

ROCC

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PRESS CUTTINGS

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ON AVOIDING SOMETHING DISAGREEABLE

Most of business was not ready for 1992, even allowing for the fact that it did not start till 1993. Even now we are not quite sure about passports, duty free and certainly the new VAT rules which began on January 1st. Even less understood were the health and safety rules derived from the EC Directive on the VDU workstation which has been written about and discussed for the past three years.

To utter a complete heresy at this point one is tempted to ask 'Dose it matter a fig?' Only this month while in Paris with a major office furniture company we asked the simple question, How are French employers facing up to the new rules which every country was required by the EC Commission to introduce into their own Health and Safety legislation on January 1st?

The answer seemed to be total confusion since not only has the change in rules been a complete non-event in France it is matched by the German managing director of a leading German office chair manufacturer remarking 'I can't understand why you are making such a fuss about this Directive. In Germany it is not an issue.'

Major corporate employers have been aware of the needs to plan healthy and productive offices for many years, and they have been regularly reviewed as lesson examples in Business Equipment Digest. The medium sized and smaller company however has been less well informed, and possibly less well motivated to be aware of the

problems caused by the rapidly changing office so that malpractice has easily occurred.

Mike Aldrich, chairman of ROCC Computers told us this month that the proliferation of computer terminals and PCs in offices brought the problems to

public attention. In particular between September and December 1988 24 cases of RSI were reported among journalists on the Financial Times. In the western world nothing is more widely publicised than issues which affect people



working in the media.

Within a very short time newspapers and courts were full of RSI cases. Public concern triggered research, analysis and government legislation.

Mike Aldrich makes the point that making the environment appropriate to the work requirement is hardly new. Noise, lighting and temperature have long been issues in the factory. It has been recognised that if you have poor performance, accidents and ill health problems you probably have poor workplace ergonomics.

If you have poor ergonomics you are probably violating some Health and Safety regulations. Sooner or later something extremely disagreeable is bound to happen.

Mike Aldrich, I couldn't agree more.

Health and Safety sooner or later is all about standards. Standards which not only relate to the quality of the workplace but the corporate quality and whether it is the sort of company to do business with. It matters more than a fig.

Eric Fordh

EDITOR

STRONG REACTIONS TO SAFETY RULES

Reaction to the new office health and safety rules has been varied but business is catching up

on January 1st. The new rules which follow many of the recommendations of the much debated EC Directive on VDU Workstations, require employers to comply with new standards for space, lighting, noise and ergonomic layout of desks and workstations where hardware such as terminals and PCs are habitually used.

The new rules require employers to assess the VDU workstations and other environmental aspects and reduce any risks found, ensure there are breaks or changes of activity, information and training is provided for users of VDU workstations and eye or eyesight tests are provided for users who request them.

The final form of the regulations and guidance reflects the wide level of consultation which the Health and Safety Executive carried out from the publication of the consultative document just over a year ago.

As well as the main guidance document, an impressive 48 page booklet called Display Screen Equipment Work: Guidance on Regulations (published at £5 by the HMSO) the HSE has also published an updated version of its short free booklet 'Working with VDUs' which gives practical advice to users on health issues and the steps employers and users should take to achieve comfortable working positions.

