



Think about health and safety

Supporting Westminster MPs
in their constituencies



Produced by the Institution of Occupational
Safety and Health in association with the
House of Commons Administration



What is IOSH?

The Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) is Europe's largest professional health and safety organisation. With some 28,000 members, it plays a vital role in providing advice to both public and private sector employers on the effective management of health and safety. IOSH has charitable status, is incorporated by Royal Charter, and has over 8,000 Chartered Safety and Health Practitioners.

Chartered Members have an important role to play in helping employers to develop strategies to reduce injury, occupational ill health and lost time events (and hence increase profit margins and competitiveness) and, in the public sector, to free up resources or provide better services.

If you'd like to learn more about IOSH, or are interested in supporting one of our initiatives, please call our Communications team on 0116 257 3189. Turn to page 20 for information on this year's key campaign.

Practical guidance for busy people

As an MP, your time is precious and the work you do is important to the electorate at large and your local community. Not only do you have the same pressures as someone running a business, you also have a high profile, a packed diary and are in the media spotlight. But you still have the same responsibilities for health and safety as your counterparts in industry.

For the most part, good health and safety isn't about party politics or paperwork – it's about practical advice aimed at protecting people. The Institution of Occupational Safety and Health has worked with Parliament's Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare Service to produce this simple, pragmatic guide. I'm sure that you'll find the uncomplicated advice useful in helping you to consider the risks faced by you and your team.

It's no coincidence that organisations with an excellent safety record are also the most efficient – the operational discipline which delivers great safety also delivers efficiency.

Strong leadership and competent advice are what's needed to achieve good health and safety. If you provide the first, we'll help with the second.

Neil Budworth
President, Institution of Occupational Safety and Health
December 2005

In my role as chairman of the All Party Occupational Safety and Health Group, I'm pleased to introduce this useful little booklet, prepared by the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health for Members of Parliament.

The booklet sets out practical guidance on health and safety matters specifically for MPs, both at Westminster and in their constituency. It gives important advice on office health and safety as well as suggestions for improving your personal safety. It explains the aspects of law that MPs need to know to protect themselves and their employees.

The information is presented in an easy-to-use format with a checklist of things to consider when planning meetings and surgeries. It offers guidance on areas ranging from furniture through to using computers and other electric equipment. There are even tips on travel arrangements.

I hope that you find this guidance of value and that it contributes in a small way to better health and safety risk management for you and your staff.

Michael Clapham MP
All Party Parliamentary Group on Occupational Safety and Health
December 2005

IOSH is pleased to acknowledge the co-operation and assistance of the House of Commons in preparing this guidance, in particular the Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare Service, Department of Finance and Administration and Serjeant at Arms Department.



Think about health and safety

Let's face it, health and safety isn't going to be your top priority. As an MP, you have a huge range of concerns and responsibilities to juggle. But taking a little time to think about how you and your support team work will be well worth doing. After all, we're talking about your most valuable 'resource' – people.

In this booklet, we've focused mainly on your life outside Westminster. At the Parliamentary Estate, you have plenty of access to professional support. Your office is set up for you by the Serjeant at Arms Department, and you can call on the Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare Service for advice and back-up, from health checks through medical treatment to a range of dedicated safety-related services. But away from the House you're more or less on your own.

Whatever your constituency set-up – and there really is no such thing as a typical MP's office – you need to focus on two main issues:

- office health and safety
- personal safety.

Office safety isn't rocket science – it's a simple matter of applying some common sense principles to what you do. It doesn't have to eat into your time and resources. This guidance booklet takes you through the basics of what you need to consider.

Personal safety needs a little bit more thought. It's when you're out and about – or in a surgery – that you and members of your team are most vulnerable. We all know the stories about the occasional egg or manure-throwing, but these embarrassing but relatively harmless incidents – perhaps worth a few column inches – are easily eclipsed by attacks of a more serious nature, thankfully rare. Who can forget the fatal stabbing of an MP's aide in 2000? This attack with a samurai sword came from a disgruntled constituent complaining to his MP – a harsh reminder of what can happen. Having the right processes and environment may make all the difference.

You can make a difference

Health and safety has an unfair reputation as being about red tape and daft decisions. By working with the experts – the Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare Service at Westminster, IOSH and the Health and Safety Executive – you, as an opinion former working at the heart of law-making, can change the way that health and safety is perceived. By developing a sensible, pragmatic approach to the risks that you and your team face, you'll be setting an example of good practice, and helping to explode the myths surrounding health and safety.

Focusing on the basics

Your major health and safety issues are addressed briefly on each page of this booklet, together with points and questions that should be considered when managing them. Remember that there isn't always an easy answer, but looking at the risks involved will at least help you to make informed decisions when you set up or review your constituency workbase.

Each page includes a short list of information sources as well as handy reminders about what's available at Parliament.

The basics in practice

To show you how a couple of the ideas in *Think about health and safety* can be put easily into practice, IOSH has taken a look at the constituency set-up of Edward Garnier, the MP local to our head office in Leicester. Read our findings and recommendations on page 17.

