

Reference No: E109/210/94; **Date:** 10/09/98

Circular 17/1998:- Safety, Health and Welfare (General Application) Regulations 1993 and Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Miscellaneous Welfare Provisions) Regulations 1995: requirements in relation to the work environment

A Dhuine Uasail,

I am directed by the Minister for Finance to refer to the Safety, Health and Welfare (General Application) Regulations 1993 (S.I. 44 of 1993) and to the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Miscellaneous Welfare Provisions)

Regulations 1995 (S.I. 358 of 1995) which place a range of legal obligations on employers in relation to the protection of the health and safety of their employees. The responsibility for observing the regulations rests with each department/office and departments/offices should therefore familiarise themselves fully with the provisions of the regulations. In that regard, attention is drawn to the various publications of the Health and Safety Authority in particular the *"Guide to the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 1989 and the Safety Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 1993"*.

This circular deals with matters concerning the physical environment and facilities at the workplace. Appendix 1 sets out guidelines on the work environment and standards of office accommodation which are to apply in the civil service. These have been agreed with staff interests under the Scheme of Conciliation and Arbitration in the Civil Service (General Council Report 1332 refers). Appendix 2 is a reference list of Circulars and Agreed Reports of General Council in the field of safety, health, and welfare at work and related topics.

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Assistant Secretary

1. Work Environment

Ventalisation of enclosed places of work

In most offices the natural ventilation provided through windows and doors will be adequate. Where mechanical ventilation or air-conditioning is provided the system should be regularly checked, kept clean as part of a plant maintenance system and free from any substance or organism which may contaminate the air passing through it thereby affecting the health and safety of employees. In the case of either natural or forced ventilation which inevitably involves the movement of fresh air, it is important to ensure that deposits or dirt which would place employees at risk are regularly removed and that surfaces and ventilation equipment are kept clean.

2. Temperature

(a) During working hours, the temperature in rooms containing work ' stations shall be adequate, having regard to the working methods : being used and the physical demands placed on employees.

(b) The temperature in rest areas, rooms for dutystaff, sanitary facilities, canteens and first-aid rooms shall be appropriate to the particular purpose of such areas.

(c) A temperature of 17.5°C should be the minimum temperature for sedentary workers in offices. This temperature should be attained within one hour of the commencement of work.

(d) In addition windows, skylights or glass partitions in offices should not allow excessive temperatures to be reached during hot weather. A temperature of 24°C should not normally be exceeded. The heating system should not result in offensive or injurious fumes entering the office.

(e) Where offices are air-conditioned, temperature should be maintained in the range 20°C to 24°C.

3. Lighting

Adequate lighting must be provided. Where possible offices should have natural lighting. When artificial lighting is used it should be sufficient so as to avoid visual fatigue and prevent glare or reflection into the workers' eyes.

4. Workstations

Work stations should be comfortable with safe and suitable chairs and sufficient space. In offices, 4.65 square metres (to include the area occupied by the officer's desk and chair but excluding fixtures such as presses, filing, cabinets and other office furniture) is the minimum amount of floor space to be allowed for each person.

5. Work Equipment

Equipment used in the office should be kept in good condition at all times, be repaired or serviced by qualified persons and any faults reported promptly. Passenger lifts should be thoroughly examined on a regular basis by a competent person. Contract maintenance staff are to be given the same health and safety protection as regular office workers.

6. Eating Facilities

Eating facilities must be available. Adequate facilities for boiling water and taking meals should be provided for office employees or they should have reasonable access to these facilities. Meals should not be taken in an office where there is a risk to safety, hygiene or health.

7. Sanitary Facilities

Sanitary facilities should be kept clean and well ventilated. They must not exit into a work-room except through the open air or an intervening ventilated space. The facilities must be located as near as possible to the office. Where there are no separate facilities provided for the public, the number of conveniences specified below should be increased as necessary to ensure that workers can use the facilities without undue delay.

