

Health and safety and the use of laptop computers

Guidelines for UNISON branches, safety representatives and stewards

Health and safety and the use of laptop computers

Guidelines for UNISON branches, safety representatives and stewards

Contents

Part 1: Background	1
The introduction of laptop computers and the risks to health and safety	1
What should employers do to prevent these risks?	1
What UNISON's survey of laptop use found	2
UNISON's risk assessment campaign	3
Safety representatives—making a difference	3
Part 2: The hazards of laptops	6
Lifting and carrying	6
Assaults and violent theft	7
Design and use of laptop computers	9
Work-related stress	12
Accidents and ill-health at work	14
Part 3: Bargaining to achieve improvements	16
Consultation	16
Assessing the risks of laptop work	18
Minimising the risks by improving work organisation	19
Negotiating a policy on laptops	20
Co-operation between employers—partnership agreements	21
Appendix 1: Health and safety checklist for negotiators	22
Appendix 2: Checklist for laptop users	25
Appendix 3: UNISON risk assessment checklist	28
Appendix 4: UNISON risk assessment form	31
Appendix 5: UNISON request for risk assessment records	32
Appendix 6: UNISON request for risk assessment review	33
Appendix 7: UNISON survey form on laptop computers	34
Further information	36

Part 1: Background

The introduction of laptop computers and the risks to health and safety

In the last few years many employers have been making increasing use of laptop computers and many staff are now required to use them as a substantial part of their normal work routine.

There is a range of health and safety hazards associated with the use of laptops. Some are similar to the hazards of any work with display screen equipment, such as vision disorders, headaches, musculo-skeletal disorders or stress.

But the risks may also be greater because in making the laptop equipment so compact it is no longer possible to meet the standards for good ergonomic design of equipment. That is, it is impossible to ensure a good fit between someone and the equipment he or she is using; it becomes more difficult to maintain a good posture while working.

Other hazards are associated with the portability of the equipment: users must carry them around with them, increasing the risk of back injuries and other musculo-skeletal injuries.

Users are also at increased risk of violent attack and theft because it is very obvious that they are carrying valuable technology which is relatively easy to snatch.

UNISON is concerned about the health and safety implications for all UNISON members who use laptops. One such group of members, careers advisers, are now frequently required to make extensive use of laptops, for example for entering clients' details during career guidance interviews and for producing career action plans for their clients at the schools and colleges they visit. They reported a number of serious health and safety concerns, so UNISON conducted a survey to find more information on the extent of the use of laptops by careers advisers and the problems they were experiencing.

We found the survey results extremely disturbing, and believe that the results are applicable to all users of laptops, not just careers advisers. We have therefore produced this guidance, to help safety representatives and negotiators to start to tackle the issue. Although the guidance is based on the survey of careers advisers the issues raised are common to laptop users, so the advice is applicable to any UNISON members who use laptops, whatever their job.

What should employers do to prevent these risks?

All employers have a general duty, under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, to ensure the health, safety and welfare at work of all their employees. Their health and safety policy and the arrangements for carrying it out must be set out in writing and brought to the attention of all employees.

More specifically, under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992 (referred to from now on as the Management Regulations),

all employers have a duty to assess the risks to health and safety to which their employees may be exposed at work and to implement measures to prevent or control those risks. The risk assessments must identify all the hazards and assess all the risks. 'Hazards' are those aspects of work that have the potential to cause harm and 'risks' are the likelihood that the harm will occur from the hazards identified.

Employers must appoint competent persons, with appropriate knowledge and understanding, to assist them and must provide these people with adequate time and resources to carry out their functions.

Risk assessments must cover anything and everything relating to the work and the workplace, including working away from the normal workplace. They should cover not only obvious physical or chemical hazards but also things like staffing levels, work organisation, lone working, working with the public, training provision. They must include everyone who may be at risk, identify groups of workers who may be especially vulnerable and they must take particular account of the risks to pregnant women and new mothers.

A proper risk assessment should enable the employer to identify and prioritise the measures that need to be taken to deal with the risks. The first requirement is to prevent the risk by eliminating the hazard altogether or by substituting a safer alternative. If elimination or substitution are not possible the employer must control the risks, with control at source being the first priority. One of the key 'control measures' is providing adequate health and safety information and training to employees and the Regulations say employers must ensure this is done.

