

Astute Safety Thinking

Welcome

Welcome to the end of the longest month in the year.

January is at last almost over – it's not really 16 weeks long, but can feel like it, especially this year being in lockdown. Thankfully, I am starting to notice the daylight hours increasing and I am starting to look forward to better weather and almost allowing myself to think about Spring. Before I get too carried away though, there are still lots of things to tackle in the sphere of Health and Safety.

People are continuing to work from home, and we need to make sure that this change is not harming people's health. I have also been asked to include some practical measures on how to make sure that our buildings are kept safe in the bad weather that comes with winter.

In some recent news, the HSE have announced that they are going to increase their checks on businesses to make sure that they have carried out a Covid-19 Risk Assessments. If you have not carried out an assessment, or you have any other Health and Safety concerns, please get in touch using my email address below.

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A guide to home working - part 3

Tips for working from home

Protecting your eyes while working from home Roshni Patel, BSc (Hons) MCOptom, Professional Services Manager at Lenstore, shares three top tips on how you can protect yourself against eye strain and fatigue whilst working from home.

Positioning your technology devices



In an office, you're likely to have a good quality desk and chair that make it easy to position your devices at a healthy distance from your eyes. It's just as important to ensure you do the same at home.

A few things to pay attention to include:

- Lighting and glare;
- Distance from screen;
- Blue light software;
- Blue light lenses;
- Screen brightness;
- Text size and contrast.

Combating dry eye symptoms

Dry eyes can cause your eyes to feel heavy and disrupt the quality of your vision which can lead to symptoms of eye fatigue. As well as ensuring a healthy work space for your vision, there are methods to help reduce dry eye whilst working from home:

- Blink regularly;
- Take breaks;
- Eye drops;
- Drinking lots of water and keeping hydrated.



Looking after eye hygiene

Eye hygiene is an important consideration at all times, but especially while coronavirus is in effect. You should wash your hands regularly, and it is recommended that you wash your hands for at least 20 seconds, scrubbing the backs, thumbs, and fingertips as well as your palms. This will help prevent infections both generally and in your eyes.

For those who wear contact lenses or spectacles, there are other considerations. Follow the guidelines below to prevent any irritation in your eye and protect your vision:

- Keep glasses clean;
- Use only solutions recommended by your optician on your lenses;
- Throw away disposable lenses;
- Clean your case.

In addition to the above, it is important to be aware it is still perfectly safe to wear contact lenses in the current circumstances.

As soon as you notice any problems with your eyes, it is important that you see an optician to get your eyes checked.

If you need training or are looking to provide Display Screen Equipment training to your staff working at home or in the office, please check the link below. There is currently 25% off all online training.

<https://www.videotilehost.com/astutesafetyconsulting/purchaseCourse.php?nid=23>

A pandemic within a pandemic?

Article by Paul Verrico & Alexis Powell-Howard

'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way'.



Alexis Powell-Howard

It is 250 years since the events which Charles Dickens used as the basis of his best known literary work – but just like Dr Manette in 'A Tale of Two Cities', we are undoubtedly living in extraordinary times.

Never before has freedom of physical movement been so constrained, whilst connectivity to the wider world remains so high. Uncertainty lingers like an unwelcome visitor as every family models how the pandemic's consequences will affect its future. People's response to the health crisis facing all members of society has been at times diametrically opposite: some folk showing 'the age of wisdom' – self-isolating at the earliest opportunity whilst others freely socialise in seaside resorts or in public houses to the last possible moments (the age of foolishness). Most of us have experienced moments of darkness and despair as we consider the potential illness which may affect us or loved ones.

It doesn't stop there: for employers, faced with a workforce which is either working remotely for an enforced long period or suddenly idle, the legal responsibility to help employees with work-related mental health issues is an additional concern which may seem secondary to the primary mission of keeping the business afloat. Nevertheless, a 'pandemic' of poor mental health may be a seemingly unavoidable result of physical isolation. Rather than add to the weighty matters which occupy organisational managers, we wanted to offer some pointers that may help your staff '*access the spring of hope*' as society is locked down to minimise the virus' spread.

Stress is:

"That which arises when the pressure placed upon an individual exceeds the capacity of that individual to cope." Confederation of British Industry (CBI).

“The adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them at work.” HSE.

Those pressures may come from a number of different sources, and when their combined effect is overwhelming, stress occurs. This means that stress is not good for you. Stress is an unhealthy state of body or mind or both.

For many years, people have referred to the Flight or Fight response as the stress response. But Flight or Fight is a one-off reaction to a perceived challenge or pressure and as such, is a safety response, ensuring the individual is alerted to possible threats allowing them to take avoiding action.

