report via the Councils intranet on line reporting form; any accidents, incidents, near misses and cases of work-related ill health. Those employees who do not have access to the on line form should complete the paper form and sent it to the Health & Safety Team within 5 days. The Health & Safety Team will transfer the incident onto the on line form. School based employees can access the reporting system via the extranet.

First Aid

Details of your first aider(s) and/or appointed person(s) will be listed locally via posters for your information and is also available via the council's intranet. Your manager or supervisor will be able to provide this information to you.

Any first-aid treatment administered should be recorded on the Accident/Incident/Ill-Health or Near Miss Report on line form.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

The Council is committed to employee mental health and wellbeing and supports this through a range of initiatives and

employee engagement. The Council is accredited with the Better Health at Work Award and this includes a range of interventions, employee support and guidance relating to mental health and wellbeing in the workplace.

The Council has also committed to the Time to Change pledge which demonstrates commitment to change how as an employer the Council thinks and acts about mental health in the workplace. It also ensures that employees who are facing these problems feel supported.

Stress

What is Stress?

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines stress as “The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them.” It can be caused by things at work, home or both. Pressure can be a good thing; it often leads to improved performance, however, when demands and pressure become too much, this leads to stress. If intense and prolonged this can lead to mental and physical ill health.

The Council is striving to manage workplace stress by;

- Preventing so far as is reasonably practicable work-related stress, by pro-actively identifying the foreseeable causes of work-related stress and controlling or eliminating the impact of these causes.
- Supporting employees to address pressures and stresses inside and outside of the workplace that may impact on their work and wellbeing.
- Providing guidance to staff and managers on the actions that they should take in the event of any member of staff experiencing stress at work.
- Providing mechanisms to monitor procedures and outcomes to assess the effectiveness of the stress management controls.
- Establishing stress focus groups and forums.
- Mental health awareness and mental health first aid training.
- Further information is contained in the:
- Human Resources Stress Management Policy, Guidance and Toolkit.
- Human Resources Stress Prevention Actions and Guidance Policy.
- The Mental Health & Wellbeing intranet pages.
- The council employee assistance programme which is provided by Health Assured.

Fire Safety

It is essential that all employees know what to do in the event of discovering a fire or upon hearing the fire alarm. Locate and familiarise yourself with the fire instructions for the premises you are working in. Familiarise yourself with the escape routes and assembly points for the premises.

If you discover a fire:

- Raise the alarm at the earliest possible opportunity.
- If you suspect or discover a fire, call 999 to inform the emergency services (fire and rescue) of the fire and location.
- Follow local fire evacuation procedure.

If you are not already sure of the emergency/fire arrangements for your place of work, check with your supervisor/manager or premises manager immediately.

Do not attempt to fight the fire. Leave the building.

If fighting a fire (trained personnel only) with an extinguisher then always ensure there is a safe means of escape behind you. Do not allow yourself to become trapped.

If alarm is raised:

- Leave the area quickly and calmly and close any doors behind you.
- Do not stop to collect personal belongings.
- If applicable, ensure your visitors leave with you.
- Do not attempt to extinguish the fire unless you are trained and it is safe to do so.
- Evacuate the premises by the nearest available exit. Lifts should not be used in the event of a fire.
- Move away from the buildings and proceed to the designated fire assembly point.
- Remain at the fire assembly point and do not re-enter the building until the all clear is given.
- Arrangements for persons who require additional assistance (i.e. staff or visitors) should be considered in the specific premises fire risk assessment. For staff and pupils this should take the form of a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP), for visitors this should be catered for in the local premises procedure.

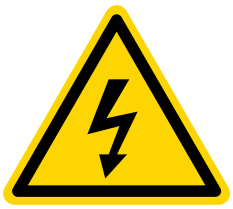
Fire Extinguishers/Fire Blankets

Only trained personnel should attempt to extinguish a fire and then only when it is safe to do so. Such personnel should know the exact location of firefighting equipment.

