

# Safety and health tips for catering staff

March 2004

This information sheet is intended to help employees, supervisors and managers in health care facilities and safety and health representatives find ergonomic solutions to real and potential problems in their workplaces.

## What the law says

**Employers** must do all that is reasonably practicable to ensure that employees are not exposed to hazards at the workplace. They must provide adequate information, instruction, training and supervision to allow employees to work in a safe manner.

**Employees** must also meet safety and health standards in their workplace. They must follow all reasonable instructions from their employer in relation to occupational safety and health matters.

## Reducing hand and arm work

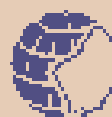
Occupational overuse injuries to muscles, tendons, bones and joints, result from movements that are repetitive and/or forceful. Maintaining a constrained or awkward posture can also cause such injuries.

To avoid overuse:

- consider varying food preparation and serving activities when planning menus. For example, do not plan a meal where every food item must be stirred by hand for long periods; vary serving activities to include a scoop, tongs and a flipper;
- use automated processes to reduce repetitive work when possible. For example, use food processors, potato peeling machines or electric mixers;
- use task rotation systems to allow each employee to change her/his working posture and use different parts of their body throughout the day;
- avoid doing the same task over and over (eg stirring, chopping and serving);

### WorkSafe

WestCentre, 5th Floor, 1260 Hay Street  
West Perth, Western Australia 6005  
Infoline: 1300 307 877 Tel: 9327 8777 Fax: 9321 8973  
Email: [safety@docep.wa.gov.au](mailto:safety@docep.wa.gov.au) Internet: [www.docep.wa.gov.au](http://www.docep.wa.gov.au)



Department of Consumer  
and Employment Protection  
Government of Western Australia



- take breaks from monotonous/repetitive tasks to prevent (not to recover from) fatigue;
- reduce the amount of force needed in hand and arm work. Use the appropriate tool. Keep knives sharp – a sharp knife is safer because less force is required;
- if gloves are needed, make sure they fit well, are appropriate for the job, do not bunch up and offer some surface traction to improve grip, if needed;
- use tools and other hand implements which are designed to keep your wrists straight (not bent) and allow operation by the whole hand, not just one finger or thumb (eg an ice cream scoop with a power grip release; a grill flipper with a bent and raised handle to keep the wrist neutral; or a knife handle curved to allow neutral wrist positioning);
- when dealing with supplies, lighten the load being handled by re-packaging into smaller weights, or into different sizes or shapes to make handling easier; and
- replace oven doors with doors that open sideways rather than downwards.

## Slips and trips

Prevent injuries by:

- ensuring that spills are cleaned up immediately with suitable cleaners. Grease requires proper cleaning. In general, whoever spills or drops something, should wipe it up or pick it up immediately. Good housekeeping is the cornerstone of prevention;
- using floor surfaces/floor surface treatments that give an adequate level of slip resistance; and
- wearing appropriate enclosed shoes with good traction (eg with rubber soles).

## Avoiding heat stress

Look at ways to avoid heat stress by:

- scheduling work and rest periods to eliminate heat stress in places where air conditioning is inadequate or not feasible;
- recognizing the signs and symptoms of heat stress and ensuring that anyone who is affected receives prompt treatment; and
- making drinking water accessible. Drink plenty of water throughout the day.

### Regional offices

Bunbury (08) 9722 2888  
Karratha (08) 9185 0900

TTY: (08) 9327 8838

## Plant and equipment

Check equipment and procedures:

- ensure all plant and equipment is well maintained and properly guarded. Redesign machines so they can't be operated without guards in place;
- develop a maintenance program for keeping all machinery in good working order (eg light bulbs; the ventilation/extraction system);
- safe work procedures should be developed and followed;
- trolleys must be suited to the use to which they will be put and maintained, and management is responsible, after consulting their employees, for that decision; and
- involve your employees in choosing equipment that suits the need. Training your staff to use trolleys safely and efficiently is essential.

## Fire safety

Consider fire safety procedures:

- implement fire safety procedures (eg how to use fire extinguishers and fire blankets correctly); and
- have emergency procedures in place so that everyone knows what to do if there is a fire in the kitchen or building. Include procedures to provide prompt treatment for burns and smoke inhalation.



## Further information

You can get further information from:

- your manager/supervisor, safety person or human resources personnel;
- your safety and health representative (if any) for your workplace;
- your union;
- the WorkSafe Division of the Department of Consumer and Employment Protection; and
- the Commission for Occupational Safety and Health (formerly WorkSafe Western Australia Commission) code of practice on Manual Handling at [www.safetyline.wa.gov.au](http://www.safetyline.wa.gov.au)

## Acknowledgement

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This publication is available on request in other formats to assist people with special needs.