However, continually being in this state means that the body chemicals associated with Flight or Fight are constantly being stimulated which may create symptoms of, or cause, ill health.



What is the Fight or Flight Response? The fight or flight response, or stress response, is triggered by a release of hormones either prompting us to stay and fight or run away and escape. So, the ‘fight’ could be getting angry and shouting and the ‘flight’ could be storming out of a room and maybe saying nothing. These types of responses are your body’s reaction to danger and were created during evolution to help you survive real stressful and life-threatening situations. Now, in today’s

world, your body still has the fight or flight response but the danger that triggers it are frequently not life threatening situations – but caused by merely just thinking negatively about something.

Most commonplace situations that you could find yourself in, are not truly dangerous, however you will still send a “danger” message to the brain with your negative ‘oh no’ thoughts ... but it’s a false message! Your stress response is triggered and your body reacts as if it was dangerous or life threatening because the brain does NOT differentiate between real and perceived threats. This response is there to save your life and the brain will not take a risk, so it launches the stress response every time ... just in case!

The stress response can be triggered in a single instant, but how quickly you calm down and return to your natural state is going to vary from person to person (and on what caused it). Typically, it takes 20 to 30 minutes for your body to return to normal and to calm down. That’s ok if this response is a one off or just an occasional occurrence (acute), your body has time to recover and return to its normal state. However, if you repeatedly trigger the stress response with on-going problems and negative thoughts, then your body has very little chance to recover. Living in a prolonged state of high alert and stress (when there isn’t any real reason for it) can be the start of chronic stress and can be detrimental to both your physical and mental health.

Written by Paul Verrico, Lawyer, Solicitor Advocate and Partner in the EHS and Crisis Management team at Eversheds Sutherland and qualified psychotherapist and TEDx speaker, Alexis Powell-Howard, Managing Director of Fortis Therapy, National small business of the year 2019.

Building Winter Readiness

Cold Weather Maintenance Checklist

You already know commercial buildings and facilities require a lot of attention, and the necessary efforts escalate when the temperatures plummet. Snow, ice, harsh winds, and other winter elements can be problematic on your properties. Even if you took preventative measures during the warmer months to prepare your commercial buildings for winter, you have to keep on top of the work rather than waiting until spring is in bloom.



Winter Maintenance Checklist

Use the following list of common winter threats to develop a strategy for you and your service team to keep your properties in tip-top shape no matter what the weather is outside.

Plumbing

Frozen pipes can lead to a wet mess, so preventing your plumbing from getting too cold needs to be a top priority.

- ✓ Check exposed and exterior pipes for signs of freezing.
- ✓ Insulate and seal cracks and openings around exposed pipes.
- ✓ Keep interior temperatures above 10 degrees Centigrade and instruct tenants to do the same.
- ✓ Look for signs of excess moisture and dry the area, as well as respond to mould or mildew that may have formed.

HVAC

The lower the temperature goes, the harder the heating portion of your heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) system needs to operate.

- ✓ Check for cracks and inefficiencies in your heating systems.
- ✓ Inspect blowers and hoses for blockages.
- ✓ Replace air filters routinely.
- ✓ Respond to abnormal sounds and odours.
- ✓ Check thermostats and make sure they are working properly.
- ✓ Empty condensation drain traps.
- ✓ Clean building air vents and monitor air flow.

Winter Elements

When the weather delivers ice, snow, high winds, and bitter cold, you need to act quickly and responsibly to ensure the safety of your tenants and staff.

- ✓ Monitor snow and create a plan to remove it should it pose hazardous.
- ✓ De-ice pavements and walkways to avoid slips and falls.
- ✓ Clean and replace wet floor mats in entrances and indoor walkways to reduce slick floors.

Roof

If what's overhead is in poor shape, what's below immediately becomes vulnerable.

- ✓ Clear the roof of high-piling snow, especially above entrances to the building.
- ✓ Check your roof for any missing tiles or slates or any that may have become dislodged in any high winds.
- ✓ Make sure you check your flat roofs, particularly if you have a warranty on your insurance policy which requires you to do so. Felt roofs have a limited life span and if they are in poor condition and they leak then your insurers may decline a claim on the basis that you didn't maintain the property in good condition.
- ✓ Monitor heating costs and increase attic insulation as necessary.

- ✓ Avoid ice dams from forming by keeping gutters clear.

If you check the roof and know the roof is in poor condition, it is best to bite the bullet and have it repaired or replaced prior to the weather turning cold and wet.