You can access *Think about* – including live weblinks – at www.iosh.co.uk/mpsafety.

The information contained in this booklet is not intended to be exhaustive and should be used as a guide only. If you have any concerns or queries, feel free to consult Parliament's health and safety adviser.

What is 'occupational safety and health'?

Put simply, occupational safety and health is about protecting people from suffering injury or ill health caused by work.

It's also about making sure that people affected by what you do, or who visit your premises, are considered and protected.

Remember that decent workplace conditions will help your team to work more efficiently and productively, ultimately helping you to do your job more effectively.

As with many other areas – from handling personnel issues to managing money – you need to set up your policies and processes for health and safety, follow them, and check from time to time to make sure that they're working properly. It's important not to lose sight of the main focus – the welfare and productivity of you and your team.

Think about...

Who may be affected by my work as an MP?

- employees
- volunteers
- members of the public
- anyone else – including your family

Where is my 'workplace'?

- your offices at Westminster
- your constituency office – permanent or temporary
- your home office
- vehicles used for work
- anywhere else visited or used during your work

Who is responsible for health and safety?

- as the employer, you're responsible, but it's not all down to you to do – it's about delegating responsibly, whether to your office manager, political agent, constituency adviser or other team members

More info...

An introduction to health and safety (HSE INDG259REV1)

Managing health and safety: five steps to success (HSE INDG275)



• Did you know?

Last year, 220 people died and 30,666 suffered major injury through work activity. Over 2.2 million people experienced ill health attributable to work, and more than 39 million days off work were caused by injuries and illness.

What paperwork do I need?

It really depends on the scale of your team and work. If you have employees you should have employers' liability insurance and display the certificate. You should keep copies of the certificate for 40 years.

You should give your employees information about health and safety, either individually (look at the free HSE publication 'Your health and safety – a guide for workers') or by displaying the 'Health and safety law – what you should know' poster, available from HSE Books on 01787 881165.

You also need to have a way of recording accidents at work – an 'accident book'. A standard record book is available from HSE Books.

If you employ five or more people, you should have a written 'health and safety policy' and written 'risk assessments' that focus on significant risks. A 'health and safety policy' outlines your commitment and approach to health and safety, who does what, and the arrangements you've made to identify and manage the risks that you and your team face. 'Risk assessment' is about deciding who might be harmed and then judging how likely it is that something will go wrong, and how serious the consequences would be.

Once you've worked out what the risks are and how significant they are, you can concentrate on cutting them out – or at least controlling them.

If you employ fewer than five, you don't need to record what you do formally via a written policy and risk assessments, although it's still a good idea. It makes sense to create a basic health and safety file to keep everything together, such as your policy, guidance leaflets, insurance certificate and risk assessments.

Think about...

Am I an employer?

- if you have a contract of employment with anyone to carry out work for you then you're an employer
- even if you have no formal contract, then depending on the degree of control you have over work done, you may still be considered an employer
- if volunteers work on your behalf, they may be considered 'employees' under health and safety law too

What insurance should I consider?

- employers' liability insurance
- occupiers' liability insurance
- motor vehicle insurance

Which documents must I have?

- 'Health and safety law – what you should know' (poster) (ISBN 0 7176 2493 5)
- employers' liability insurance certificate
- accident book (ISBN 0 7176 2603 2)
- written safety policy (if five or more employees)
- written risk assessments (if five or more employees)

More info...

Employers' Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act 1969: a guide for employers (HSE HSE40)

Officewise (HSE INDG173)

Stating your business, www.niceic.org.uk/downloads/HSEGuidance.pdf

Five steps to risk assessment (HSE INDG163REV1)

Your health and safety – a guide for workers, www.hse.gov.uk



At Parliament

Parliament's Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare team can provide useful templates, office risk assessments, checklists and guidance. The Service also offers a free one-day course on health and safety for MPs' office managers. Have a look on the Parliamentary intranet or call the health and safety adviser for details. Remember that you'll be able to transfer the advice available at Parliament to your constituency set-up.

Contact the House of Commons Department of Finance and Administration for more information on employers' liability insurance.

What about health and safety law?

The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 is the main framework legislation in the UK. The Act enables the Secretary of State to make regulations covering health and safety. You must comply with health and safety law – if you don't, you are committing a criminal offence and may be prosecuted.

In addition to prosecution, if people are harmed as a result of your activities, you could face a civil claim for compensation.

Remember that the poor publicity alone could be extremely damaging.

Remind your employees that they have legal duties to co-operate with you to ensure health and safety requirements are met.

Think about...

What sources of information are available to help me meet the demands of the law?

Parliament's Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare Service – call the health and safety adviser on 020 7219 1505

The HSE has plenty of information and guidance:

- infoline: 08701 545500
- website: www.hse.gov.uk (for A–Z of free downloadable leaflets go to 'publications')
- books: 01787 881165

You can also get authoritative information on health and safety from IOSH:

- helpline: 0116 257 3199
- website: www.iosh.co.uk
- books: 01787 249293

More info...