The Management Regulations also require employers to co-operate and co-ordinate health and safety measures where their activities interact, for example where they share work premises or where staff are contracted to work at another employer's premises.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) take risk assessment very seriously and are taking strong enforcement action against employers who fail to carry out risk assessments and so put their employees' health and safety at risk. Precedent has already been set for prosecuting and fining an employer for not complying with their risk assessment duties, even though no personal accident or injury had actually occurred as a result.

To find out more about risk assessment, see the list of UNISON's publications in *Further information*.

What UNISON's survey on laptop use found

The full report of UNISON's survey of laptop use in the careers service, to which 500 careers advisers responded, has been published separately (see *Further information*). Briefly, the survey found that 94% of employers in the careers service have introduced laptops and that 81% of careers advisers use them for writing career action plans and 71% use them for inputting data on client records. Laptop use is extensive, with 62% of careers advisers using a laptop continuously between one and five hours per day. Many careers advisers are already suffering ill-health effects from use of laptops and stress was widely reported.

Some of the findings which are of most concern were:

- 61% reported back pain

- 60% reported neck pain
- 55% reported pain in their arms and hands
- 68% reported eyestrain
- 63% reported headaches
- 55% found laptops heavy
- 49% were concerned about the risk of assault.

Many of the careers advisers reported that they were suffering multiple health problems, for example:

- 89% of those who suffered headaches also suffered eyestrain
- 81% of those who suffered back pain also suffered eyestrain
- 80% of those who suffered back pain also suffered headaches
- 79% of those who suffered back pain also suffered neck pain
- 69% of those who suffered back pain also suffered pain in arms and hands.

Given this level of suffering among careers advisers, it is clear that employers in the careers service have not been complying with their legal duties to carry out risk assessments and to take action to prevent or control risks. UNISON believes these findings may also apply to members in other jobs who use laptops.

As well as putting themselves in danger of enforcement action by the HSE, employers also face possible litigation from injured employees suing them for negligence. UNISON's Legal Department has taken up the cases of thousands of members who have suffered personal injury or ill health at work and won substantial amounts of compensation, including a recent award of £70,000 for a member who developed repetitive strain injury (RSI) as a result of their work.

UNISON's risk assessment campaign

UNISON believes that surveys such as the laptop survey and other reports from members provide clear evidence that many employers are just not taking their risk assessment duties seriously. That is why in 1997 we launched our campaign—*Work! it's a risky business*. We want UNISON representatives to get employers to sign up to joint action with the union to improve health and safety at work by doing thorough risk assessments and agreeing a programme of action to prevent or reduce risks. Representatives can use the national risk assessment campaign to help them tackle the particular problems they face in their own workplace. The introduction of laptop computers highlights many examples of the sorts of things that need to be properly assessed.

See *Further information* for UNISON publications.

Safety representatives—making a difference

UNISON safety representatives can play an important part in ensuring that risk assessments are done properly. Trade union safety representatives have legal rights under the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977 to support them in tackling problems in the workplace. These rights were strengthened further by the Management Regulations, which gave reps additional rights to be consulted by their employers.

UNISON members in the careers service should ensure that they elect safety representatives and that those representatives get TUC or UNISON training so that they understand their rights and how to use them effectively. UNISON branch health and safety officers are there to provide advice and support but it is the workplace safety representative who has rights in law. The rights can be summarised as follows:

The right to information

- To be consulted by their employer on health and safety matters.
- To receive information from the employer to assist them in their functions.
- To receive information from Health and Safety Inspectors.
- To inspect and take copies of health and safety documents and accident records held by the employer.

The right to investigate

- To investigate potential hazards, accidents and dangerous occurrences at the workplace.
- To investigate the health and safety complaints of the people they represent.

The right to inspect

- To carry out inspections of the workplace every three months and more frequently if there have been substantial changes in work conditions (such as the introduction of new technology) or in the light of new information from the Health and Safety Commission or Executive (for example new information about VDUs or stress).
- To carry out inspections following a notifiable industrial accident, disease or dangerous occurrence.

Organisational rights

- To make representations to the employer about any matters affecting the health and safety of the people they represent.
- To represent members in consultations with Inspectors from the enforcing authorities.
- To have paid time off for training and for carrying out their functions.
- To be provided with facilities from the employer including facilities for private discussion with members.
- To request (with at least one other safety representative) that the employer set up a safety committee.
- To attend meetings of safety committees

Consultation rights

The right to be consulted by the employer, in good time (that is, before changes take place), about:

- The introduction of any measures that could affect the health and safety of their members.
- The health and safety consequences for their members of the introduction of new technologies into the workplace.
- The health and safety information and training provided to them and to their members.

