1. Principle?

While the hazards in offices are normally of a lesser nature than the ‘shop-floor’, there is still a requirement to ensure that flooring, furniture, equipment, space, lighting and ventilation is kept in good repair. Internal rooms should also be kept at a reasonable temperature. Offices are generally safe places if they are kept clean and tidy.

These guidance notes do not cover fire, electrical installations, lifts, or kitchen equipment, managing Legionella risk. These are specialist areas dealt with elsewhere.

2. How does this affect your organisation?

Office space should be purposefully designed to reduce the numbers of hazards. Consideration should be given to adjustable workstations, provision of purpose built storage, where to locate desks to provide sufficient space for users, access to power, services and clear walkways and emergency exit routes through the area.

3. Who has to do what?

Managers should be aware and willing to act to mitigate office risk by ensuring that cabling cannot be damaged. Bags should be put out of the way of walkways and open draws and trailing cables avoided.

Managers may also consider portable appliance testing for office equipment items. However, if the items are not moved regularly and cables are properly managed to avoid abrasion, damage or snagging, then there is little to go wrong. In most cases a periodic visual inspection of the cable and the plug top will be sufficient. Items that are frequently moved have a greater opportunity to be damaged and therefore may need more formal portable appliance testing.

4. What training is required?

No formal training is required to manage an office safely but an appreciation of the general hazards associated with office areas and good ergonomic design are helpful when alterations and new premises or locations are considered. Anyone working in an office still needs a basic induction to
cover welfare facilities, emergency evacuation procedures and instruction on setting up workstations correctly.

5. What documents and records do you have to keep?

Records of maintenance requests should any of the facility or its furniture require repair.

6. Where do you go for more information?

www.hse.gov.uk/office/

7. What else might you have to consider?

Managers should also consider the risks to workers using display screen equipment (computer workstations) which is covered in a different guide. They should also consider handling files stationery and the occasional movement of office equipment and mechanical handling aids should be provided if it is a proportionate action to reduce risk. They should also be mindful of what stressors may be present in the workplace and seek to mitigate these too: again the subject of a different guide in this series.

There is no reason why fully qualified electricians have to be employed to wire plugs, change fuses or carry out portable appliance testing. Provided that an employee is given the right equipment and trained how to do this, then they may carry out these activities.

Consideration should also be given to fire precaution and control, electrical installation maintenance, goods and people carrying lifts, specialist equipment (e.g. kitchen equipment, laboratory equipment or maintenance workshops. Ventilation and hot water systems will also need to be managed to avoid contamination with the Legionella bacillus. All these areas require more specialist advice.

www.iirsm.org