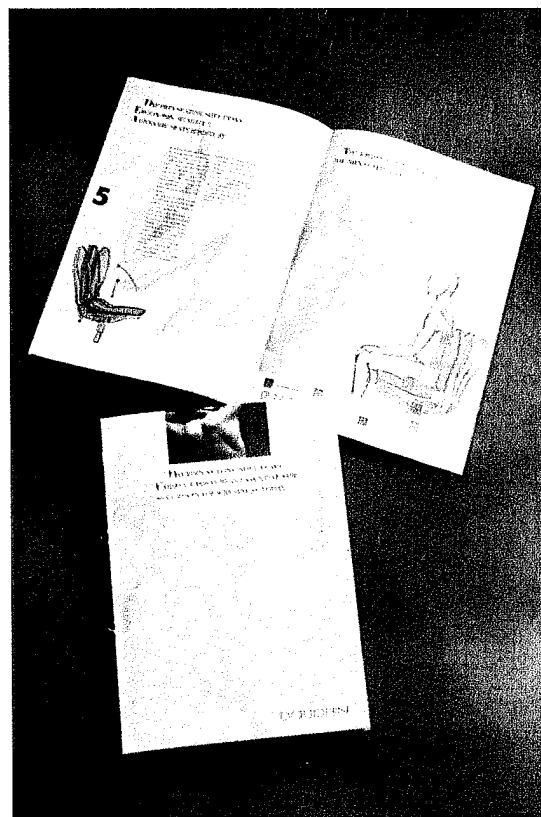
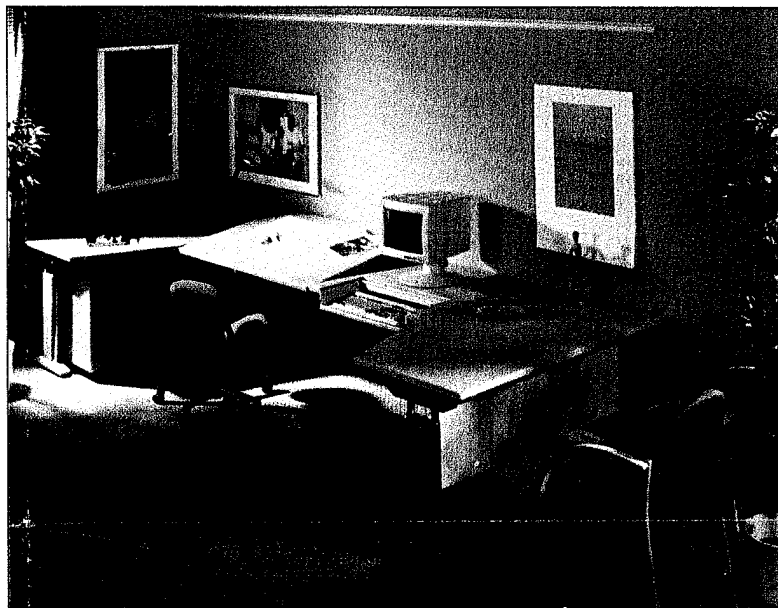
This booklet also contains a brief description of the regulations and employers' obligations under them.

While the detail of the regulations are in many cases not specific in terms of actual dimensions the requirements for the general layout of the workstation, display screen and its images, the keyboard, the work desk or work surface, the work chair are set out in the schedule to the regulations.

This also details space requirements with the following phrase 'The workstation shall be dimensioned and designed so as to provide sufficient space for the operator or user to change position and vary movements.'

This schedule also refers to the lighting requirement, the need to avoid reflections and glare, noise, heat, radiation and humidity. It also remarks on the 'interface' between system and user, in

The Prospect range, right, from Newstyle has already been used in a major contract, while the Flexidesk from Flexiform, below, is used by TSB head office. Below right, is the Cooper-Dauphin guide to seating solutions and back pain.



other words, the software.

A well laid out guide to the new rules is being published by the EEA representing the Electronics, Telecommunications and Business Equipment Industries. This guide is an amalgam of the views of many contributing bodies as well as a number of expert contributors. This guide is ideal for employers who now face the task of planning workstation analysis and gives good guidance on many aspects of the new rules.

There is also a very good section on the areas of alleged harm such as skin disorders, RSI and stress.

One of the main problems for the employer seeking to comply with the regulations however is the selection or appointment of a suitable health and safety consultant which is recommended in the Guidance notes if the employer does not already have a suitably qualified person on the staff.

It is suggested that selecting a suitable consultant to advise on workstation design and compliance with the new rules is going to be one of the areas of greatest contention. The Health and Safety Executive said before Christmas that the need for training courses and consultancies is being oversold to business.

Many of the claims being made about what the legislation says and what firms must do are bogus, aimed at getting businessmen to buy advice and then undertake unnecessary measures usually involving further products or services.

One firm advertising training courses is saying that its course has the approval of the European Health and Safety Commission. No such body exists. Another is quoting duties on hearing testing which is grossly out of line with actual requirements.

Other firms are claiming the existence of requirements that do not exist in law concerning electricity, chemical hazards and the use of display screen equipment. 'Frequently these sales pitches emphasise penalties that might apply if the 'law' were to be broken.'

'These claims worry us' says the Director General of the HSE John Rimington adding 'Our aim is to help firms provide answers to real risks. These bogus claims exaggerate what needs to be done, and cause unnecessary expense to firms at a difficult time. Firms unsure about what the law actually says should ring our area offices.'

The HSE has published a free guidance leaflet giving practical advice to small firms on what to look for when choosing a health and safety consultant. The type of consultant available is described and advice is given on how to decide whether a consultant is needed, how to choose the right one and how to judge performance.