- The arrangements for appointing a competent person to assist the employer to carry out their health and safety duties.

The introduction of new technology in the form of laptops is something on which safety representatives should most certainly be consulted. Safety representatives should ensure that they are involved and consulted from the very start whenever changes are being considered. They should use their rights to inspection and investigation to check whether members are experiencing problems and to ensure that the employer deals with them. This guidance sets out some of the things to look out for.

Part 2: The hazards of laptops

This part gives more detailed advice about the particular hazards of working with laptops. It includes information about any specific legislation or official guidance from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) that applies.

Lifting and carrying

Hazards

If laptop users have to carry their equipment around with them they are at increased risk of manual handling injuries such as strains of the back, neck and shoulder. The variety of computers in use is quite wide, ranging from notebooks to mini-computers. Many have integral printers which make them considerably heavier. The weight of the equipment, leads and carrying case may be as much as 9 kilograms.

Staff are also likely to have to carry other items related to their work. Careers advisers, for example, may have to carry supplies of paper and forms, reference books and their clients' files. The distance over which this equipment has to be carried can be considerable, particularly if there are no car parking facilities nearby or if advisers have to use public transport. Once they arrive on site at a large college or school they may have to carry the equipment up several flights of stairs or down long corridors.

Employers' legal duties

As well as their general duties to carry out risk assessments, employers have specific duties under the Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992. They must first of all avoid the need for manual handling altogether. If some manual handling tasks cannot be avoided then employers must assess the risks of injury to employees and take steps to minimise them.

Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992

Employers must:

- Avoid the need for employees to undertake manual handling operations which involve a risk of their being injured, so far as is reasonably practicable.
- If manual handling cannot be avoided, make a suitable and sufficient assessment of the operation taking into account:
 - the task
 - the load
 - the working environment
 - individual capability (including pregnancy or recent childbirth)
 - other relevant factors.
- Reduce the risk of injury to the lowest level reasonably practicable.
- Provide information about the weight of the load and its heaviest side.
- Review the assessment if it is no longer valid or if there has been a significant change in the manual handling operations.

The Health and Safety Executive has produced a number of publications for employers setting out in more detail what they need to do to comply with the

Regulations. These range from free leaflets to more detailed guides for specific sectors (see *Further information*).

Advice to safety representatives

The rate of back injuries among members is of great concern to UNISON: one of our campaign priorities is to prevent back pain by ensuring proper manual handling risk assessments are carried out. Safety representatives can play a part by using their legal rights, checking their employers' risk assessments and ensuring that remedial action is taken. There are a number of UNISON publications that can help (see *Further information*).

Avoiding manual handling

The best way to avoid manual handling risks altogether is by eliminating the need to carry laptops. This means substituting laptops with a desk top personal computer (PC) on each client's site so that it is only necessary for staff to carry disks with them.

Reducing the risks of manual handling

Until the use of laptops can be eliminated the risks of injury must be assessed by the employer and a safe system of work devised. The choice of laptops should optimise their design and weight. Risks may be reduced in a number of ways:

- By reducing the total load, for example by arranging for supplies of paper or a printer to be stored on the client's site, or for access to the client's printer.
- By using carrying aids such as trolleys, bags that can be carried on the back rather than one shoulder (some companies do provide these or pay an allowance for their purchase), or by ensuring shoulder straps are long enough to allow the load to be carried across the body rather than on one shoulder.
- By reducing the distance that loads have to be carried, for example by negotiating designated parking or unloading areas nearby and by ensuring that a ground floor level room is allocated for interviews.
- By providing training in safe lifting and handling techniques, especially in and out of cars.

The alternatives need to be assessed carefully for each situation. For example, it would be inappropriate just to supply everyone with a trolley if several of those people still had to negotiate flights of stairs or public transport where the use of a trolley could worsen the problem.

Assaults and violent theft

Hazards

Laptop computers are a prime target for theft. The requirement to carry a laptop around increases the risk to staff of being assaulted by someone trying to steal it. The fact that many laptop users, including careers advisers, work alone may make them more vulnerable, particularly when travelling at night.