Types of fire extinguisher and their use

Type of Fire		Type of Extinguisher/Description				
		Water	AFFF Foam	Carbon Dioxide	ABC Dry Powder	Wet Chemical
Description	BS EN Symbol	**Red body with red label**	**Red body with cream label**	**Red body with black label**	**Red body with blue label**	**Red body with yellow label**
Wood, paper, textiles, etc., and other carbonaceous materials		✓ Yes	✓ Yes	✗ No	✓ Yes	✓ Yes
Petrol, oil, fats, paints, etc., and other flammable liquids		✗ No	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	✗ No
Flammable gases		✗ No	✗ No	✗ No	✓ Yes	✗ No
Flammable metals such as aluminium, magnesium, titanium		✗ No	✗ No	✗ No	✓ Yes Specially formulated dry powder	✗ No
Electrical hazards		✗ No	✗ No	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	✗ No
Cooking oil and fat		✗ No	✗ No	✗ No	✗ No	✓ Yes

Electrical Safety



Thousands of people are killed or injured each year as a result of electrical shocks. Many fires are reported each year as being caused by electrical faults. You could be at risk if you:

- use equipment carelessly.
- use equipment for a job it is not intended to be used for.
- use faulty equipment.

Electrical Safety Measures

- Report all defects to your supervisor/ manager.
- Cut off the supply – switch off or isolate all equipment/machinery before adjusting or maintaining.
- Don't touch water – or damp surfaces while you are touching unearthed metal or bare wires. Keep electrical equipment dry.
- Check equipment – to ensure that the insulation is not broken or damaged. Ensure that the insulation sheath enters into both the plug and equipment.
- Maintain equipment – keep equipment in good condition and free from damage.
- Damaged equipment – all electrical equipment must only be repaired by suitably qualified and authorised staff. Damaged equipment should be passed onto your supervisor/manager to be taken out of use.
- Housekeeping – keep equipment clean and free from dust, oil and moisture. Always cover or tape down trailing cables.
- Fire – never use water on an electrical fire. Use a carbon dioxide or dry powder extinguisher.
- Training – if unsure how to operate electrical equipment, stop and inform your supervisor/manager. Never carry out tasks without the necessary authorisation.
- Never carry out repairs or alterations to electrical equipment unless suitably qualified and authorised to do so.

Hazardous Substances

The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) covers substances that are hazardous to health. Substances can take many forms and include:

- chemicals
- products containing chemicals
- fumes
- dusts
- vapours
- mists
- nanotechnology
- gases and asphyxiating gases and
- biological agents (germs). If the packaging has any of the hazard symbols then it is classed as a hazardous substance.

COSHH assessments with accompanying current Manufacturers' Safety Data Sheets (MSDS's) are in place for all hazardous substances used or produced in the workplace. Familiarise yourself with the assessments for substances you use at work and follow all safety instructions. Ask your supervisor/manager for more information.

Substances harmful to the body may enter by four main routes. These are:

- Absorption – through the skin, including entry through cuts and abrasions and the eyes.
- Ingestion – through the mouth, this is generally considered to be a rare method of contracting industrial disease.
- Inhalation – the most important route of entry, which can allow direct attacks against the lung tissue, which bypass other defences such as those of the liver.
- Injection – through puncture wounds i.e. needle stick/syringe injuries and contact with sharp objects. Compressed air if used inappropriately can be injected through the skin.

It is of vital importance that employees maintain high standards of personal hygiene by:

- Not smoking, eating or drinking when handling and using hazardous substances.
- Removing protective clothing and washing hands before using the toilet, smoking, eating or drinking.

Asbestos

Asbestos containing materials are present in many buildings built before 2000, especially those that were constructed, refurbished or altered between 1950 and the 1980's.

Asbestos containing materials around boilers, pipes and columns, in ceiling tiles, partition boards, soffits, fire breaks, roof felting, roof spaces and under floor ducts.

Where there are asbestos materials present these will be marked with warning labels.

If asbestos containing materials are present this does not mean there is a risk to health. **No damage – no danger.**

It is important that asbestos containing materials are not damaged or disturbed, remain encapsulated and that any damage is repaired promptly by competent personnel trained to do so.

