

# SAFETYFORCE NEWS

## Seven ways to keep your workplace germ-free

Considering many of us spend a quarter of our lives in the office, you'd think we'd keep it clean. Yet our workspaces could well be harbouring germs that cause colds, flu and food poisoning.

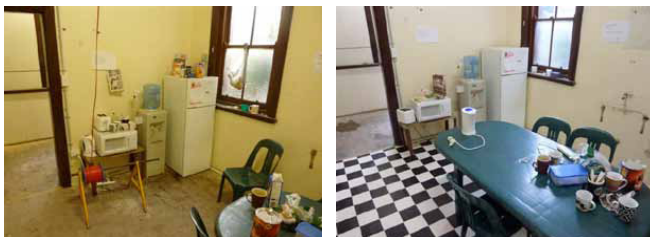
Many studies show that office desks have more bacteria than toilet seats. Yet a recent Great Australian Washroom survey found that 84 per cent of us think offices are second only to hospitals for hygiene.

"Actually, all it takes is for one colleague to have a bug and this could get passed on to everyone else," says public hygiene specialist Dr Richard Hastings. "For example, not only are office phones handled by different people each day, but the handsets are held close to the nose and mouth."

Researchers at the University of Arizona swabbed office surfaces in four US cities and found one in every five hosting harmful bacteria. Phones, computer mice and keyboards were the worst culprits.

The study's biggest surprise? "I thought for sure men would be germier," says Professor Charles Gerba. "But women were much worse." This is probably because women interact more with small children and tend to eat and apply make-up at their desks. Hand lotion also makes bacterial transfer easier.

Shared office kitchens are often contamination hotspots. "People think the bathroom is bad, but far more serious is the kitchen," says Dr Ronald McCoy, spokesperson for the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners.

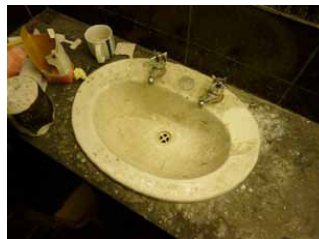


"Food poisoning is a major health risk caused by poor food storage, preparation and handling, often the case in offices."

But Dr McCoy adds we shouldn't be too paranoid. "Effective hand washing with soap and cleaning using warm water and a plain detergent is the best and cheapest way to get rid of germs," he says. And maybe reduce the number of sick days, too.

### Seven tips for a germ-free office;

- Ensure there are adequate hand-washing facilities with hand sanitiser, liquid soap and paper towels
- Avoid touching bathroom surfaces and use paper towels on toilet door handles
- Use antibacterial spray, and change cloths and tea towels regularly, in kitchens
- Establish a kitchen-cleaning roster and three-day throw-out policy for fridge food
- Avoid eating at your desk
- Use disinfecting wipes daily on keyboards, phones and shared equipment
- De-clutter your desk.



## Reducing musculoskeletal injuries

*Peter McCubbery (Ergonomics Unit Acting Manager, WorkSafe) is an ergonomist with 15 years experience, including 10 with WorkSafe. In this edition, Peter talks about reducing the risk of musculoskeletal injuries, such as sprains and strains, from hazardous manual handling in order picking.*

We estimate some workers in order picking are bending their backs forward at least 300 to 400 times a day. If it was possible to use 'correct lifting techniques' we'd see workers out there with legs and thighs as big as Sherpas' who trek up the Himalayas! We don't.

Order picking in large delivery centres gets product into large and small retailing organisations. Tonnes of product are picked daily by many workers – every product picked from a pick slot inside storage racking goes onto a pallet or roll cage, usually starting just above ground level.

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Despite many good innovations to reduce manual handling, these workers still face significant risk of injuries from all the back bending.

One way to control the risk of injuries is to introduce height-adjustable load shifting equipment to raise the empty packing pallet so the unnecessary back bending is designed out.

There are some proactive organisations that welcome change and look for innovative products to reduce the risk of musculoskeletal injuries to their workers. The average cost of a musculoskeletal injury is \$54,000 – and that doesn't factor in the personal cost.

WorkSafe inspectors are doing everything possible to provide assistance and guidance to order picking delivery centres, including researching and investigating potential solutions such as height-adjustable, double-pallet length order picking load shifting equipment. This type of solution means workers can pack or handle product at a safe height.

These solutions when adopted will not only increase productivity (eg workers will take less time to pick product), potentially containing supply costs, but also reduce the risk of injuries to workers. And that has to be a good thing.

## Adecco fined over workplace fatality

Adecco Industrial has been fined \$100,000 following a fatal on-site accident involving one of its on-hire workers.

The incident occurred in December 2007, when a labourer on-hired by Adecco to a metal fabrication company sustained fatal injuries after a beam fell and crushed him.

An investigation into the accident found that working to remove the beam was outside the scope of tasks for which the worker had been employed, and should have been undertaken by an external contractor who had been engaged specifically for the job.

The investigation presented evidence to the Brisbane Industrial Magistrates Court that Adecco did not conduct adequate enquiries regarding the tasks its worker would be performing and had not conducted a risk assessment or site inspection since October 2006.

The investigation also found that Adecco had placed too much reliance on the host workplace to ensure safety of the workers.

The court heard that Adecco should have made it clear to the worker exactly what his role entailed and should have told him to report any tasks asked of him that fell outside these duties.

Adecco pleaded guilty to breaching section 24 of the Queensland Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995 and was ordered to pay a \$100,000 fine, plus costs.

## Room for improvement as year long WorkSafe crackdown reveals thousands of safety breaches

There is room for improvement for businesses across the state after WorkSafe issued more than 2000 improvement notices as part of a crackdown on workplace health and safety breaches.