The attempted robbery may be opportunist or it could be carried out by someone who has observed the daily work routine of the worker and the fact that they regularly carry this valuable equipment. The theft could be attempted while the laptop is actually being carried by the individual or might be from their car.

Employers' legal duties

The duties of employers under the Management Regulations to carry out risk assessments and to prevent or control risks include a duty to assess the risks of violence to their staff. The HSE has published several guidance documents for employers on violence at work, ranging from a general advice leaflet to detailed guidance for specific work sectors (see *Further information*). Work-related violence is defined by the HSE as 'any incident in which an employee is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances arising out of the course of his or her employment'.

Work-related violence is foreseeable; some of the work situations identified in HSE guidance as putting people at potential risk are:

- providing care, advice or training
- working alone
- carrying or handling money or valuables.

The HSE advises employers to adopt a seven step approach to assessing the risks and putting in place effective preventive measures.

Violence to staff: HSE guidance to employers

Employers should:

1. Find out whether there is a problem (by asking staff and their union representatives).
2. Record all incidents (using a report form and making sure that everyone knows how to use it).
3. Classify all incidents (for example, by place, time, type of incident, who was involved and possible causes).
4. Search for preventive measures (for example, changing the design of jobs, avoiding the need to carry valuables such as laptops, providing training, providing means of summoning help, ensuring that the work schedule for staff working off base is known, considering the timing of visits, the arrangements at work sites, for example environment, car parking, lighting).
5. Decide what to do (involving staff in the choice of preventive measures).
6. Put the measures into practice (including publishing the policy for preventing violence in the safety policy statement and ensuring employees are made aware of it).
7. Check that the measures work (through joint management and trade union committees).

The HSE has also published a leaflet on working alone in safety (see *Further information*) which covers mobile workers who may work alone for part of their job. In it the HSE stresses that risk assessments of lone working must be carried out by the employer to determine the necessary precautions to be taken.

Under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995 (RIDDOR), employers must notify the enforcing authority in the event of an accident at work to any employee resulting in death, major injury or incapacity for work of three or more days. The Regulations specify that an accident at work includes an act of physical violence.

Advice to safety representatives

UNISON wants to ensure that employers do not ignore the risks of violence to employees when carrying out their risk assessments. Many of the risks are foreseeable and must therefore be assessed and prevented.

Violence is not just a law and order issue to be left to the individual to deal with. It is a health and safety issue to which UNISON gives high priority and we have published guidance to enable safety representatives to tackle the issue effectively (see *Further information*). Safety representatives can use their legal rights to raise work-related violence with their employer.

Preventing violence

The most obvious way of preventing the risk of assault or violent theft is to ensure that staff do not have to carry laptop computers as they are attractive to potential thieves. The substitution of desk top computers installed on site would eliminate the need for laptops to be carried. The risk of violence from any other aspect of employees' work will still need to be assessed and prevented or reduced.

Reducing the risk of violence

Until the use of laptops can be eliminated, safety representatives should ensure that employers assess the risks using the step by step approach recommended by the HSE and work with them to agree jointly the most effective precautions to be taken. As indicated above, any other risks of violence arising from the work should be assessed at the same time. Things to consider include:

- The locations which staff visit, car parking arrangements, lighting etc.
- If laptops are carried, whether advisers are being told to take them home because the employers' building security is inadequate etc.
- The procedures for leaving details of their itinerary for the day, reporting in etc.
- Arrangements for getting home late at night.
- Arrangements for summoning help, mobile phones, radio alarms.
- Training in procedures for dealing with violence, including not putting oneself at risk in order to protect property etc.
- How incidents are reported, provision of report forms etc.

Design and use of laptop computers

Hazards

There are a number of health and safety hazards associated with the design and use of laptop computers. Many of the hazards are the same as those for any work with display screen equipment. However, the risks may be greater for laptop use because, by its design, the compact technology cannot meet the ergonomic standards required for standard desk top equipment, so it is difficult for users to achieve a comfortable working posture.

The design of laptops means that the screen and keyboard are fixed and cannot be adjusted separately to ensure that the screen is at the correct height and angle for the eyes at the same time as the keyboard is at the correct level for the hands and arms.

The screen is small and the display is less easy to read, particularly on older

models. Because of the limited movement of the screen it may not be possible to angle it to cut out all glare.