Every person managing or working within such a building should assume the presence of asbestos containing materials within the premises unless documentation (asbestos survey/management plan) is available that confirms otherwise. Information on surveys can be obtained from the Asbestos Management Unit.

Site arrangements must ensure that no entry into roof spaces, underfloor ducts or any repair, maintenance, renovation, conversion, or alteration takes place unless the location and condition of asbestos containing materials is known.

Trained persons must carry out a survey and have the type of asbestos identified by an accredited laboratory. Any remedial work or removal of asbestos containing material must be carried out by a competent contractor.

If you suspect that you have discovered asbestos, leave it alone and inform your supervisor/manager immediately.

Restrictions on Alcohol Consumption

Whilst the council is not against alcohol consumption outside of office hours, and it is not the intention of this policy to intrude into the privacy or lifestyle of employees, the council recognises that alcohol misuse is associated with a variety of negative workplace outcomes, including higher levels of absenteeism, reduced turnover and increased frequency of accidents. The council must respond where consumption of alcohol shows a clear detrimental effect on an individual's attendance or work performance.

The consumption of alcohol by council employees during working hours or immediately prior to work is not permitted.

Should an employee consume alcohol for any reason during working hours they should not return to work, instead they should take flexi or annual leave agreed in advance by their line manager. Employees should be reminded that they should not drive home.

Employees are reminded that following a period of heavy drinking they may still be over the legal alcohol driving limit the morning after.

Suspicious Packages/Bomb Threats

Employees should be particularly vigilant of any suspicious packages. A suspicious package is any item that is out of place and cannot be accounted for. Such a package should be treated with extreme caution and its presence should be reported to your manager.

A procedure for dealing with suspicious packages/bomb threats is in place. In the event of a suspect package being found the fire and evacuation procedure shall be used and further instructions issued following evacuation.

If you have not been told what the procedure is at your place of work advise your supervisor/manager or query with your premises manager.

Display Screen Equipment (DSE)

The council must ensure that employees are protected from any risks associated with Display Screen Equipment (DSE) (i.e. computers and laptops) Duties apply to employees who regularly use DSE as a significant part of their normal work (daily, for continuous periods of an hour or more). These employees are known as DSE users. Employees identified as “Users” of Display Screen Equipment (DSE) should undertake an assessment using the DSE Workstation Risk Assessment Checklist.

This form is available online through the Health and Safety intranet pages. As a ‘DSE User’ you are entitled to eye sight tests upon request through your supervisor/manager, if corrective lenses are required, for DSE use only, the council will contribute a set fee toward the overall cost, details are available from the Health and Safety Team.

Display Screen E-Learning is also available. The course aims to enable the learner to understand the health and safety issues relating to display screen equipment and workstations, and to put in place all the precautions and controls necessary to work safely.

Driving at Work

Nationally, it has been estimated that up to a third of all road traffic accidents involve somebody who is at work at the time. This accounts for approximately 200 road deaths and serious injuries every week. Nationally, more than 300 people a year are killed and many more are seriously injured where a driver has fallen asleep at the wheel of a motor vehicle.

Many road traffic accidents do occur through lapses in driver concentration, human error, failure to observe the Highway Code and poor condition of vehicle. It is the intention of this section of the handbook to cover:

- General Driving Safety;
- Winter Motoring, and
- Driver Fatigue.

Information on personal safety in a car/vehicle is contained in the Personal Safety Section of this handbook.

Risks associated with the use of mobile telephones in vehicles are covered in the Mobile Telephone Section of this handbook.

General Driving Safety

Drivers of motor vehicles should:

- Comply with the Highway Code at all times.
- Ensure that the vehicle is roadworthy and complies with statutory requirements.
- Ensure council vehicle(s), have pre-user checks appropriate for that type of vehicle and if applicable, ancillary equipment i.e. trailers etc. are carried out. This also applies to hire/common wheels vehicles.