Health and safety regulation: a short guide (HSE HSC13rev1)



At Parliament

You and your employees have a duty of care to co-operate with House authorities in implementing health and safety policies and procedures.

Personal safety and working alone

As an MP, the chances of you or someone in your team being threatened or attacked – verbally or physically – are going to be higher than the average professional. You are in a public position, perhaps with a high profile. People may come to you with deep-seated issues, problems and concerns – and they may be at the end of their tether.

You and your team members may face threats to your personal safety when out and about, at your constituency office or at a surgery or bureau. Don't assume that physical violence is all you need to worry about – it would be wrong to overlook the effects of violent threats, gestures or language. Serious or persistent verbal abuse or threats can cause long term health damage.

Of course, this is a delicate balancing act – on the one hand, you need to make sure that you and the people who work with and for you are safe, and on the other, you don't want to appear unapproachable or inaccessible to your constituents.

For specialist advice and training on security issues and avoiding violence contact the police commander of your local force.

When you or members of your team are working alone, then not only will you need to deal with some of the personal security vulnerabilities special to the job, but you may also encounter additional problems. For example, you need to think about what will happen if someone falls ill or suffers an accident when working on their own, whether in the office or elsewhere.

Think about...

What do I need to consider when planning meetings and surgeries?

- the setting and environment
- the organisation of the meeting space and furniture – eg is there ready access to a door without passing the visitor?
- whether unauthorised visitors are able to enter and move about the building
- the arrangements for people waiting to see you
- training to deal with difficult or violent situations
- basic physical security measures
- organising good team support to make sure that no-one is working alone or without back-up – particularly when meeting people

Which measures should I put in place to deal with emergencies?

- a simple procedure for handling suspicious packages
- a simple policy for handling threats, immediate or otherwise

What should I do to support members of my team when they can't avoid working alone?

- put in place measures to call for help or back-up, eg routinely carrying a mobile phone
- make sure that team members let others know where they are going, and make use of a straightforward 'logging in/off' system
- consider the special risks faced on any overseas trips

More info...

Violence at work: a guide for employers (HSE INDG69REV)

Working alone in safety: controlling the risks of solitary work (HSE INDG73REV)

IOSH's 'Risk management toolkit' has downloadable PDFs including information on violence and a checklist for dealing with violence:

www.iosh.co.uk/files/technical/irma/Violenceatwork.pdf

www.iosh.co.uk/files/technical/irma/Violencechecklist.pdf



At Parliament

If you are concerned about your personal safety, contact the plain clothes section of the Security Force.

Funding for specific security measures may be available from the Department of Finance and Administration – call the Policy Unit.

Have a look at the 'emergency actions' on the Parliamentary intranet or in the Members' Handbook.

Call the Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare Service practice nurse for guidance on overseas trips. St Thomas' Hospital will give you advice, vaccinations and medication.

Your office

You may have more than one 'workplace' outside Westminster – a separate office and perhaps ad hoc venues where you hold your surgeries or bureaux. Each building that you or your staff use in support of your role as an MP is a place of work.

You need to provide basic facilities for the welfare of your employees. You also need to make sure that you offer a safe working environment – emergency evacuations should be top of your list, but there are other important areas to think about too.

Think about...

Are they *my* premises?

- are you the owner/occupier/tenant?
- do others use the building?
- who is 'responsible' for maintenance issues?
- if you share premises with others, is there an evacuation plan for fires or other emergencies, and who is the contact for 'common' issues?

What do I need to provide for my team?

- toilet and washing facilities, including hot and cold running water
- access to drinking water
- a way of getting hot food and drinks
- somewhere to take breaks

What about the layout?

- make sure that getting in and out of the office can be done safely
- consider lighting, ventilation and temperatures – all can have an impact on how people feel when they're working, especially in a high pressure situation
- make sure that there's enough work space and storage

How accessible is your office?

- consider whether people with disabilities can get in and move around easily

What about pregnant employees?

- re-evaluate their activities – lifting and carrying will probably be out of the question
- look at the way the desk and other furniture is set up
- consider providing a place to rest or lie down
- keep checking with your employee throughout her pregnancy to make sure that all the right adjustments are made and any problems are taken on board

More info...

Workplace health, safety and welfare: a short guide for managers (HSE INDG244)

Welfare at work: guidance for employers on welfare provisions (HSE INDG293)

The HSE Northern Ireland booklet 'The guide to workplace health and safety' is at www.hseni.gov.uk



At Parliament

Health and safety training courses for your staff are offered through WWP, a company contracted by the House. Go to www.wwp.co.uk for a training schedule. Help with travel costs is available from the Department of Finance and Administration.

If you or your team see faulty, damaged or dangerous equipment, furniture or situations, call the Helpdesk.

Fire

There is always a risk of fire – and this will be increased in high-rise office blocks.