The question of appropriate consultants has resulted in the formation of the Association of Professional Ergonomics Consultancies (APEC). The consultancies are CCD Ltd, Davis Associates, Ergonomics Research Unit the Robens Institute, Human Reliability Associates, Humane Technology, Hi-Tech Associates, ICE Ergonomics and System Concepts Ltd.

Tom Stewart of System Concepts explained that many employers might have difficulty in identifying the type of consultancy which had professional qualifications and experience in the area of ergonomics related to office work.

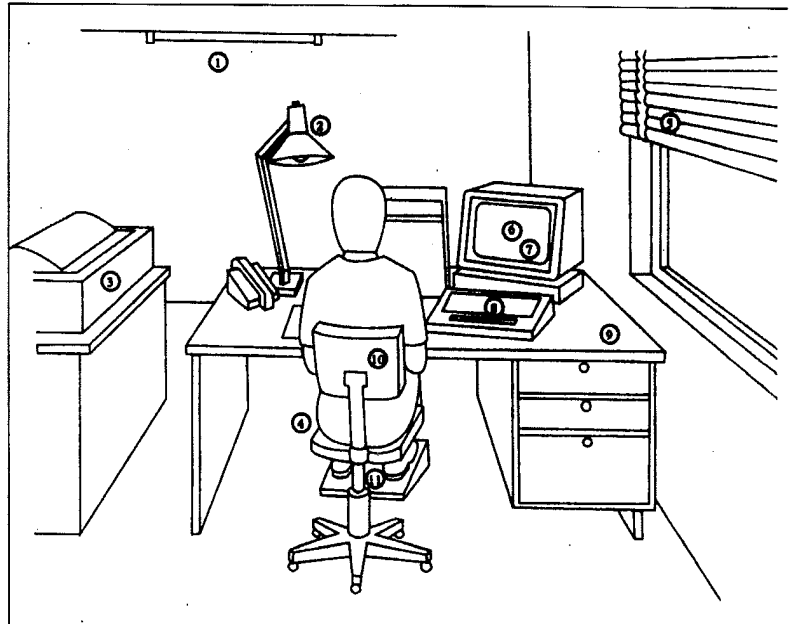
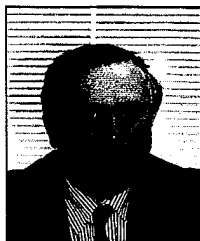
He added 'While the new regulations were designed to protect employee health and safety but will also offer productivity benefits as systems are made more human centred. However we are already witnessing a flood of self-styled 'ergonomic' products and consultancy services with little or

up too much.

He said that a stable footrest can be used to solve the problem of users whose chair is set at the optimum height for keyboard and work surface but find that their thighs are compressed by the seat edge. BS 7179 recommends that a footrest should not move unintentionally and should have a large enough non-slip surface to allow freedom of movement.

Document holders can help users who work from source documents but the user should check that the holder is sufficiently

The H&SE guide to the new rules indicates, right, the areas on a typical vdu workstation where close attention should be given.



Pam Schulz, above left, compares the US view while Mike Aldrich, left, says that standards should be set.

no scientific basis. As reputable ergonomics consultancies we are concerned that British industry is being "conned" into buying unnecessary 'ergonomic' products and unprofessional ergonomics services.

'We have therefore decided to form APEC.'

Tom Stewart was also forceful on the subject of adding accessories to allegedly comply with regulations. He warned that purchasers should accept that simple provision of an accessory cannot guarantee compliance despite the over enthusiastic claims of some suppliers. Accessories must be used correctly or they can create more problems than they solve. An example is an inappropriate screen filter which may distort the image or cause the user to turn the brightness and contrast

strong to accept quite large documents.

He was also very scornful of radiation shields which have been known to cause problems because of their coating, wrist contraptions which are not wrist rests and rest pause counting software which, he argues, misses the reason behind the need for a rest break.

Training for users and for management is being offered by CCD, reviewed in November 1992, Business Equipment Digest, in the form of both videos for direct use and consultancy on the appropriate measures to be taken to protect the health and safety of staff. Unlike equipment, an employer's responsibility cannot be switched off at the end of the day.

Many suppliers are also very concerned that the regulations are understood. William O'Brien, director of Sven Christiansen who produced an excellent employers' guide to the EC Directive, advised employers 'Don't look at the new regulations in isolation but bite the bullet and take into account all the recently introduced regulations including the Management of Health & Safety at

Work Regulations 1992, the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 and the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1992.