- Comply with any workplace/site-imposed restrictions such as speed limits, pedestrian routes, parking and one-way systems etc.
- Drive or ride carefully and in accordance with the prevailing weather conditions at the time i.e. snow, ice, wind, fog and rain etc.
- Comply with medical advice given by general practitioners and health professionals in relation to driving. Certain medicines/treatments may affect your driving. Always read the instructions on medicine packaging.
- Comply with guidance given in the council's Code of Practice for the use of Mobile Telephones.
- Ensure that routine checks on fuel levels, tyre pressure/depth, water levels etc. are carried out.
- Ensure that if you need to drive a council vehicle, other than a "pool car" at work, you will need to be authorised to do so via the council's Fleet Management Team. Authorised drivers are provided with a detailed manual of instruction and guidance.

Winter Motoring

The British weather is unpredictable. Winter can be especially hazardous. If you must use a motor vehicle during severe weather, make sure you are prepared for the conditions.

- Keep your windscreen, windows and mirrors clear of frost and ice.
- Add anti-freeze to the radiator and screen wash to the washer bottle.
- Make sure lights and indicators are working.
- Check that all tyres have a good tread depth (legal minimum is 1.6mm across the centre three-quarters of the breadth of the tyre and around the entire circumference).
- Ensure there is enough fuel for your journey.
- Have an emergency pack i.e. ice scraper, de-icer, torch, blanket, boots and spade etc. You may need it if you get into problems.

Your Journey

- Before setting off, assess whether it is safe to carry out your journey. Check the local and national weather forecasts and the traffic news. Listen to travel information on radio or check the Intranet.
- Set off earlier to allow for the need to drive slower, possible hold ups due to blocked roads and possible single lane traffic moving slowly.
- Keep a longer gap than normal between you and the vehicle in front, at least 2 seconds. Where there is ice and snow on the road, allow at least a 10 second gap.
- Brake accelerate and steer more gently to avoid losing control of your vehicle.
- Use dipped headlights.

Yourself

- Remember, driving in adverse weather conditions is much more tiring than normal. Always allow more time for your journey.
- Comply with any lone working procedures that may be in place for when you are on council business but are not at your place of work or designated base.
- If you do get into difficulty; stay with your vehicle if possible until help arrives and if you have to leave your vehicle, make yourself visible to other road users.
- Plan your journey to include at least 15 minute break every two hours of driving or sooner if feeling tired.

Machine/Equipment Safety

Many serious accidents involve machinery. There are a wide range of hazards associated with machinery/equipment. ALL users of machinery MUST recognise these hazards in order that they can take the appropriate precautions.

The main hazards are as follows:

- Hair or clothing can become entangled in rotating parts.
- Shearing can occur between two moving parts.
- Crushing can occur between two parts.
- People can be struck by moving parts.
- Cuts can result from contact with sharp edges.
- Material can be ejected from machinery.
- Parts of the body can be drawn in or trapped between moving parts.
- Sharp pointed parts can puncture skin.
- Friction or abrasion is possible from contact with rough surfaces.

There are also risks of people falling into/ against machinery as a result of poor housekeeping in the area around the machine. It is vital that all floors around machines are kept clean and tidy and free from spillage.

The following checklists provide guidance on the Do's and Don'ts that should be applied when working on or around any machinery.

Do's ….

- Only use machinery/equipment that you have received information, instruction and training on and have been authorised by the council to use.
- Carry out pre-use checks of machinery/ equipment before using it. Look for obvious signs of visible damage i.e. signs of wear and tear, frayed cables etc.
- Always know how to stop the machine/ equipment before you start it.
- Always ensure ALL guards are in position and ALL protective devices are working.
- Always ensure the area around the machine/equipment is clean, tidy and free from obstruction.
- Always inform your supervisor/manager immediately if you think a machine is not working properly or any safeguards are faulty.
- Always ensure you are wearing the appropriate protective clothing and equipment.
- Inform your supervisor/manager if you are taking any prescribed drugs that might affect your ability to use machinery/ equipment safely.

Dont's ….