You must formally assess the risk of fire. It's important to take steps to prevent the start of fire, make sure there are clear escape routes, and that there's equipment to fight a fire *if appropriate*.

Contact your local fire service if you need advice or guidance.

Think about...

What measures need to be in place for detecting a fire and raising the alarm?

- fit smoke detectors and make sure they're regularly maintained
- if your office is relatively small and contained, you may not need elaborate alarm equipment
- if you do need a full alarm system, make sure that it's regularly tested and that everyone can hear it, including those with hearing problems

What measures need to be in place to ensure everyone can escape quickly?

- clear ways of escape, including provision for getting people with disabilities out safely (known as a 'personal evacuation plan')
- a fire evacuation procedure that everyone knows about and understands
- well marked fire exits that are kept clear

How do I prevent fire or the spread of fire?

- keep waste to a minimum
- keep potential fuel – eg paper – away from heat sources
- check that any flammable substances are stored securely
- keep fire doors closed
- follow 'good housekeeping' principles – be organised and tidy

What about fire extinguishers?

- make sure that you have enough of the right types of extinguisher throughout your premises (usually water-based and CO₂)
- get extinguishers inspected annually – and replace them if they've been used

Do I need to train my team?

- you need to make sure that everyone who works on your premises is aware of the fire evacuation procedure, escape routes and where local call points are
- you need to make sure that everyone knows when and how to use fire extinguishers

More info...

IOSH's 'Safe start-up' resource links to a fire risk assessment checklist at www.fpa-fireriskassessment.com/introduction.htm
The HSE/Home Office guidance 'Fire safety: an employer's guide' is at www.archive.official-documents.co.uk/document/fire/contents.htm



At Parliament

If you have any queries, contact the fire safety manager for advice and guidance.

You and your team at Westminster should attend one of the brief annual fire safety refresher courses.



Did you know?

In a single year, fire brigades attended over 36,000 workplace fires. These fires killed 30 people and injured over 2,600.

Electricity

Throughout your premises you'll have numerous electrical appliances. Remember that computers, photocopiers, printers, kettles, fires, fans, radios and televisions all have the potential to kill or injure.

These everyday pieces of equipment are essential for your team to work effectively, but it's vital that your staff know how to use them safely, and that the appliances are looked after to keep them in good working condition.

Think about...

What do I need to do to ensure electrical equipment is safe?

- make sure it's checked periodically by a competent person – not an enthusiastic amateur!
- check regularly for signs of burning/overheating/scorch marks
- check regularly for damaged plugs and frayed or damaged cables
- take damaged cables or equipment out of use straightaway
- make sure there are enough sockets for the equipment
- make sure that adaptors are safe and not overloaded – the broad 'gang' adaptors are better than the box-shaped ones
- consider fitting 'residual current devices' which cut off the electricity supply almost instantly if there's a problem
- if members of your team bring in their own electrical equipment, get it checked out
- encourage your team to switch off and unplug equipment that's not in use or if the office is unattended

More info...

Maintaining portable electrical equipment in offices and other low-risk environments (HSE INDG236)

Electrical safety and you (HSE INDG231)



At Parliament

If you or your team bring in personal electrical equipment, let your Office Keeper know. The Office Keeper will arrange for the kit to be safety-tested.



Did you know?

In a single year, 10 people were killed by contact with electricity while at work, and 148 suffered major injuries.

Lifting and carrying

Even basic office work will involve some lifting, lowering, pushing and pulling items by hand.

Remember that the health problems known as ‘musculoskeletal disorders’ – anything from back pain to damaged hand and arm muscles – can be serious, cumulative or even chronic and disabling. Following a few simple rules can make a huge difference.

Think about...

What can cause injuries?

- lifting or moving heavy boxes
- lifting or moving machines or equipment
- over-reaching, stretching or twisting
- lifting with a bent back
- repeating an action over and over again
- dropping heavy loads

What sort of injuries can happen?

- injury to the back, neck or spine
- injuries to arms, wrists, hands or shoulders
- injuries to legs or feet

What do I need to do?

- look at the risks involved in any physical work
- make sure that lifting and carrying is avoided where possible
- keep the size of loads down
- make sure equipment – eg a trolley – is used if it’s needed
- train your team in the right techniques for lifting and moving things
- make sure that any lifting is done by the right people – those with enough strength and capability

More info...

Understanding ergonomics at work (HSE INDG90REV2)

Getting to grips with manual handling: a short guide (HSE INDG143REV2)

Aching arms (or RSI) in small businesses (HSE INDG171REV1)



At Parliament

Serjeant at Arms staff are trained in lifting and carrying techniques and will be able to help with more physical work. Contact your Office Keeper if you need this type of support.



Did you know?

Manual handling injuries account for more than a third of all accidents and 14 per cent of major injuries. Around 1.1 million people suffer from musculoskeletal disorders. This resulted in the loss of 11.8 million working days in one year.