Manual handling, damaged storage racking, unsafe scaffolding, inappropriate storage of dangerous goods, insufficient return to work plans for injured workers and poor forklift traffic management were among the issues identified during the campaign.

Over the past 12 months as part of the Safe Towns, Safer Work Zones campaign, WorkSafe inspectors visited small businesses in 13 regional and suburban areas which had a high injury rate or which had not been visited before.

Inspectors visited 1546 workplaces and issued 2118 improvement notices for health and safety and accident compensation breaches across the state. Twenty-four prohibition notices were issued and an additional 171 breaches were able to be dealt with on the spot.

WorkSafe's General Manager for Health and Safety, Lisa Sturzenegger, said the results were surprising. "Considering the businesses were given notice and information on the campaign, the high number of businesses who failed to address health and safety risks is disappointing," she said.

"It is important businesses change the way they think about what they might see as minor issues around the workplace.

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“We’re not talking about large expenditure and complicated issues. Slips trips and falls and poor manual handling – often caused by inadequate lifting or carrying equipment -account for 60% of all injuries.”

Ms Sturzenegger said despite some disappointing results, there were some standout examples of workplaces meeting all of their health and safety obligations.

“It’s great to see businesses making health and safety a priority in their workplace,” she said.

“Other businesses took the visits as an opportunity to discuss any issues they may have with the inspectors or ways they can make their workplaces safer.

“Businesses are often so busy with their day-to-day operations, they welcome the opportunity to meet with WorkSafe inspectors.

“It is far more beneficial for everyone if employers and workers take the time to look for and fix safety issues as soon as they’re identified.”

Moorabbin received the highest number of notices issued in a suburb; inspectors visited 145 workplaces, issued 278 improvement notices and one prohibition notice for protective clothing for spraying equipment. Another 19 breaches identified were dealt with on the spot.

Bairnsdale topped the list for regional areas, with inspectors visiting 98 workplaces and issuing 264 improvement notices for health and safety breaches. One workplace was issued with a prohibition notice relating to an unsafe scaffold and another 31 breaches were dealt with on the spot.

Safe Towns, Safer Work Zones campaigns involve a team of WorkSafe inspectors who visit an area over a one-week period to check on compliance with workplace health and safety.

WorkSafe’s specialist return-to-work inspectors also took part in the campaign. Their role was to check that workplaces have return to work information available and also have a return to work plan in place for injured workers.

Locations included Mansfield, Mildura, North Geelong, Camperdown and Cobden, Daylesford and Hepburn, Bairnsdale, Campbellfield, Preston, Clayton, Braeside, Melton, Moorabbin, Doveton and Hallam.

The 12-month campaign kicked off in Braeside in July last year and finished in Doveton and Hallam earlier this month.

## Regional Breakdown

Location	Visits	PIN's issued	Prohibition notices issued	Fixed on the spot
Mansfield	62	101	2	17
Mildura	98	163	2	17
North Geelong	178	255	4	44
Camperdown	60	68	1	19
Daylesford	47	31	0	9
Bairnsdale	98	264	1	31
<b>Total</b>	<b>543</b>	<b>882</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>137</b>

## Suburban Breakdown

Location	Visit	PIN's issued	Prohibition notices issued	Fixed on the spot
Campbellfield	81	86	1	3
Preston	105	83	0	22
Clayton	159	233	3	31
Braeside	140	235	1	46
Melton	206	203	4	13
Moorabbin	145	278	1	19
Doveton and Hallam	147	118	4	34
<b>Total</b>	<b>983</b>	<b>1236</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>168</b>
<b>Total Overall</b>	<b>1526</b>	<b>2118</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>305</b>

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*Carolyn Kennedy (Project Manager, WorkSafe) tells us why forklifts and people don't mix.*

Even though fatalities involving forklifts have reduced significantly over the past decade, incidents involving forklifts and pedestrians continue at an unacceptably high rate – 143 between January 2010 and February 2011. Around 80 per cent of these occurred in warehousing environments.

## What employers should do

1. Ask “are forklifts really necessary for the work to be done?” Could a less hazardous alternative item of plant be used (eg hand or powered pallet truck, electric tug, tow tractor)?

2. Develop a traffic management plan for the workplace that includes:

- consultation with all workers
- policies and procedures
- Information/instruction/training
- supervision
- expectations for compliance (including disciplinary procedures)
- monitoring and review of the plan.

3. Identify areas where forklifts and pedestrians could interact. A useful approach is to use a map of the workplace to identify these areas in consultation with health and safety representatives and workers, and mark areas from high to low potential for interaction.

4. The ‘three metre rule’ is outdated. Employers need to assess forklift operations to determine the actual separation distances and types of barriers that will be needed, considering:

- type of load being carried
- forklift operating speeds
- working environment
- any physical barriers or electronic systems in place

5. Based on the assessment of forklift operations, controls should be put in place that **physically separate pedestrians** from areas of forklift operation **at all times** so far as is reasonably practicable. This can be achieved by:

- work scheduling to prevent pedestrians being in the area of operating forklifts
- exclusion zones and safety zones
- electronic systems to prevent pedestrian and forklift interaction (eg proximity sensors, speed limiters, zoned detection systems).

**Painted lines alone are not an effective way to separate pedestrians from operating forklifts.**



The basic challenges are to productivity, which will be increased if good decisions are made but decreased if poor options are chosen, and to safety and health, which will be impeded if known risks are ignored.



Principles of good design are most economically applied at the start of a project and are more costly to introduce retrospectively.