

BFAWU GUIDE TO WORKING WITH VISUAL DISPLAY UNITS

This section is a guide for those members who work with Visual Display Units (VDUs) and their representatives. It will summarise the law, some common problems of working with VDUs and some advice on improving the workstation for the operators. This guidance covers all types of Display Screen Equipment including Laptops and PCs. The Regulations refer to the operators of VDUs as “users” and it is important that we first of all define who is a user. The Health & Safety Executive in their guidance notes to the Display Screen Equipment Regulations 1992 define a user as:

- A person who normally uses a VDU for periods of an hour or more at any one time.
- A person who use a VDU in this way more or less daily.
- People who have to transfer information to or from a Display Screen.
- Those who have little or no choice about using them, because of job dependency.
- Those who need to apply high levels of concentration to using them.
- Those people who need special training to use a VDU.

Whilst the legislation does not affect those people who only use a VDU occasionally; they still have general protections under other health & safety legislation.

The Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 require employers to minimise the risks associated with working with VDUs, by ensuring that the workstation and the jobs are well designed. The regulations do not lay down technical specifications of the equipment to be used, but do give some directions to protecting the user from related health problems, which include:

- Work Related Upper Limb Disorders. (WRULD) which include aches and pains in the fingers, wrists, arms, elbows, shoulders neck and back.
- Headaches, eyestrain, tiredness, fatigue and stress.

In general it is the way in which the VDU is used that causes the problems, rather than the VDU itself. In most cases these difficulties

can be overcome by changing the design of the workstation or altering the way in which the job is carried out.

The employer must carry out a risk assessment of the workstation to enable them to identify the potential risks to their employee's health and to enable them to reduce the risks to the lowest possible level. The workplace assessment should cover:

- The Display Screen Equipment, including screen, keyboard and software for size, positioning, glare and suitability.
- Accessories such as mouse mats and wrist rests for suitability.
- Ergonomic design of the furniture to ensure desks are suitable for the operator and that chairs are adjustable.
- The working environment, including suitable lighting, heat and humidity.
- The task that is to be carried out, including the special needs of the individual operator.

As with all risk assessments, reviews should be carried out at regular intervals or if there is a significant change in the job, the equipment or the individual carrying out the task.

Whilst the regulations require breaks to be given, but do not specify the duration or frequency of them. The risk assessment should identify these issues, but clearly breaks need to be:

- At regular intervals. Short frequent breaks are of more value than rare lengthy ones.
- Taken prior to the operator feeling stressed or fatigued. They are meant to give rest not recuperation.
- Taken away from the workstation, where this is possible.
- A means to reducing the workload at the screen, not as an interruption that needs to be caught up, once the operator returns.

Employees who are covered by the regulations can ask their employer to pay for an eye test, to be given by an optometrist or a suitably qualified Doctor. These tests should be carried out at regular intervals as defined by the optician or at more regular intervals if the user believes their eyesight is suffering because of their work with VDUs. If special glasses are needed to carry out the work on a VDU,



then the employer is responsible for paying for basic lens and frames.

The employer should provide the user with relevant training and information to ensure that they use the equipment safely and avoid health risks associated with VDU work.

The training should include the need for good posture, proper use of the equipment, good housekeeping, eye tests and sensible reporting of other problems. This training should extend to those operators using laptops or PCs at home or away from the office.

Further information on the use of Visual Display Units; contact your local Regional Office.