- Never use a machine unless you are authorised and trained to do so.
- Never try to clean a machine in motion – switch off and unplug it or lock it off.
- Never use a machine or appliance that has a danger sign or tag attached to it. Danger signs should only be removed by an authorised person who is satisfied that the machine is safe.
- Never wear dangling chains, loose clothing, gloves, rings or have long hair hanging loosely.
- Never distract people who are using machines.
- Never use machinery/equipment that you and/or your colleagues have identified as being damaged.
- Never work on any machinery unless you are authorised to do so! Items such as electric drills which you may use in your own home must not be used unless you are authorised.

Manual Handling

Your back is one of the most injury prone parts of your body; about half of all back injuries result from inappropriate lifting.

There are six steps to correct lifting:

- Feet shoulder width apart, one foot ahead of the other in the direction of the intended movement.

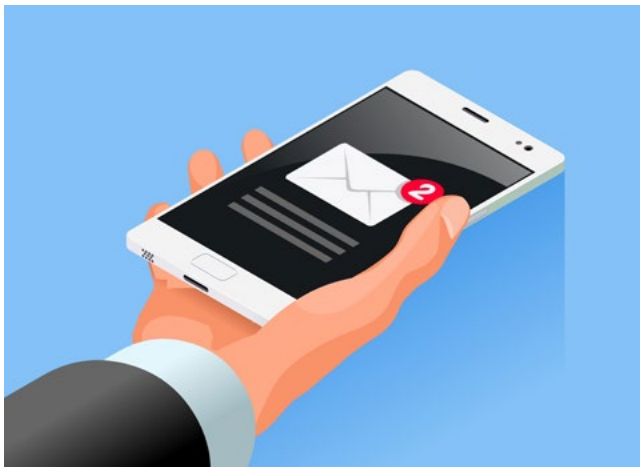
- Knees bent (not squat) – gain most effective power from thigh muscles. Mid position the best.
- Back straight – not necessarily vertical, leaning forward slightly. Centre of gravity over the load.
- Arms close to the body – nearer the centre of gravity.
- Hands palm grasp – roots of the fingers and palm of the hand.
- Head looking forward, to prevent rounded shoulders and curved spine.

The following are general rules, which should be applied for all situations:

- Do not lift any object unless you have to – Use a mechanical aid.
- Stand close to the object – Have a firm footing with feet spread on either side of the load.
- Keep your back straight. Bend your knees.
- Grasp the object firmly – Be sure your grip won't slip.
- Lift with your legs – Slowly straighten your legs. After legs are straight, bring back to vertical position.
- Keep the object close to your body throughout the operations.
- Avoid twisting your body. If you must change direction, move your feet instead.
- Lift smoothly. Avoid jerky motions.

Remember always to:

- Examine the object – Check the size, shape and weight. Decide where and how you are going to hold it. Check for grease, oil and sharp edges. Extra care should be taken with awkward shapes as these often present more risk than smaller heavy objects.
- Clear the route – Ensure the path you will take is free from obstructions and tripping hazards.
- Get help – If you have any doubts about lifting an object, ask for assistance.
- Store heavier items at waist height – this reduces the need for excessive bending or stretching.
- Ensure where mechanical lifting aids such as hoists and attachments etc. are used, there is an up to date service sticker present on the equipment. If not in date, do not use the lifting equipment and report this immediately to your line manager.
- Consider the Load, Individual, Task or Environment (LITE).



Mobile Telephones

The use of mobile telephones at work offers a convenient and efficient means of communication. In some circumstances they can also have safety benefits in terms of security and use in emergencies.

Using a hand held phone or other communication device while driving severely limits the driver's ability to physically control the vehicle in a safe manner. Research shows that using a mobile phone while driving means you are four times more likely to be involved in a road accident. The law requires a driver to have proper control of his or her vehicle at all times. Consequently, driving in a careless or dangerous manner through use of a hand held phone could result in legal action. Even with hands free telephones in vehicles it is safer not to use them while driving as conversations can distract attention from the road.

The use of 'council issue' and personal mobile telephones whilst driving during council time or on council business is not permitted. You must switch off mobile telephones whilst driving and must find a safe place to park and turn off the vehicle ignition before making or receiving calls or checking for messages or missed calls.

