

Reference No: E109/52/82 ; **Date:** 27/04/84

Circular 12/1984:- Health and Safety aspects of Visual Display Unit (VDU) operation

A Dhuine Uasail

I am directed by the Minister for the Public Service to state that he has accepted an agreed recommendation made by the General Council, under the scheme of conciliation and arbitration for the civil service, regarding the health and safety aspects of VDU operation (Report 991).

2. Accordingly, the arrangements set out in the following paragraph will apply, with effect from a current date, in the case of civil servants who are assigned to VDU work.

Eye Tests and Monitoring of Eyesight

3. Staff should be given an eye test prior to employment on VDUs; staff at present engaged on VDU operation should also be given this test. These tests should be carried out by a panel of opticians nominated by the employing Department in consultation as necessary with the Chief Medical Officer. The cost of the tests should be borne by the employing Department. In addition, arrangements will be made by this Department to monitor and compare over a period of two years the eyesight of (a) a group of VDU operators and (b) a control group of staff not engaged on VDU work.

Breaks from continuous viewing

4. Staff engaged in the uninterrupted operation of a VDU should have breaks away from the display unit (e.g. on other work) to the overall value of ½hour for 3 hours work at the display unit - the detailed implementation of these arrangements, together with any special arrangements which might be necessary in the case of shift workers, to be determined by local consultation. Moreover, the duties of an officer assigned to VDU work should not, during the first 4 weeks of such assignment, entail more than 4 hours screen viewing time each day.

Special Safeguards

5. The following special safeguards will apply in the case of pregnancy, persons with epileptic tendencies and persons under medical treatment involving the use of tranquillisers:

- (i) Pregnant women will not be required to operate VDUs.
- (ii) Photo-sensitive epileptics should seek medical advice before working on VDUs.
- (iii) VDU operators should be advised that certain drugs such as Valium and Librium affect the speed of eye movements and could lead to eye fatigue.

Ergonomic Factors

6. Departments should, in co-operation with staff, ensure that the physical working environment is such as to obtain effective working in an acceptable and safe environment. The following guidelines should, in particular, be observed:

- (i) Equipment (character dimensions, character generation, refresh rate, contrast, colours' keyboard design etc) Full regard should be had to the manufacturer's operating instructions; the machines should be kept in a good state of repair and cleanliness; in general the display should present

an image to the operator that is both clear and stable; corrective action should be taken immediately if any faults or problems arise.

(ii) Working Environment (lighting, glare, noise, heat etc) The illumination provided should be adequate but not excessive, due regard being had to the manufacturer's guidelines in this respect; the possibility of glare and reflection should be avoided as far as possible e.g. by positioning the operator in front of an uncluttered surface and away from windows with the VDU screens at right angles to the incoming light; care should be taken to avoid the area becoming excessively hot from heat generated by the VDU terminal; attention should be paid to minimising excessive noise arising from ancillary equipment and other sources.

(iii) Design of workplace The workplace should be carefully designed to take due account of the individual; the equipment should give the operator sufficient room to spread materials needed for the work in progress and to adopt a comfortable posture in the relevant work activities; if at all possible the seating should be adjustable for both height and rake, the more components of the workplace that can be adjusted by the individual operators to suit themselves the better.

General

7. Any enquiries from Departments about this circular should be made to Room 3.03, Department of the Public Service, South Frederick Street, Dublin 2 (Tel: 779601 ext 521). Personal enquiries should be made to the Personnel Unit of the employing Department.

Mise le meas,

William P Smith
Deputy Secretary