Gutters

The first item on your agenda will most likely be checking the guttering and downpipes. They need to be completely cleared of leaves, weed growth, detritus and any waste material that may have found its way into the pipes. If the access to the rainwater gutters is difficult, you can call firms who use long flexible hoses attached to a powerful electric motor and they can 'vacuum clean' your gutters and downpipes.



Keeping your rainwater gutters in good condition is an important exercise. Mould and ingress of water can occur if they are not kept clear and there is a chance this will not be covered by your insurance policy so a bit of thought now will pay dividends.

Service your Boiler

When the temperature starts to plummet, you will realise it is time to service your boiler. Unfortunately, everybody is wanting their boilers serviced at the same time so the gas fitters (make sure they are 'Gas Safe' registered) plumbers will be inundated with requests for servicing work.



If your boiler is oil fired then it will also need to be serviced. You will also need to ensure that there is adequate oil to heat the property to your desired temperature and that the oil doesn't run out prior to another delivery being available. Remember of course that even if you order a delivery of oil, the tanker may not be able to get through the snow, your oil may run out and therefore your boiler stops, your pipes freeze, and the property is flooded.

Can you make a claim from the insurer as the heating was not on?

Check your Woodwork

Check all woodwork for signs of rot or deterioration. A little maintenance work on timber sills and windows can save a lot of money in the long run – cracked paint will let the water in and once this happens the rotting process will start.

Paths and Steps

This last advice point applies equally to owners of unoccupied properties as well as occupied buildings. During the autumn the leaves fall from the trees and are blown around by the wind. They can collect on pathways and steps and if they are not cleared away, they can cause a tripping hazard. This was the case for a real personal injury claim which went roughly as follows: -

The owners of a small block of converted flats on the South Coast were away for most of the year and employed a management company to look after the letting and management of the flats.

A visitor to the lower ground floor flat was descending the steps to the front door and slipped on slippery 'gunge' that was rotting leaves that had been allowed to collect on the steps. The visitor to the property sustained injuries and made a personal injury claim against the owner's insurance policy.

Eventually the insurers of the managing agent paid the claim as they had failed in their duty of care to maintain the property in the owner's absence as they were required to do so under the terms of their contract.

This emphasises the need to keep pathways and steps clear of rotting leaves, detritus and anything else for that matter that may be a trip hazard.

Empty properties are most likely to lack routine maintenance and checking as they may not be close to the owner's home or business and the regular maintenance checks may not flag up any problems if they are not checking for weather related issues. Some insurance policies have conditions that apply

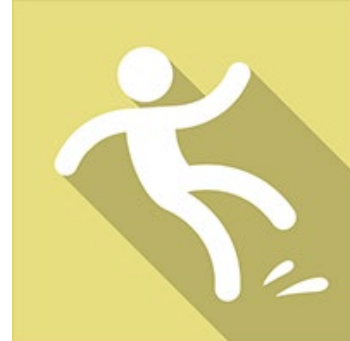
from 1st October and last throughout the winter which require more frequent visits to check the property, the central heating to be left on at a certain temperature, the loft hatch to be left open a certain amount and various other requirements. So, you need to understand your unoccupied buildings insurance policy, and if you are in any doubt as to the cover it provides or the requirements on you to maintain full cover then speak to your insurance broker.

The cold reality is that winter can wreak havoc on commercial properties, but with the right precautionary measures, you can avoid being left out in the storm. Work with your service team and call in skilled, professionals to keep your buildings running efficiently and effectively.

This article was included as a special request. If you have any subjects that you would like more information on or subjects that you think that we should include, then please get in touch with:
paul.sidney@astutesafetyconsulting.com

Online Training

Whilst we are in this period of uncertainty, not knowing how long lockdown will remain in place and how long furlough will last etc., it is still important to maintain your obligation to train your employees on health and safety. Our online training courses are professionally made and offer one to one training which can be done in the comfort of your own home and in your own time.



The featured course this month is Slips, Trips and Falls. It is approved by the International Institute of Risk and Safety Management (IRSM) and has content that lasts 60 mins.

Slips, trips and falls account for almost a third of non-fatal injuries at work. It is a widely held belief that with just a few minor changes to working practices and attitudes this could be reduced significantly.

This course will introduce you to some of the statistics relating to slips, trips and falls and dispel some of the myths surrounding them. It also touches on the law as it relates to slips, trips and falls. It contains real examples of where things have gone wrong and some practical steps that could have been taken to prevent these incidents. The course also covers some of the straightforward changes that can be made in most businesses to significantly reduce the risk of a slip, trip or fall incident occurring.

To view the course please follow the link below.

<https://videotilehost.com/astutesafetyconsulting/purchaseCourse.php?nid=78>