Working with computers

Computers – sometimes referred to as ‘display screen equipment’ – may seem harmless but they are likely to be the most common risk to health your staff will come across.

If working conditions aren’t right, computers can cause musculoskeletal disorders – back or neck pain or damaged hand, wrist and arm muscles. These can be serious, cumulative or chronic and disabling. The good news is that with proper planning and awareness they can be easily avoided.

In a nutshell, you need to consider:

- computers
- monitors
- keyboards and mouse devices
- desks
- chairs
- how the work is organised.

You may also need to focus on foot rests, wrist rests and copy holders.

Think about...

If I or my team use computers, what do I need to do?

- provide suitable work furniture and sufficient space
- assess the desk, chair and other equipment to make sure they’re appropriate and that the adjustments – from chair height to screen angle – have been used to best effect
- use a system of breaks or task rotation for people who use computers for significant chunks of time
- offer eye tests for people who use computers day in, day out and suffer from eye problems

If I or my team use laptops, what do I need to do?

- add full-sized keyboards, mouse devices and screens if they’re regularly used for long periods
- be aware of posture when using a laptop – it’s easy to fall into bad habits, particularly if it’s being used in a hotel or car!
- consider the combined weight of a laptop, files and papers when travelling around – you may need a wheeled carrying case

More info...

Working with VDUs (HSE INDG36REV2)



At Parliament

The Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare Service will give you guidance on good practice and risk assessment forms. Call the Health and Safety Adviser.

The furniture and equipment provided by Parliament will meet the appropriate standards – if you need to make changes or adjust the layout, ask your Office Keeper for advice.

Stress at work

Stress is an increasing cause of occupational ill health and can affect different people in different ways. For some people, a limited amount of pressure can be a good thing, but a great deal of harm can be caused if it becomes excessive or prolonged.

In your environment, stress may be a big issue, so it's worth taking time to think about it.

Think about...

What should I look out for?

- whether team members are overburdened
- whether they have enough responsibility to make decisions
- what particular tasks cause pressure
- whether timescales and deadlines for tasks or projects are realistic
- signs of stress – from mood swings to frequent bouts of illness

How should I communicate with my team?

- keep everyone up to speed on things that affect them
- make sure that responsibilities are clearly defined
- encourage discussion if a member of your team feels stressed

What should I do if workplace stress is an issue?

- talk to the affected member of the team – try to get to the bottom of the real causes and agree solutions together
- make reasonable changes to the workload, working hours and so on
- talk to others in your team – is the problem widespread? It could be that you need to make broader changes
- check to make sure that things have improved – if not, get professional advice

More info...

Work-related stress: a short guide (HSE INDG281REV1)

IOSH's 'Risk management toolkit' has a PDF on stress information:

www.iosh.co.uk/files/technical/irma/StressManagement.pdf

HSE's stress management standards can be accessed at

www.hse.gov.uk/stress/standards/index.htm



At Parliament

If you need advice, contact the Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare Service team. There are some useful tools and guidance on the Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare Service pages of the Department of Finance and Administration's intranet.



Did you know?

An annual 13 million days off work are said to be as a result of stress. Occupational stress is estimated to cost society £3.7 billion per year. Civil work-related stress cases alone have landed some high settlement bills.

On the road

Every year around one-third of all road traffic accidents involve someone at work.

In addition to road traffic legislation, health and safety law applies if people drive a vehicle as part of their working day.

Think about...

If I or my team drive in connection with work, what do I need to do?

- check your motor vehicle insurance to ensure that it covers use at work
- check your employees' insurance to ensure that it covers use at work
- check your employees have a valid current driving licence – you don't want disqualified drivers using vehicles while working for you!
- make sure that plenty of time is allowed for each journey and encourage people to take rest breaks during long trips – a 15-minute break every 2 hours is recommended. Try to avoid the worst driving conditions
- consider overnight stops if travelling a long way from home
- discourage people from using a mobile in hands-free mode when driving – it quadruples the risk of a serious crash
- consider alternatives – do you or your colleagues really need to drive? Could you take a train or arrange a conference call?
- if extensive driving is unavoidable, consider arranging defensive or advanced driving courses

Is the vehicle maintained in good working order?

- make sure the vehicle is suitable for long journeys
- make sure the vehicle is correctly maintained

More info...

Driving at work: managing work-related road safety (HSE INDG382)



• Did you know?

It's estimated that every week 20 people are killed and 250 are injured through work-related traffic accidents. At over 1,000 deaths per year, traffic fatalities are four times higher than all other workplace deaths put together.

Equipment

Any equipment that you provide for your employees – from a computer to a paper guillotine – must be safe.

In an office, the dangers aren't going to be anything like those faced on, say, a building, industrial or agricultural site, but that doesn't mean that accidents can't or won't happen.

Think about...

What work equipment do I have?

- photocopier
- printer
- scanner
- PC
- laminator
- TV/DVD/video
- filing cabinet
- guillotine
- heaters or fans

What should I do to reduce risks?

