



## Health and safety in the retail industry.

Guernsey's retailers are important to our island, employing many people and providing goods and services to the benefit of islanders. Ensuring that premises remain safe and healthy places for customers and staff is an important responsibility of any business. GOSHA advocates a sensible and practical approach be taken, not only to comply with the law but to uphold the good reputation and well-being of the business. GOSHA has prepared this leaflet to help to remind retailers of some of the hazards and action which can be taken to mitigate or eliminate risks.

### Lifting, Carrying and Standing

Lifting is an important part of all retail store work. Cashiers lift groceries during the whole work shift, stock clerks put products on shelves throughout the day, and department store staff stock and retrieve products from stockroom shelves frequently. These tasks contribute directly to the high rates of back injuries, lower back pain, hernias, heart and circulatory problems among retail store workers.

There are several important guidelines to follow when performing these tasks. Loads that seem too heavy for you to lift should be broken down into smaller units so that they are manageable. Mechanical lifting devices should be used to lift loads that are too heavy. If no mechanical device is available team work should be employed.

Heavy loads should not be lifted directly from the floor. Products should be stored at least 18 inches above the floor and not above shoulder height. A ladder may be necessary to be able to reach high items. A table may be necessary to bring products up to comfortable heights.

There is no evidence that back belts prevent back injury.

When performing carrying tasks, it is important to bring the load close to the body. Handles or cut handles should be used on cartons.

### Common health and safety concerns in the retail industry include:

- Handling and lifting materials
- Slipping, tripping and falling
- Using ladders
- Cuts and bruises
- Violence in the workplace
- Shopping and robbery
- Harassment
- Exposure to chemicals, biological hazards and diseases
- Biological hazards (like infectious diseases)
- Travelling safely to and from work

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Awkward postures such as twisting and turning while carrying a load should be avoided.

Standing can cause varicose veins and back fatigue, aching feet and muscle strain, among other ailments. Anti-fatigue mats made of a soft material, foot rests, stools and chairs can help relieve the constant pressure of standing for long periods of time.

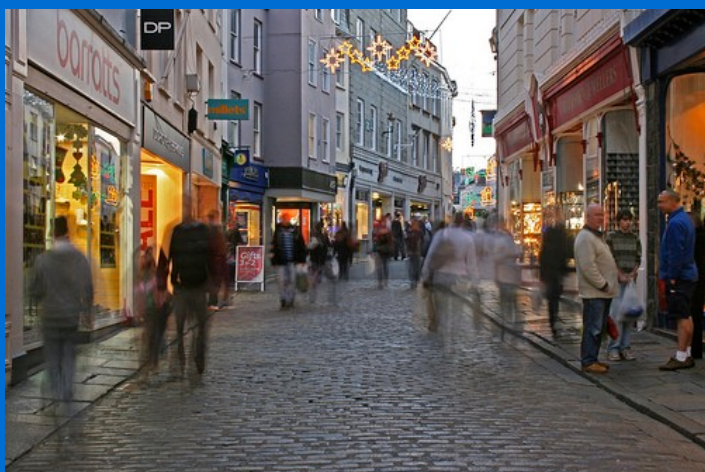
## Ergonomics

The basic idea of ergonomics (the study of workplace design) is to design the workplace to fit the worker and not change the worker to fit into a poorly designed workplace. Work stations must be adjustable to be able to accommodate the wide variety of heights and strengths of retail workers.

The best height for a working surface depends on the worker and whether or not he or she stands or sits. The ideal height is generally between 2 to 4 inches below the elbow for delicate work and between 6 to 18 inches below the elbow for heavy work. The solution for working surface height is to make the surface adjustable to accommodate each worker.

A workstation that allows for alternating between sitting and standing is important, as is room to move about without awkward motions and decent lighting.

## Repetitive Strain Injury



In many areas of a retail store there are workers performing jobs that require repetitive bending and twisting of the hands, wrists and upper body. These tasks often place excessive stress on muscles, tendons, blood vessels and nerves. These repetitive motions frequently result in conditions such as carpal tunnel syndrome, tendinitis, ganglion cysts and tenosynovitis. These conditions are serious, causing pain, loss of use of the hands and wrists and permanent damage.