The only exception to the above is for authorised and properly fitted hands free kits (i.e. fitted by a competent person with fixed speakers and microphones). These can be used whilst driving in council time but only after discretion is exercised.

Noise at Work

Noise at work can cause hearing damage that is permanent and disabling. This can be hearing loss that is gradual because of exposure to noise over time, but also damage caused by sudden, extremely loud noises. The damage is disabling as it can stop people being able to understand speech, keep up with conversations or use the telephone.

Hearing loss is not the only problem. People may develop tinnitus (ringing, whistling, buzzing or humming in the ears), a distressing condition which can lead to disturbed sleep.

Where there is a risk to health and safety from noise the Council will:

- Undertake risk assessments to establish the sources and level of exposure;
- Provide employees with personal hearing protection;
- Make sure the legal limits on noise exposure are not exceeded;
- Maintain and ensure the use of equipment you provide to control noise risks;
- Provide you with information, instruction and training; and
- Carry out health surveillance (monitor employees' hearing ability).

Do you have a noise problem at work?

This will depend on how loud the noise is and how long people are exposed to it. As a simple guide you may have a problem if:

- You have to shout to be clearly heard by someone 2m away
- Your ears are still ringing after leaving the workplace
- People use equipment which causes loud explosive noises such as cartridge-operated tools or guns.

Vibration at work

Hand-arm vibration Syndrome (HAVS) can be caused by operating hand-held power tools, such as road breakers, and hand-guided equipment, such as powered lawnmowers, or by holding materials being processed by hand-fed machines, such as pedestal grinders. Occasional exposure is unlikely to cause ill health.

HAVS is a painful and disabling condition that affects the nerves, blood vessels, muscles and joints of the hands and arms. It causes tingling and numbness in the fingers, reduces grip strength and the sense of touch, and affects the blood circulation.

The Council will:

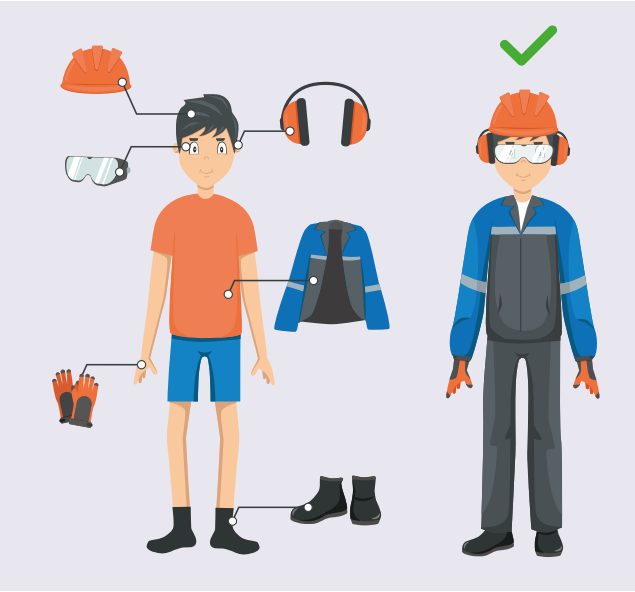
- assess the vibration risks and identify if there is a problem;
- put in place appropriate control measures to counter the risks;
- provide health surveillance where risk remains;
- provide information and training to employees on health risks and the actions being taken to control those risks.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

There are wide range of work activities take place that require employees to wear, use and store Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). If hazards cannot be controlled in other ways, it is the responsibility of your supervisor/manager to carry out an assessment of need with the aim of providing suitable PPE to protect you against one or more risks to your health.

Examples of PPE include:

- Safety glasses/goggles;
- Gloves;
- Safety helmets;
- Ear defenders/plugs;
- High-visibility clothing;
- Safety harnesses;
- Respiratory protection (disposable face masks and half mask respirators etc.)
- Disposable aprons.



Waterproof, weatherproof or insulated clothing is regarded as PPE, only if it is necessary to protect employees against adverse climatic conditions that could otherwise adversely affect their health or safety. Ordinary working clothes and uniforms that don't specifically protect against risks to health and safety are not classed as PPE.