- make sure people are trained to use the equipment and that it is used only as designed
- maintain equipment in good condition and in accordance with manufacturers' instructions
- inspect and, if appropriate, get the equipment tested regularly

More info...

Simple guide to the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (HSE INDG291)

Slips, trips and falls

Slips and trips are the most common cause of major injuries at work. At Westminster, nearly half of all accidents involve slips, trips or falls. Both your team and visitors to your premises are at risk.

Look at the areas of your workplace where people are likely to walk and consider any potential slip or trip hazards.

Remember that falls from a height needn't be from the top of a building. A tumble from a ladder, or even a chair, can cause serious damage. Make sure the right equipment is used rather than improvising – use stepstools or proper stepladders for higher access. Better still, think about where you store things and try to keep items within easy reach.

Think about...

What can I do to prevent slips or trips?

- make sure the flooring isn't wet or slippery – dry or clean up spillages straightaway
- make sure that uneven or worn carpets or tiles are replaced
- try not to have electrical cables crossing walkways, but where it's unavoidable, secure them with proper covers
- focus on how well the work areas, hallways, corridors and so on are lit – it can make a huge difference
- make sure there's enough room to work and that everything's kept as tidy as possible
- encourage sensible footwear!

What could be termed a 'height'?

- any height from which a fall is likely to cause injury
- ladder work

How can I make things safer?

- store materials at a convenient height
- make sure that the right equipment is available and used
- check that window openings are limited if there is a risk of falling out
- follow 'good housekeeping' principles to keep storage needs to a minimum

More info...

Five steps to risk assessment (HSE INDG163REV1)

Preventing slips and trips at work (HSE INDG225REV1)

HSE slip and trip webpages are at

www.hse.gov.uk/slips/information.htm



At Parliament

Encourage your team to report hazards and faults to the Helpdesk or by filling out an 'Action for safety' card.



Did you know?

Slips and trips account for a third of all major workplace injuries. Ninety-five per cent of major slips leave the victim with broken bones.

Accidents and first aid

You'll need to sort out first aid arrangements to cover injury, illness or emergency. First look at what level of first aid cover would suit your set-up – 'First aid at work: your questions answered' will help with this. At the very least, you must have a fully stocked first aid kit and ask someone to act as an 'appointed person'. This person can take charge if someone is injured or falls sick, calling an ambulance if necessary. He or she should also maintain the first aid kit. Remember that the 'appointed person' isn't a first-aider – this calls for proper HSE-approved training. It's a good idea to train a member of your team to be a first-aider so that he or she will be able to deal with minor incidents or act as a first line of treatment in cases of more serious problems.

Remember that you'll need to cover situations where your first-aider isn't available, and that an emergency won't necessarily be confined to you or your team – it could be a member of the public. Make sure that you have the right insurance cover, especially if your first-aider may be helping a visitor or other member of the public.

Certain types of accident and occupational ill health must be reported – straightaway by phone and in writing within 10 working days to your local HSE office. Call 0845 300 9923 or log on to www.riddor.gov.uk.

Think about...

How do I report and record accidents?

- buy an accident book
- inform your team of the duty to report accidents

Which types of accident are reportable to the HSE? The extensive list includes:

- death or 'major injury'
- fractures other than to fingers, thumbs or toes
- amputation
- dislocation of shoulder, hip, knee or spine
- loss of sight
- electric shock if unconscious or admitted to hospital for more than 24 hours
- any other injury requiring admission to hospital for over 24 hours
- injury resulting in more than three days' absence

How do I prepare for if someone has a minor injury?

- make sure team members can call on a trained first-aider, or at the very least an 'appointed person' to take charge in an emergency
- provide a fully kitted out first aid box
- remember to make arrangements for when a member of your team is travelling

More info...

First aid at work: your questions answered (HSE INDG214)

Reduce risks – cut costs (HSE INDG355)

RIDDOR explained (HSE31)



At Parliament

Emergency arrangements are already set up at Westminster – but remember that they stop at the Estate gates. You'll need to manage your own arrangements in your constituency.

At Westminster, report all accidents causing an injury to the Serjeant at Arms office. Report all 'near misses' – where something *could* have gone wrong – on the 'Action for safety' cards.

Hazardous substances and noise

'Hazardous substances' – anything that can cause harm to people who come into contact with them – are used in many workplaces and include materials ranging from cleaning fluids to print toner. Remember that products that are used at home may be covered by legal requirements if used at work.

Some offices can be noisy because of the equipment used in them. Staff shouldn't be exposed to noise levels above 80dB(A) averaged out over the day, unless the risk of hearing damage is assessed and action is taken (from getting quieter machines to fitting acoustic covers). The 80dB(A) noise limit is the sound typically made by a normal vacuum cleaner – it's extremely unlikely that you'll find this level on a regular basis in your office.

Remember that as well as the possibly damaging effects on hearing, noisy environments can cause distraction, stress and headaches. This is more likely to be the issue for your team – noisy environments can seriously affect relationships, morale and productivity if they aren't tackled.

