

GUIDANCE ON USING DISPLAY SCREEN EQUIPMENT (DSE)

What is DSE

DSE are devices or equipment that have an alphanumeric or graphic display screen and includes display screens, laptops, touch screens and other similar devices.

What are the health risks with DSE?

Some workers may experience fatigue, eye strain, upper limb problems and backache from overuse or improper use of DSE. These problems can also be experienced from poorly designed workstations or work environments. The causes may not always be obvious and can be due to a combination of factors.

Getting Comfortable

- Sit comfortably. Adjust your chair to suit. Ensure your back is supported.
- Forearms should be approximately horizontal to the keyboard and the eyes should be the same height as the top of the screen.
- Make sure there is enough work space to accommodate all documents or other equipment. A document holder may help avoid awkward neck and eye movements.
- Arrange the desk and screen to avoid glare, or bright reflections. This is often easiest if the screen is not directly facing windows or bright lights
- Adjust curtains or blinds to prevent intrusive light.
- Make sure there is space under the desk to move legs.
- Avoid excess pressure from the edge of seats on the backs of legs and knees.
- A footrest may be helpful, particularly for smaller users.

Well Designed Workstations

Keyboards and keying

- A space in front of the keyboard can help you rest your hands and wrists when not keying.
- Try to keep wrists straight when keying.
- Good keyboard technique is important – you can do this by keeping a soft touch on the keys and not overstretching the fingers.

Using a mouse

- Position the mouse within easy reach, so it can be used with a straight wrist.
- Sit upright and close to the desk to reduce working with the mouse arm stretched.
- Move the keyboard out of the way if it is not being used.
- Support the forearm on the desk, and don't grip the mouse too tightly.
- Rest fingers lightly on the buttons and do not press them hard.

Reading the Screen

- Make sure individual characters on the screen are sharp, in focus and don't flicker or move. If they do, the DSE may need servicing or adjustment.
- Adjust the brightness and contrast controls on the screen to suit lighting conditions in the room.
- Make sure the screen surface is clean.
- When setting up software, choose text that is large enough to read easily on screen when sitting in a normal comfortable working position.
- Select colours that are easy on the eye (avoid red text on a blue background, or vice versa).

Changes in Activity

Breaking up long spells of DSE work helps prevent fatigue, eye strain, upper limb problems and backache. Ideally breaks or changes of activity happen naturally or you have control when to take a break.

The following may help users:

- Stretch and change position.
- Look into the distance from time to time, and blink often.
- Change activity before you get tired, rather than to recover.
- Short, frequent breaks are better than longer, infrequent ones.
- Take opportunities to stand up e.g. when making/receiving phone calls.

Timing and length of changes in activity or breaks for DSE use is not set down in law and arrangements will vary depending on a particular situation.

Portable computers

In general portable computers (e.g. laptops etc) should not be used for long periods.

The same controls above will also reduce the DSE risks associated with portable computers. However, the following may also help reduce manual handling, fatigue and postural problems:

- Consider potential risks from manual handling if you have to carry heavy equipment and papers.
- Whenever possible use a docking station or firm surface and a full-sized keyboard and mouse.
- The height and position of the portable's screen should be angled so that the user is sitting comfortably and reflection is minimised (raiser blocks are commonly used to help with screen height).
- More changes in activity may be needed if the user cannot minimise the risks of prolonged use and awkward postures to suitable levels.