The keyboard is also small and, although manufacturers may claim that the letter keys are the same size as those on a standard keyboard, the function keys are usually squashed around the remaining space so that the hands feel cramped during use. (In any case, increasing numbers of DSE users are now given the choice of an ergonomic, curved or split keyboard and do not use a standard keyboard.)

Irritation and stress may build up because keys are placed in a different position or in an awkward juxtaposition, for example, the delete and cursor keys next to each other. Often the pointing and clicking devices are more difficult to control than a standard mouse.

Although it may be possible to use the laptop with a separate keyboard or mouse to allow more flexibility and avoid some of the worse problems, this will add to the total weight being carried so is not an ideal solution.

Furthermore, because laptops are portable, users may be put under pressure to use them at an inappropriate workstation, thus increasing the risk of problems caused by poor posture.

The principal hazards from the use of laptops are musculo-skeletal disorders such as back pain, neck pain and work-related upper limb disorders (WRULDs) or repetitive strain injury (RSI) as these disorders, which may involve pain in fingers, hand, arm or shoulder, are commonly called. Other hazards are visual fatigue, sore eyes and headaches, and stress and physical fatigue.

The risks are especially high if laptops are actually used on the lap, in a car or at the low coffee tables and chairs which are often provided by clients to give a more relaxed and informal atmosphere to interviews such as careers guidance interviews. For example, constant pressure on careers advisers to complete and sign the action plan during each interview can lead to stress which is not only a health risk in itself but is also an important risk factor in musculo-skeletal disorders. WRULDs can develop rapidly into chronic and disabling conditions and it is important that they are recognised and dealt with as early as possible.

Vision disorders and headaches may be experienced if eyesight defects are not detected and corrected before screen based work begins.

Employers' legal duties

As well as their general legal duties to carry out risk assessments, employers have specific duties under the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 (the DSE Regulations) to assess the risks of DSE work and implement measures to prevent or control them.

The Regulations set out some criteria for defining DSE users and DSE equipment. They cover portable systems unless they are not in prolonged use. UNISON's survey of careers advisers showed that most of these staff did use their portable computers for prolonged periods so their employers should be complying with the requirements of these Regulations. Even if the laptops are not used for prolonged periods, the employer still has a duty to carry out risk assessments under the Management Regulations if there could be a risk (for example if staff are complaining of aches and pains).

The HSE guidance to the DSE Regulations (see *Further information*) sets out

the approach and standards to aim for. The HSE is in the process of reviewing its guidance so that it takes account of technological developments such as the increasing use of laptops, the introduction of software requiring intensive use of a mouse or other pointing device etc. Their most recent leaflet gives the following advice about portable computers:

'Laptops and other portable computers have to be compact enough to be easy to carry. This results in design compromises, like smaller keyboards and screens, that make portables less comfortable in prolonged use than a normal VDU.

It is best to avoid using a portable for long periods when full-sized equipment is available. And like other VDU users, people who habitually use a portable should be trained how to minimise risks. This includes sitting comfortably, angling the screen so it can be seen clearly with minimal reflections, and taking frequent breaks if work is prolonged. Wherever possible, portables should be placed on a firm surface at the right height for keying.'

Advice to safety representatives

Although the DSE Regulations have been in force for several years, many employers still do not take them seriously, believing that the hazards of DSE work are trivial. Furthermore, many employers believe that portables are not covered by the legislation even though it is clear that the exclusions only apply if portables are not used for prolonged periods. However, many employees are suffering serious musculo-skeletal disorders and other problems so it is important that safety representatives use their legal rights and raise these problems with their employers. There are UNISON publications on office hazards, DSE, RSI etc. that will be helpful (see *Further information*).

Preventive measures

Since laptops cannot meet the ergonomic standards laid down they should be replaced by full-size desk top computers at each site that employees visit as the first line in prevention. The computer should be installed at a suitable desk and a fully adjustable chair should be provided.

Risk assessments should be carried out for the work in accordance with the Regulations in the normal way. Particular attention must be paid to ensuring that the equipment and workstation meet ergonomic standards, that there are adequate breaks and changes of activity, that proper training is given and that employees have any eyesight problems corrected before they start screen-based work.

Protective measures

Until laptops can be eliminated it is important that the employer carries out risk assessments and takes steps to minimise the risks. This means applying the requirements of the legislation even more stringently since the risks are potentially greater.

