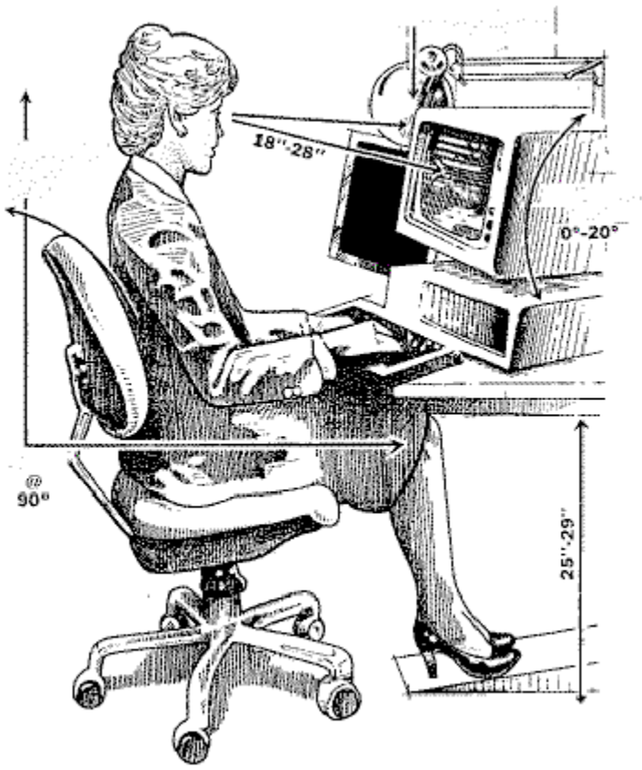
work Safe! Bulletin

Video Display Terminals

Bulletin No.: 113



In today's workplaces, the continuing concern about the health effects associated with Video Display Terminals (VDTs) has increased. Alleged reproductive effects and visual strain have been the main focus.

There may be a public conception that VDTs emit radiation that is a hazard to a pregnant worker or her fetus. Various agencies have done testing of radiation levels emitted by VDTs. These recorded levels have been found to be less than the presently established standards.

Scientific health studies have also been done to determine the total risk associated with VDTs. These studies do not indicate a direct link between working with a VDT and adverse pregnancy outcomes. However, there are still some doubts whether reported occurrences of miscarriages were normal, or caused by using a VDT.

Ergonomic conditions (i.e. workplace and job design conditions), and stress are two other potential factors that can be related to fetal distress or reduced fetal growth.

Adverse reproductive effects are not commonly associated with the sedentary activity usually found in VDT occupations. However, work conditions that involve unnaturally long periods of little or no movement, may restrict blood flow to the fetus.

The second factor is stress. It is also hard to measure, but is a daily part of the office environment, productivity demands, and inter-personal relationships.
In light of this information and the ongoing controversy, a prudent employer should consider relocating a pregnant operator for the term of the pregnancy, where requested.
Studies have been done on the possible harmful effects of VDTs on the operator's eyes. These studies have failed to indicate irreversible eye damage in VDT users as compared to nonusers of VDTs.

However, VDT operators do report a high incidence of eye problems. Symptoms include soreness, redness, stinging, itching, and general fatigue of the eyes, as well as dull headaches. Ergonomic problems such as pain in the neck and back may be related to using a VDT. These problems are usually associated with improper work practices, poor office design, and other stress factors.

These visual and ergonomic problems can be corrected through proper work station design, eye examinations, and where necessary the use of corrective lenses. It may become evident that some operators, who wear glasses and/or contact lenses, may need a change in their prescription.

Proper work station design includes consideration of:
· split keyboards and screens
· brightness and contrast controls
· document holders
· task lighting
· proper desks, chairs and footrests
· overhead lighting
· window location
· and work/rest regimes.

Stress factors such as:
· anxiety
· boredom
· fatigue
· increased workload
· unclear job descriptions
· job security and promotion.

These factors are not unique to VDT operators, and they can be minimized or eliminated through improved communications, continuing education, and frequent informational meetings.