

'Hot Topics' provide basic guidance on common workplace Health & Safety requirements. They use a simple 'Q&A' approach to convey key messages, but are not intended as an authoritative interpretation of every aspect of the applicable Health & Safety legislation.

Hot Topic 04: Display screen equipment (v01, 02-Apr14)

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## 1. What is 'display screen equipment'?

Display screen equipment, usually abbreviated to 'DSE', has quite a broad definition and means any alphanumeric or graphic display screen, regardless of the display process involved.

As well as traditional cathode ray tube screens the definition includes more recent technologies such as liquid crystal, thin film transistor and plasma display screens.

Display screens used to display line drawings, graphs, charts or computer-generated graphics are included, for example:

- computer display screens;
- word processors;
- VDU's;
- CAD terminals; and
- microfiche readers.

However, DSE used mainly to show television or film pictures, including CCTV monitors, is not classed as DSE.

## 2. Is there any law that covers the use of DSE?

Yes. The use of DSE is covered by the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 and further guidance is contained in its supporting approved code of practice, L26.

## 3. Are there any potential ill-health problems associated with using DSE?

There is not a single defined ill-health effect associated with DSE use. Normally DSE users report a number of symptoms associated with its use. Examples of such symptoms include:

- aches and pains, especially in the neck, shoulders, arms and back, due to poor posture or lack of movement during prolonged use of DSE;
- visual fatigue and eye-strain;
- stress; and
- skin problems.

## 4. Who is classed a DSE user?

It is difficult to give a single or simple definition. The mere fact that a person uses some form of DSE during their normal work does not necessarily mean they are classed as a user.

In effect, deciding whether a person is a DSE user involves assessing the DSE use covering a number of factors, including:

- the level of dependency on the DSE;
- discretion for or criticality of errors;
- whether use of the DSE requires significant training;

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- where the DSE is used for prolonged periods, e.g. >1 hour at any time;
- if the DSE is used on a daily basis;
- if there is fast information or data transfer.

Each factor can be rated, e.g. as being 'low', 'medium' or 'high', and the overall score provides a steer as to whether or not the person should be classed as a DSE user. In effect, it is the overall impact of the DSE's use, rather than one specific factor, which identifies a potential DSE user.

### **5. What must an employer do if they think they have a DSE user?**

Firstly, the employer should assess the person using the above criteria to ascertain whether the person is, in fact, a DSE user.

Secondly, if identified as a DSE user, then the employer should:

- in conjunction with the user, conduct a risk assessment of the workstation to identify any potential risks; as necessary,
- make appropriate changes and adjustments to the workstations to reduce any risks;
- arrange, if so requested, for the DSE user to have an appropriate eyesight test (usually undertaken every 2 years); and
- provide, if necessary, special corrective glasses if normal corrective glasses cannot be used and the eyesight test identifies a specific DSE requirement.

### **6. If I am a DSE user, what must I do?**

As a DSE user, you should:

- in conjunction with your employer, conduct an assessment of your workstation;
- adjust your chair, screen and work environment to achieve a comfortable working position;
- inform your employer if you are unable to adopt a comfortable working position or have difficulties with your desk layout; and
- inform your employer if you suffer from any symptoms that may be caused by the use of your DSE.

### **7. What should I be looking for in a well laid out DSE workstation?**

There are a number of things that you should consider to ensure a well laid out DSE workstation is provided and most are common sense, such as:

- there is adequate lighting, and it is not too bright;
- the workstation is set at a right-angle to any windows and between rows of overhead lights to avoid glare;
- the workstation should be free of unnecessary clutter;
- distracting noises are minimised;

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- there is adequate leg-room (both height and depth) and clearance to allow the DSE user to undertake postural changes;
- the screen has a stable image that is adjustable (both distance and angle) and is free of glare and reflection;
- the keyboard is adjustable in position and all the keys are clearly legible;
- the DSE user's chair is adjustable for height, lumbar support and height of the arm rests;
- the provision of a footrest if your feet cannot comfortably reach the floor.

However, it is important to emphasise that the absence of one or more of these controls does not mean that the workstation is inadequate, but it becomes more important to ensure other factors are right.

### **8. Where can I find out more about DSE?**

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has published a leaflet, 'Working with VDUs', IND(G)36, that provides further guidance on the use of DSE in the workplace. In addition, HSE has prepared a 'DSE Workstation Checklist' that can be used to conduct DSE workstation self-assessments.

A copy of the leaflet and checklist can be downloaded free from HSE's website.