- Workstations must be suitable, with full-height desks and fully adjustable chairs to allow users to achieve the best working position.
- Suitable lighting and the ability to reduce glare are also important.
- Work schedules should be flexible and users must be allowed to take frequent breaks from keyboard work.
- Full eye and eyesight tests should be provided and the optician should be told that the work involves looking at a small laptop screen with less

possibility for distance adjustment, so that they can give the appropriate advice.

- Proper information and training should be given about the health risks and how to avoid them by ensuring good posture, taking frequent breaks, doing simple exercises etc.
- Particular consideration should be given to women who are pregnant and who need to be able to work in a position which does not put pressure on the abdomen or lower back.
- Procedures should be put in place for reporting promptly any symptoms, such as pain or numbness, so that remedial action can be taken before the condition worsens or becomes chronic and difficult to treat.

Work-related stress

Hazards

UNISON's survey found that the use of laptops in the careers advice service has led to an increase in the levels of reported stress. The problems arise both from the actual use of laptops, such as the fear of violence or the inability to achieve a comfortable working posture, and from the organisational context in which they have been introduced. The organisational factors are a particularly significant source of stress.

The linking of a percentage of public funding for careers service companies to overall career action plan targets has led to the setting of what are often unacceptably high targets by the Government and the careers service companies.

Within individual companies, careers advisers' personal targets may be unrealistic in cases where staffing levels have fallen. On top of this, the requirement by some companies for individual action plans to be completed and signed at the time of the interview has placed careers advisers under increased pressure to produce a large number of action plans with only a short space of time for each. This has also led to a feeling of dissatisfaction because they believe they are compromising the quality of the professional service they provide for quantity of action plans.

Many careers advisers have also experienced a change from being supported by clerical staff to having to be largely self supporting in terms of doing their own data inputting, word processing etc. This has happened with very little training in the keyboard skills required. Although careers advisers accept that they will have to work with new technologies, the manner in which changes have taken place has left them feeling deskilled rather than empowered by the technology.

These types of pressures will be all too familiar to other groups of public service workers who use laptops.

Employers' legal duties

The employers' general duties under the Management Regulations to carry out risk assessments include a duty to assess the risks of stress in their organisation. The Health and Safety Executive says that employers must ensure that health is not put at risk through excessive and sustained levels of stress arising from the way work is organised, the way people deal with each other at work or from the day to day demands placed on the workforce. The HSE has published guidance for employers so that they can understand how workplace stress may arise and what they need to do.

The HSE advise that stress is most likely to occur if:

- Pressures pile up on top of each other or are prolonged.
- People feel trapped or unable to exert control over the demands made upon them.
- People are confused by conflicting demands made on them.

Other risk factors include:

- inflexible or overdemanding work schedules
- lack of understanding from managers
- uncertainty about work and objectives
- demands of working with people
- fear of violence
- inadequate control of workplace hazards
- bullying by managers
- managers who do not listen to staff or involve them in decisions over changes.

Advice to safety representatives

UNISON wants employers to take stress seriously and to treat it like any other workplace hazard by assessing and reducing the risks. We have published guidance on stress to help safety representatives to address the problem in their own workplace (see *Further information*).

Safety representatives can use their legal rights to raise stress with the employer and ensure it is tackled. They should ensure that the employer uses the HSE guidance and follows the advice contained in it.

Preventing stress

Preventive measures will depend on what causes of stress have been identified. They could include:

- avoiding the need to carry and use laptops
- agreeing more realistic work targets
- agreeing more flexible work deadlines
- organising work to allow for more daily task variety
- giving employees more control over their own work routine
- giving employees more say in decision making
- providing more training
- ensuring staffing levels are adequate
- ensuring employees have the support they need
- improving communications
- having procedures for reporting stress.

Accidents and ill health at work

Most of Part 2 has discussed the hazards of laptop work and how to assess and prevent the risks of injury and ill-health arising from those hazards. In circumstances where accidents or ill-health do occur, employers have a duty to ensure that these are reported and investigated. They should also use their accident and ill-health records to help monitor their health and safety performance and identify whether further action is needed.

Accident book

All employers have a duty to keep an accident book and to ensure that all accidents and incidents are reported, whether these occur on or off site, and however slight they may seem. Although an accident may seem unimportant at the time, it could lead to complications later on, which is why it is important that it is noted in the accident book.

'Near misses' should also be reported as they may help identify a hazard which can be removed or prevented before, rather than after, it causes an accident.