Correct ergonomic design is one of the most important ways to avoid these kind of illnesses. Eliminate the twisting and bending caused by poorly designed tools and workstations is the only way to reduce the risk.

## Fire Prevention

Fire hazards often exist in retail stores due to flammable and combustible materials, electrical malfunctions, open flames, sparks, hot surfaces, smoking and unsafe storage of chemical products. The employer must have an emergency plan for how to evacuate the store, who to call in case of fire, and job tasks for people responsible for evacuation. Exit routes should not be blocked and must be clearly marked with exit signs. It is better to have a pre-emergency plan than for chaos to result when a fire breaks out, causing loss of life and property damage.

Fire extinguishers must be available if specified as a requirement by the fire authority and/or your insurer, in all retail situations GOSHA strongly recommends that they are made available.

Workers should be trained in how to use them. They must be the correct type for the hazard: type A for combustibles, type C for electrical equipment and type ABC for general fires. Fire extinguishers must be inspected regularly to ensure that they are in good working order. The needle gauge must be at the 12:00 o'clock position and the nozzle in good shape.

Good housekeeping and proper storage and disposal of combustible and flammable materials are the most important steps in preventing fires in a retail store. The employer must allow time in the work day for this type of work to be done.

## Computer Operators and Data Processors

Keyboard operators, telephone operators and other members use computers that come in a variety of shapes and sizes. One size workstation will not fit everyone. The key to a safe computer workstation is ensuring that it fits the user, is adjustable and comfortable.

The monitor should be placed 18-30 inches from the user and the top of the monitor should be level with the user's eyes. The keyboard should be detached from the monitor screen. It should be flat or slightly angled. Both should be easily adjustable.

The seat height and armrests should be adjustable and the width should be a minimum of 18 inches. The seat pan should be contoured and cushioned. The backrest should support the lumbar region. Foot rests should be provided.

The other rules of ergonomic design, like good lighting and space, are also necessary to avoid the risk of repetitive motion illnesses.

People employed in retail face an exhaustive list of hazards on the job. It is important for them to be aware of those dangers, as well as their employers' responsibilities in ensuring a safe workplace.

## Floors

Slips, trips and falls are common causes of injuries in all retail stores. Wet, slippery floors around produce, meat, fish and freezer areas are especially hazardous in grocery supermarkets. Similarly, aisles that are cluttered with boxes, and uneven cracked flooring are all hazards commonly found in department stores.

All spills need to be cleaned promptly, and time needs to be allowed to clear clutter and waste from the aisles.

## Machine Guarding

Many bakery, deli, meat and fish department workers as well as store carpenters and maintenance staff, use electrical equipment that can cause serious cuts, bruises, amputations, crushed bones and other injuries. The machines include saws, meat grinders, slicers, mixers, balers and waste disposal units. The moving parts must be guarded to prevent body contact with the machine, and chain mail gloves should be provided for cleaning them. Moving parts include belt drives, shear points, nip points pulleys, sprockets, blades, saw blades, rotating and flying parts.

In the deli or meat department, blades on the slicing machines must have machine guards to help prevent accidents. Non-automatic slicers must have a handhold protected from the blade. All slicers must be kept sharp so that force is not necessary. Deli workers should not wear loose clothing, which might get caught in the blades of a machine.

## Waste Disposal

Waste disposal is a hazard that is present in most retail store situations, and it must be dealt with cautiously to ensure that nobody is hurt. Waste compactors and loading doors should be interlocked with the drive mechanism so that the unit can not be operated unless the door is fully closed. Balers should have two handed stop and operating buttons that make you push both buttons simultaneously to operate. This keeps your hands at a safe location and dis-

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tance from danger. The feed throat on garbage disposal equipment and grinders should be guarded so that hands cannot come into contact with the moving blades.

## Electricity

Staff in department stores, supermarkets and other retail stores may face hazards from exposure to live electricity. Contact with energized equipment can cause shock, burns, startle accidents and even death.