As an employee, you should ensure that:

- You understand the correct use, care and storage of your PPE.
- You follow instructions and report any defects or problems to your supervisor/ manager.
- You don't misuse or interfere with anything provided for health and safety purposes.
- You know how and when to replace PPE.

Lone Working

Any member of staff who is working alone, either in normal working hours or out of hours should comply with the local lone working procedure. The Council has access to a lone worker protection system called Tunstall. Where lone working risks are identified, consideration must be given for employees to be registered to use the Tunstall system. For more information please contact the Councils Health and Safety Team.

In higher risk situations this will include reporting to base at the end of the working day.

Security

- Secure all valuables in lockers, desks or cupboards.
- Always lock your vehicle. Keep valuables out of sight.
- The council accepts no responsibility for items that are lost or stolen.

Personal Safety

On foot

- If you have a personal alarm, carry it with you at all times.
- Think ahead. Stay alert. Be aware of what is going on around you.
- Walk with confidence and purpose.
- Avoid short-cuts through dimly lit alleys or across waste ground. Keep to busy well-lit roads.
- Walk facing the traffic so that a car cannot pull up behind you unnoticed.

- Walk in the middle of the pavement so you have a good view of doorways and alleys.
- Keep your hands out of your pockets so that you are always free to defend yourself.
- If you regularly work late, try to vary your route home.
- Keep your wallet in a secure place and if you are carrying a handbag keep it close to your body.
- If someone does grab your bag, let it go rather than risk injury in fighting.
- If a motorist in a car threatens you run away in the opposite direction to the way the car is facing.
- If you think you are being followed, cross the road and keep walking. If you are still being followed, make for the nearest busy area, an open shop or a well-lit house and, if necessary, ask for help.

On public transport

- Avoid using isolated bus stops, particularly after dark.
- On a train sit in a compartment where there are several other people – ideally in a compartment which will be near an exit.
- Sit in a position which allows a good view of your surroundings.

In a vehicle

- Plan your route and ensure you have enough fuel to get there and back.
- Keep your vehicle in good working order.
- When driving in areas where you feel concerned for your personal safety, for any reason, keep the windows closed and doors locked.
- Keep your handbag/briefcase out of site.
- If your vehicle breaks down and you are waiting for assistance, sit in the passenger seat as this suggests to others you are waiting for someone to return.
- At night, park in a well-lit place preferably in a busy area. Try not to park in poorly lit streets. Always park as close to your destination as possible.
- In a multi-storey car park, find a space close to the exit, near to the ground level. When returning, have your keys ready to that you can get in quickly.
- Lock up, putting valuables in the boot. When you return, remember to check the back seat before getting in.
- If working late in the office, move your vehicle to a well-lit area.

Slips, Trips and Falls

- Thousands of people are injured in workplace falls each year.
- Most falls are slips or trips at floor level – not falls from high places.
- You can make a difference, report defects and faults to your supervisor/manager.

Avoid Slips – Be aware of hazardous walking conditions

- Hidden steps – When turning corners or stepping outside, look out for steps that may not be obvious.
- Loose carpets – Watch for carpets or tiles that are not secured, use caution when walking over loose tiles, pavements or floorboards. Report these problems to your supervisor/manager.
- Smooth surfaces – Watch for waxed or highly polished floors.
- Wet surfaces – Take care on wet surfaces, whether it is from patches of water, ice, snow, oil or grease on the floor. In the autumn/winter, watch out for wet leaves on footpaths and steps.

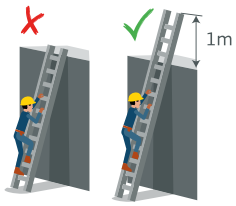
Avoid Trips – make good housekeeping a habit

- Furniture – Arrange furniture in a safe manner to avoid creating obstacles and sources of potential falls. Always close drawers and cupboards after use.

- Electrical Leads – If electrical cables are in use, route them along walls or
- overhead where they cannot be walked on or tripped over.
- Personal belongings – Store personal belongings in desks or lockers, so they do not create a trip hazard.
- Materials – Do not store items in corridors or stairways. Put items away in their correct location. Do not leave even the smallest of items on the floor as this can lead to a big fall.