Think about...

If I have hazardous substances on my premises, what do I need to do?

- check if there are less or non-hazardous versions available that can be used as alternatives
- inform your team of the dangers involved in using certain substances, how to use them, how and where to store them, and how to get rid of them safely

Which machinery generates noise in an office?

- photocopiers
- mail sorting machinery
- printers

If I have noisy machinery, what should I do?

- if noise levels are excessive – eg if people consistently have to raise their voices to make themselves heard – then you should seek expert advice. Remember that improvements don't have to be complex or costly though – moving equipment to a different room, changing the layout, using screens, or replacing a problem machine with a smaller, more modern version may do the trick

More info...

COSHH: a brief guide to the regulations (HSE INDG136REV3)

Noise at work: guidance for employers on the Control of Noise at Work Regulations 2005 (HSE INDG362)



• Did you know?

More days are lost through ill health than through accidents, and many more fatalities if asbestos exposure is included. In a single year, over 1 million workers suffered work-related injuries. Twice as many suffered from ill health problems.

A constituency office in action: Edward Garnier QC, MP for Harborough

Edward Garnier's constituency is a hybrid of urban and rural, spanning parts of Oadby and Wigston on the outskirts of Leicester, Market Harborough and a host of villages in between. IOSH visited the converted terraced house in the centre of the historical market town of Harborough that is used as the main constituency office to see how two of the health and safety basics are dealt with. We focused on the risk of fire in the office building and the ever-present **personal safety** issues typical in an MP's team.

Fire

The overall arrangements for dealing with a fire emergency at the constituency office were fairly reasonable (given the low occupancy and layout of the building), and general housekeeping was good, minimising the risk of piles of combustible materials mounting up, and keeping paper away from heat sources. However, we suggested a smoke detector could be fitted on the upper floor and tested regularly. We also suggested installing an emergency ladder here – the early 20th century building had very steep stairs and no way to escape from the windows in the top of the building. Both measures would be relatively cheap and simple to organise.

We suggested that the team should have basic fire extinguisher training and that extinguishers should be tested regularly – and if they've been damaged or used, they should be replaced.

We also recommended that the team checked with its insurance broker to make sure that the right insurance package was in place to cover the particular demands of an MP's office and work.

Personal safety

Edward Garnier uses a number of different venues for advice bureaux in his constituency, ranging from village halls to meeting rooms at the local Asda superstore. Each venue has a separate office space and 'reception'. The constituency has a long-standing team of experienced volunteers, many familiar faces within the community.

Given the fact that approaching their MP is often very much a 'last chance saloon' for locals, sent through by, say, the Citizen's Advice Bureau, frustration is likely to be a feature of any meeting. The constituency team makes sure that there's always someone to act as 'receptionist' for bureaux visitors and follows a first come, first served policy. Each visitor is made to feel welcome and comfortable, and asked to complete a simple form with their details.

Front line staff offer 'tea and sympathy' and work hard to defuse tensions. The team is clear on what to do for back-up if things go wrong in these situations. On a broader level, the office makes use of intelligence coming from the Conservative Association's 'warning system' which highlights potential flashpoints.

Sensibly, the MP makes use of large, round tables wherever possible – they allow him to keep a 'safe space' between the constituent and himself, while not being too intimidating.

If someone is reluctant to wait for the next bureau date, then one of the three local political agents will stand in for the MP, with the aim of taking any heat out of the situation and mitigating tension build-up. Agents will also visit people unable to come to an MP 'open house'. Basic security measures include always letting colleagues know who, where and when they'll be visiting, and taking along a mobile phone.

While these arrangements seem basically sound, founded on a pragmatic approach, we advised that 'house calls' shouldn't be made solo – this is when individual members of the team are at their most vulnerable.

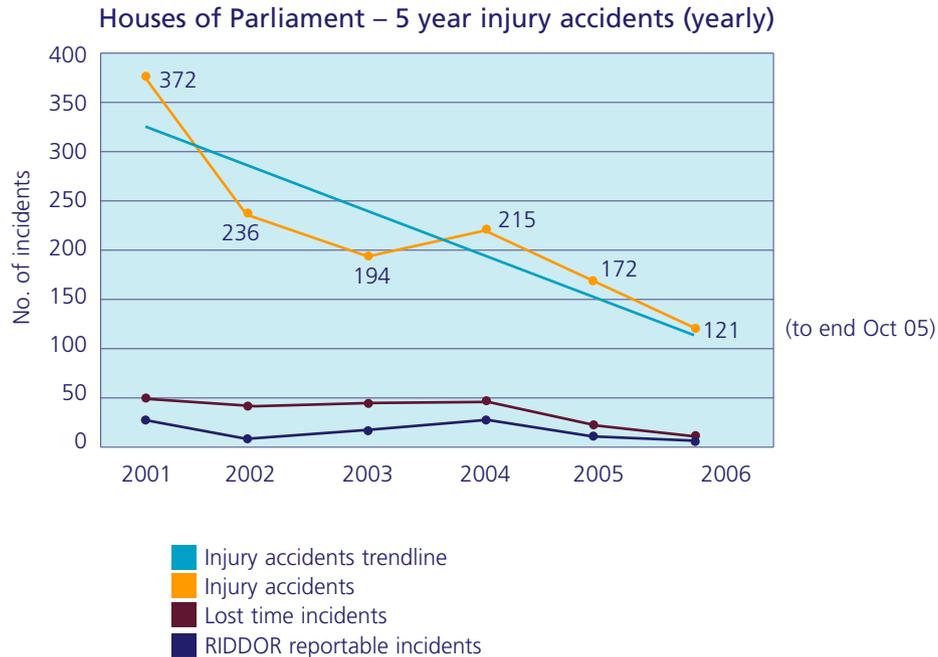
The verdict?