MALE AND/OR FEMALE

Number of People at work

1 to 5
6 to 25
26 to 50
51 to 75
76 to 100

Number of

8. Washing Facilities

Adequate and suitable facilities for washing should include running hot and cold (or warm) water as well as soap and clean towels (the single towel for use by many should be discouraged) or other suitable means of cleaning or drying. Washing facilities should be conveniently located, be near to the sanitary facilities and large enough to facilitate the washing of face, hands and forearms. They should be kept clean, well maintained, have adequate lighting, and be sufficiently ventilated and adequately protected from the weather. One washbasin must be provided for every 20 employees up to 100 employees and one for every 40 employees, or part thereof, after that.

9. Office Cleanliness

The standard of cleanliness required will depend on the use to which the office is put. Floors and indoor traffic routes should be cleaned at least once per week. Any waste material that accumulates should be removed on a daily basis. Interior walls, ceilings, windows and work surfaces should be cleaned at suitable intervals, so as to maintain an appropriate hygiene standard. Contract office cleaners are to be given the same health and safety protection as regular office workers.

10. Supply: of Drinking Water

It shall be the duty of every department/office to ensure that an adequate supply of wholesome drinking water is provided and maintained at suitable points conveniently accessible to all staff.

11. Shared Accommodation

Where civil service employers share an office building with private sector employers, and the civil service are not the anchor tenants, arrangements to deal with Health and Safety in such buildings must be made. There must be consultation with safety representatives before the arrangements are agreed.

APPENDIX 2

Index of major Circulars and General Council Reports on Safety and Health, and related topics

Circular no. 12/84 - "Health and Safety aspects of Visual Display Unit operation" *[instructions on the use of VDUs, including eyesight tests]*

Circular no. 32/90 - "Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 1989" *[instructions on the Act, how to compile safety statements and how to set up consultative arrangements with Staff; training and information; fire safety precautions; National Authority for Occupational Safety and Health; promulgation of the circular]*

Circular no. 22/93 - "Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations, 1993; First-Aid" *[provision and maintenance of first-aid equipment; instructions on training of first-aiders]*

Circular no. 3/94 - "Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations, 1993; Requirements for Work with Display Screen Equipment and Visual Display Units" *[regulations concerning equipment and environment; breaks from work on VDUs; training on use of workstations; further instructions on provision of eyesight tests; special corrective lenses; pregnancy; warning re photo-sensitive epileptics/certain medication; promulgation of the circular]*

Circular no. 34/95- "Measures to Protect the Health and Safety of Pregnant Employees" *[requirement to assess the workplace for risks to pregnant or breastfeeding employees; requirement to move employees to safe work if risk exists, or to grant health and safety leave]*

General Council Reports.

General Council Report 597 - *[Table, chair and bin to be provided to clerical staff", where necessary)*

General Council Report 686 - Claim for proper heating arrangements in Government Offices *[agreement that the temperature in Government offices will normally be maintained in the range 63 - 73 degrees fahrenheit)*

General Council Report 1077 - Claim concerning Air-Conditioned Office Accommodation
[maintenance arrangements; agreement that the temperature in air- conditioned Government offices will normally be maintained in the range 68 - 75 degrees fahrenheit)

General Council Report 1202 - Claim that Rest Rooms be provided in all workplaces
[recommendation that basic Rest Rooms be provided] !

General Council Report 1252 - Indemnification of Safety Representatives *[clarifying liability of Safety Representatives appointed under Circular no. 32/90]*

General Council Report 1277 - Code of Practice on Smoking in Government Offices *[sets out model code on adoption of measures to restrict smoking in the workplace for)consideration by departmental Safety and Health committees]*

Where Available:

The circulars are available in the "**Cod Pearsanra**" ("**Civil Service Personnel Code**"), which is available for inspection in Personnel Units. The General Council Reports are also available from Personnel Units.