It is also important that symptoms of work-related ill health are entered in the accident book as this provides a written record which can be referred to at a later date if necessary. Employers should not try to argue that ill health symptoms are not accidents and safety representatives should insist that these details are entered if the employer has no other means of keeping records of work-related ill health.

Staff should be actively encouraged to report all accidents, incidents and near misses. It is particularly important that staff working off site can report accidents and incidents.

Reporting under RIDDOR

Employers have a legal duty under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences 1995 (RIDDOR) to report certain specified or 'notifiable' injuries, diseases and dangerous occurrences.

Notifiable injuries include deaths, major injuries and injuries which cause sickness absence of three days or more, and include injuries suffered as a result of physical violence. Notifiable diseases include some musculo-skeletal injuries. Detailed guidance on the Regulations has been published by the HSE, as well as a short leaflet for employers (see *Further information*).

Investigating

Employers should always investigate the cause of accidents and ill health and review their risk assessments in the light of their findings so that any additional preventive measures needed can be implemented. Safety representatives should ensure that such reviews are carried out jointly with the union and that safety representatives are involved. Regular review of accidents and ill health should be on the agenda of the joint safety committee so that priorities for action can be agreed and set. Trade union safety representatives have a right to investigate the cause of accidents or ill-health at the workplace.

If you suffer an accident or ill-health from work

If you have an accident or near miss or if you suffer ill-health, aches or pains caused by your work, you should report this in your employer's accident book even if the incident occurred off site. You should also tell your UNISON

safety representative, who has a legal right to investigate problems on your behalf.

Making entries in the accident book provides important documentary evidence that there is a problem which your employer must address. Also, if you visit your GP, you should tell them that you think your ill health is work-related and get them to record this in your notes. If you need the union to act on your behalf at a later date this will be valuable supporting information.

Part 3: Bargaining to achieve improvements

At national level UNISON is taking action on the issue of laptops. We have sent the survey report to the Health and Safety Executive, and have pressed them to investigate the risks, including manual handling and violence, of portable computers to all users. We have also asked them to include these risks in their review of the guidance to employers on work with display screen equipment.

We have also sent the report to the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) and the Careers Service National Association. We have pressed the DfEE to re-examine the linking of 15% of public funding to action plan targets and are pleased that the Government has now made a commitment to stop using action plans as a funding measure with effect from 1998/99. However, the DfEE intends that action plans will continue as a key element of performance measurement in careers guidance and we are making representations to ensure that it does not become a national policy requirement that they are to be completed and signed at each interview.

We have requested the opportunity to work with the Careers Service National Association to produce guidance on good practice based on what some of the more enlightened companies are already doing.

At workplace level UNISON representatives can also take action to ensure that members' health and safety is protected. This part of the guidelines discusses some of the main issues which should be included in the bargaining strategy:

- consultation
- risk assessments
- preventing and minimising risks
- health and safety policies
- co-operation between employers.

As the survey results raise issues which are common to many laptop users, branches can use the results given in this guidance as evidence to present to employers where other members are experiencing problems with laptop use, or before the introduction of laptops.

In addition branches could carry out their own survey (see Appendix 7) to gain more detailed information on members using laptops.

Consultation

UNISON representatives should make sure that employers are aware of their duty to consult them when changes are proposed. Safety representatives have a right to be consulted in good time about anything that may affect their members' health and safety, including the introduction of new technology or new ways of working (see Part 1).

'In good time' means when there is still a chance of influencing decisions, not after the decision has been taken. It means allowing time for representatives to discuss proposed changes with members and to get feedback about their

views. It means allowing time to research the issue and find any relevant information. Representatives should seek to negotiate a written agreement with their employer on the range of health and safety issues for consultation, timescales for discussion with members etc.

Purchasing policy

Safety representatives should ensure that they are consulted by the employer about their purchasing policy for computer equipment. Representatives should get involved straightaway as some laptops will have been in use for several years already and employers will be taking decisions now about the next generation of computers to be purchased.

The trend is towards increasingly compact systems so what may be gained in reduced weight will be lost in ergonomic design, with smaller keyboards and screens etc. The smaller the system the more expensive the equipment tends to be, so there are persuasive economic arguments to be made as well as health and safety ones for replacing these with desk top computers at the client's site.

A timetable should be agreed for the replacement of laptops by desk top computers.