Local political agent Margaret Richards concedes that committing the key health and safety risks and actions to paper, rather than representing another addition to the never-ending paperwork demands of the job, would in fact act as a useful 'aide memoire', prompting her and her team to get things funded and sorted out. She also recognises that it shouldn't take much effort to make sure that the team isn't put at risk during surgeries or at other times, and that common sense, 'cheap and cheerful' options will often work the best.

Your Westminster workplace: health and safety at the Parliamentary Estate

The Parliamentary Estate includes 13 or so buildings housing MPs, peers, their staff and the staff directly employed by the two Houses. Add to these contractors, the press, security personnel and visitors. There are some 15,000 passholders and at any one time there are likely to be between 4,000 and 5,000 people on this unique site. Parliament has a duty of care to ensure that all these people are able to work in or visit the Estate in safety.

The impact of Parliament's five-year health and safety risk management strategy, launched in 2000, has been dramatic. Have a look at the chart below to see how injury accidents have been cut in the past five years – in terms of how often they happen, and how serious the consequences are.



Further resources

The HSE has published *A helping hand for MPs: a handbook for assisting constituents on health and safety* which offers valuable guidance on the questions your constituents are likely to ask.
t 08701 545500

Free publications are available from the HSE on 01787 881165. We've identified the most relevant booklets and their reference numbers under separate areas. These documents are also online at www.hse.gov.uk, accessed through the link to 'free leaflets'. Use the reference code for finding them quickly.

The Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare Service has a range of helpful booklets focusing on the Parliamentary Estate. The Service also offers you access to a team of professionals ready to give advice on health and safety, including medical screening, physicals and physiotherapy, and welfare issues such as stress awareness, giving up smoking and healthy living.

The Service encourages you and your staff to help look after your fitness by using the in-house gym at Westminster.

IOSH's *Risk management toolkit for SMEs* is a free resource – download it at www.iosh.co.uk/technical.

Protect your people – and your business ... the practical one-stop health and safety toolkit, published by IOSH, looks at basic small business health and safety. With a jargon-free approach, there's plenty here to help in establishing or improving your own set-up.
t 01787 249293

Useful web links

There is a huge range of information on health and safety available online, as well as a number of free downloadable tools. The following sites are a good starting point:

www.iosh.co.uk
www.safestartup.org
www.hse.gov.uk
www.rospa.org.uk

We'd like to thank members of our Wales Branch for their work on an early version of this document, designed to help Welsh Assembly members.

Figures and statistics in this document are drawn from the Health and Safety Executive, Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. All data are for the UK.

IOSH campaign 2006: safeguarding the next generation

The under 21s are twice as likely to have an accident at work. Why? They are less skilled, don't have the same understanding of the workplace and aren't aware of hazards they face. Typically, they also lack the confidence and social skills to challenge those who may ask them to do something that's potentially dangerous.

IOSH believes that it's vital to help protect the next generation – that's why our key campaign topic this year focuses on safety for 14 to 21-year-olds – from students on work placements to apprentices on the job full-time.

'First job, twice the risk' – cutting the chances of young people being harmed at work:

- We're initiating a year-long campaign to highlight the vulnerability of young people and the actions that can and should be taken by responsible employers to protect them
- We'll be working with the HSE to promote European Week for Safety and Health at Work 2006, which focuses on young people
- As part of European Week, we'll be launching a UK-wide health and safety competition for under 21s
- We're investigating the level of risk faced by young people on work experience and producing a simple guide for the first steps in the workplace
- We're working with teachers' organisations and will continue to push for better representation of risk issues on the National Curriculum.

If you'd like to get involved with IOSH's campaign, please call Ruth Doyle on 0116 257 3202.

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IOSH is Europe's leading body for health and safety professionals. We have over 28,000 members worldwide, including more than 8,000 Chartered Safety and Health Practitioners.

The Institution was founded in 1945 and is an independent, not-for-profit organisation that sets professional standards, supports and develops members and provides authoritative advice and guidance on health and safety issues.

Institution of Occupational Safety and Health
Founded 1945
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