Electric shock injuries are a danger when retail workers are exposed to live wiring, temporary wiring and damaged electrical equipment, especially when adequate training has not been given. It is estimated that more than half of all electric shock deaths and injuries can be prevented if employers provide training about electrical hazards and institute safe working practices.

In supermarkets, slicers, grinders, saws and other electrical appliances have exposed non-current carrying metal parts that can cause electrical shock when used near water. There is also the potential for shocks during routine maintenance and servicing if electrical lockout and tagout is not used to de-energize the powered equipment.

In department stores and other retail stores, exposed temporary wiring and damaged flexible cords can cause injury. Product displays and newly designed areas are frequently installed without permanent wiring. Back of the store stockrooms may have damaged wiring, temporary fixtures and obsolete electrical equipment. Retail workers should visually inspect all electrical wiring regularly to check for breaks, fraying, and other defects. All electric outlet boxes should be covered. All switch boxes and circuits should be labeled.

Residual current devices, which shut off electrical current in the event of a leak, should be used whenever possible, and electrical lockout and tagout, which prevents accidental start up of machinery during maintenance, should be practiced at all times.



## Indoor Air Quality and Pollution

Most retail stores are in "closed" buildings, where windows can not be opened easily and doorway exits are often in remote areas.

Indoor air pollution is caused by the build-up of vapors, particles, molds, fungus and bacteria in building air. The indoor sources of these pollut-

ants can be human waste, cigarette smoke, fuel-fired furnaces, building materials, furnishings, cleaning products, store consumer products, asbestos and pesticides. Molds, spores, fungus and bacteria can accumulate in standing water, wet furnishings, furnace water, and air ducts. Meat wrappers can be harmed by the vapors of burning plastic wrap.

Polluted outdoor air can be drawn into a building via the air intakes. Gases and particles from vehicle exhaust, as well as other pollutants from the area are common indoor air pollutants.

If unchecked, these pollutions can cause severe respiratory ailments. All workplaces where these risks are present need an effective mechanical ventilation system.

The system in store may include a series of fans, ducts, heating or cooling coils, vents, and hoods. A single air handling unit may handle several zones with different requirements within the store. A mechanical system must bring in fresh outdoor air, mix it with the air that is already circulating inside the store and distribute the conditioned air to all areas, including stock rooms, via ducts.

## Working in the Cold

Staff who work in cold environments like freezers, cold box storage rooms and refrigeration trucks need proper protection from the cold. Protection from the cold can be attained by wearing proper clothing and the redesigning of your working situation. Your employer should train you in the health hazards associated with exposure to cold, the early signs of overexposure, proper clothing and the safe work practices to use when working in cold temperatures. Clothing should be lightweight, waterproof and layered. It should allow moisture, such as sweat to evaporate from the inside, while preventing environmental moisture from penetrating to the inside. People perspire even in cold temperatures. If the outer layer of clothing prevents the sweat from evaporating and wets the clothing close to the body, the body will remain cold and wet, a dangerous combination. It is important to alternate working in cold areas with working in areas that are warm and heated.

Machinery, tools and jobs should be designed to make them less hazardous. Since clothing is bulky and there is loss of manual dexterity due to clothing and the cold, tasks should be redesigned with this in mind. Attention should be paid to spacing of handles, knobs and other mechanical parts. Tool handles should be easy to grasp. Metal parts should be insulated. There are a number of other dangers in retail workplaces, including chemical exposure, on-the-job stress and asbestos.

if you need help or guidance contact the Guernsey HSE on 234567 and you may also find it helpful to contact one of the training/H&S consultants shown in our website. The Guernsey Fire Service can be contacted for further fire prevention information or guidance.



## Hardening the Target

- The store should be kept clean and well-stocked
- Posters or signs should not block the area around the register from view
- If possible, workers should be able to see out and customers and police should be able to see in
- Make a cash drop or safety deposit box available
- Post signs advising that "Minimum cash is kept on premises."
- Operate only one register from late at night through early morning.

## Remember

- There should be written procedures for checking workers' wellbeing and getting emergency help when they need it.
- Employers are required to conduct risk assessments to identify potential hazards.

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