He added 'Do not be tempted to ignore the new regulations hoping they will go away. Employees are now much more aware of their employer's obligations. Get an appropriate member of staff trained in basic office ergonomics. Do not think you can off-load the responsibility by bringing in outside consultants.'

'Carry out an analysis of every workstation not just the VDU workstations and note any possible risks to health and safety. Keep a record of analyses carried out and changes made.'

'If you think you have four years grace under the display screen regulations you are sadly mistaken. There is no period of grace in carrying out analyses of workstations and action has to be taken immediately to correct any risks identified.'

He too is scornful of claims 'Our footrests meet the regulations' and 'Our display screens are low radiation'. Of the latter he adds 'Irrelevant, even the Swedes who developed the best low rad standard accept that there is no evidence that the minuscule radiation from display screens causes any harm at all.'

He also says 'The regulations are undoubtedly bureaucratic, frequently unclear and based on an EC Directive that was very poorly drafted.'

Brian Murphy, sales and marketing director of Senator International said that few medium sized businesses in the UK were aware of the effect of the new regulations. He added that the regulations were highly comprehensive and the result will be that some end users will have to re-equip some workstations.

Brian Murphy is strong on the subject of seat height backrests and said 'It is frankly ridiculous to state that the height of a chair backrest only has to be adjusted in relation to the ground and not the seat. No responsible company would buy operators chairs which did not have adjustable backrests.'

Alan Trotter, managing director of Carson Office Furniture, said 'The office has now become the shop floor of the 21st century. We had legislation to protect the shop floor workers of the 20th Century. Now as the economy becomes increasingly service, as opposed to manufacturing, oriented, more people are working in the office, so now we need legislation to ensure that the increasing population of

officeworkers enjoy the same protection (from bad working practices) that shop floor workers have enjoyed in recent times.

'We welcome the forthcoming legislation and believe it is highly appropriate as it will ensure the VDU user's well being is being considered.'

Neil Henderson, marketing director of Cooper-Dauphin plc, says 'There is nothing in these Directives or Regulations which is not common sense. We as an industry have been advocating ergonomics and good posture for years before the European Council and the Health and Safety Executive put their weight behind them.'

'Consequently many employers already have put their house in order but we are

have selected systems with great care for their corporate building in Oslo.

This £1.5m project made use of the Prospect range distributed here by Newstyle. This range features height adjustable desking and while this feature is not spelled out as a requirement, the value of adjustment in matching work surface heights to the needs of users cannot be denied.

Another overseas view was expressed by Pam Schulz, vice-president marketing of Microcomputer Associates in California, distributed here by Eldon Rubbermaid, who told us that in the US the legislation covering health and safety at work was very much in the hands of the various State legislatures. However

these bodies as well as employers and other interested parties were taking increasing notice of the views and edicts of the Occupational Safety and Health Association (OSHA) which has issued guidelines. This caused 'an amazing level of discussion on the whole safety issue on the office.'

There was some health and safety law which applied only to employers of over a certain size but this has now been overturned. Pam Schulz told us that there had been a number of class actions related to RSI claims but these were often multiple claims against suppliers, employers and insurers but there is now a ruling that such actions must be based on a one action suit.

On the question of monitors and screens Taxan Europe say that VGA and Super VGA monitors running at 60 Hz or under will meet EC Directives or the new regulations. Tests with users revealed that more than 75% of users detected flicker using standard VGA 640x480 at 60 Hz running MS Windows.

Although many consultants have very specific views on the use of filters and their type OCLI glare guard filters are claimed to eliminate up to 99% of glare and reflections and enhance contrast by a factor of three. They also say that the profiles of the shields also will meet all the current screen dimensions on the market.

Michael Aldrich, chairman of ROCC Computers tells us 'The ergonomics issues are primarily about applied common sense. Making the equipment fit the people is more sensible than making the people fit the equipment. Health and Safety legislation however doesn't address management problems but it does present a way of working efficiently and effectively.'

'Do not be tempted to ignore the regulations hoping they will go away'

still finding that far too many employees have not enough room on their desks to arrange all their computer equipment.'

He added that many users are still being troubled by glare from their VDU screen. This is all going to need careful thought. There is no substitute for undertaking an audit to assess the problems and then arranging for the reconfiguration of the furniture and equipment to solve them.

For the past year however many users undertaking refurbishment or equipping new offices have been troubled by the lack of final detail on what the regulations may entail. A feature on such an installation is in this edition but elsewhere in Europe and Scandinavia where concern with the working environment has always been an issue organisations such as the Norwegian Maritime Test Institute, Norsk Veritas,

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