Avoid Falls – follow some basic guidelines

- Check stairways – Ensure that stairs are well lit and handrails are secure.
- Check lighting – Make sure that lighting fittings are clean and not obscured. This is especially important on stairs.
- Equipment – Avoid working at height if it is reasonable to do so. If you have to work at height, only use appropriate access equipment. Do not use makeshift equipment.



- Handling – Obtain help when carrying or moving heavy or awkward loads.
- Dress sensibly – Avoid clothing that may become entangled in moving machinery or equipment. Wear flat soled shoes.
- Avoid taking short cuts – follow recognised pathways.

Smoking

Employees are not permitted to smoke in any part of the council premises or vehicles. For further information, consult the Councils Workplace Smoking Policy.

Working at Height

Falls from height are the most common cause of fatal injury and the second most common cause of major injury to employees.

Ladders, stepladders, step stools, mobile step stools (kick stools), working platforms, mobile access equipment and scaffolds are all pieces of work equipment used to assist employees working at height, where it cannot be avoided.

You should only use access equipment that is suitable for the type of work being undertaken and for which you have received specific training in the safe use of. Always follow the manufacturers' instructions, local risk assessments and method statements to ensure access equipment is used/stored both correctly and safely.

Do not use access equipment if you are not fit enough or suffer from giddiness or are not confident with heights. Further comprehensive guidance on safe work at height is available via the Councils Working at Height Code of practice and procedures.

Those responsible for managing working at height activities will use the working at height risk assessment templates or equivalent for ladders, step ladders, kick/ step stools, and mobile tower scaffolds available on the Intranet (see useful contacts and sources of information).

Food Safety and Hygiene

All council employees who have particular responsibility for preparing and serving food must follow food safety and hygiene principles in accordance with training they have received.

Useful Contacts and Sources of Information

The Health and Safety Team webpage provides anyone with access to the Intranet with health and safety information. The homepage comprises of regularly updated news page, frequently asked questions, health and safety posters and specific risk assessments or checklists.

The Health and Safety Team Guide is available which introduced the team structure and provides information on how we can provide a high performing Health and Safety service for the council.

Health and Safety Team

Tel: 03000 263 430

Email: hsteam@durham.gov.uk

Occupational Health Service

The Council has an Occupational Health Service that can provide advice and guidance where work may be affecting your health or your health is affecting your work. Where you have concerns of this nature speak to your line manager who can refer you to the service.

The service also provides a full range of occupational health services including:

- Advice on fitness to work, disability and workplace adjustments.
- Individual consultations with a qualified occupational health doctor or nurse where your manager has referred you for advice in relation to the council's sickness absence policies.
- Health surveillance, for example hearing tests where you may be exposed to industrial noise or hand arm vibration syndrome assessment where you work may include the use of handheld vibration tools.
- Where your manager/supervisor has identified that your job role may possibly expose you viruses such as hepatitis A or B the OHS will explain the risks to you and offer you appropriate occupational immunisation.
- Access to advice and treatment on musculoskeletal conditions such as back, knee, shoulder pain, which may include treatment sessions with a qualified physiotherapist.
- Access to an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) which is available 24 hours a day 365 days a year on a free telephone number. This offers advice on a range of issues such as debt, relationship problems, bereavement, stress and mental health concerns. Planned telephone counselling sessions can also be arranged through the service. Short term focused 'face to face' counselling is also available where appropriate, following telephone assessment.

Telephone: 03000 268 999

Email: occhealthadmin@durham.gov.uk

Trade Unions

Within the council, recognised trade unions play an important role in health and safety. Trade unions and elected trade union safety representatives can provide members with valuable advice, guidance and assistance with regard to health and safety. Trade union websites provide a useful source of health and safety information. Examples include:

www.tuc.org.uk

www.unison.org.uk

www.neu.org.uk/

www.gmb.org.uk

www.unitetheunion.org

Corporate Health & Safety
Resources
Durham County Council
DH1 5UL

www.durham.gov.uk Tel: 03000 263 381

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