If individuals are experiencing health problems their work should be reassessed and commitment should be sought for prompt replacement of the laptop as part of the remedial action required following the risk assessment.

'Competent persons'

Safety representatives also have the right to be consulted about who the employer appoints as the 'competent persons' for carrying out risk assessments. They should be satisfied that the competent person has knowledge and understanding of:

- the work being assessed
- the principles of risk assessment and prevention
- up to date health and safety measures
- identification of work hazards

They should also be able to:

- identify health and safety issues
- assess the need for action
- design, develop and implement strategies and plans
- check the effectiveness of these strategies and plans
- promote good health, safety and welfare practices
- know their limitations and when to call for other experts.

Although safety representatives should be consulted about the competent person to do the risk assessments, they should ensure that the employer does not try to put the responsibility for carrying out risk assessments onto safety representatives themselves.

It is the employer's responsibility to do risk assessments, though safety representatives can play an important part in checking that they are done properly. Reps should not feel pressurised to carry out risk assessments themselves because they think that this is the only way to make sure they are done.

Assessing the risks of laptop work

UNISON representatives should ensure that employers are complying with their legal duties to carry out risk assessments. They should use UNISON's risk assessment campaign materials to help them negotiate a joint approach (see *Further information*). They should ensure that employers take into account both laptop design and laptop use.

The main legal requirements

For laptop work employers' main risk assessment duties are set out in the following legislation:

- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992—covering all hazards, all risks, all people who may be affected.
- Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992—covering specified display screen equipment, DSE users.

The Management Regulations are the overriding Regulations with which all employers must comply. Employers' risk assessments must set out the measures needed to prevent or minimise risks. Prevention is the first priority.

When considering the risks arising from the design of laptops, representatives should note that they can also use the requirements of the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1992 to help them in their negotiations. These Regulations require employers to:

- Ensure that work equipment is suitable for the purpose for which it is provided.
- Have regard to the working conditions and to the risks to health and safety where that work equipment is to be used.
- Ensure that work equipment is used only for operations for which it is suitable and under conditions which are suitable.

The HSE says that employers' risk assessments under the Management Regulations should enable them to select work equipment and assess its suitability for the task. This may mean that laptops would have to be withdrawn as a result of the findings of the risk assessments.

Wherever work with display screen equipment is carried out employers must also comply with the more specific requirements of the DSE Regulations. Work with laptops is covered by the DSE Regulations unless it is not prolonged. What is meant by 'prolonged use' is not spelled out but the HSE guidance says that if portable equipment is in habitual use for a significant part of users' normal work it is covered by the Regulations.

UNISON's survey results show that the majority of careers advisers do habitually use laptops for a significant part of their job so we believe that employers should be complying with the legislation. And, as laptops are less suitable ergonomically, the length of time they can be used before they cause problems will be less than for conventional computers used in the same conditions.

In cases where it is decided that laptop use is not a significant part of the normal work, employers still have a duty to assess the risks and implement preventive or protective measures under the Management Regulations. Even though they may not be required to comply with all the detail of the DSE Regulations, safety representatives should ensure that employers use the HSE guidance to the DSE Regulations to help them identify the approach to take.

Preventing the risks—elimination or substitution

The general risk assessment should identify all the hazards of laptops, including their design, their use, manual handling, violence and stress, and the measures needed to prevent or minimise them. In deciding the measures needed, the first considerations should be whether laptops are desirable.

For example, are they really necessary for the work of careers advisers? The employer should ask whether they can be eliminated and PCs used instead, by reorganising work so that careers advisers do not have to use a laptop but instead can use:

- a PC provided by the employer at the client's site
- a PC at their office base
- clerical support for this work.

Elimination and substitution *are* possible. For example, some careers service companies have already taken the decision to provide PCs at the clients' site. These include Cambridgeshire Careers, Cumbria Careers, and Shropshire Careers Services. Lifetime Careers in Stockport and High Peak, and Quality Careers Services do not use laptops to produce action plans, the latter ensuring that there are sufficient PCs for every careers adviser in every office where they work. Other companies, for example, Careers Enterprise Group, are investigating the feasibility of using PCs at the clients' site either provided by them or made available by the client.

Careers Enterprise Group are also testing the practicality of using portable Zip drives in conjunction with PCs. Zip drives are small and light with the capacity to store large amounts of data using special Zip disks. They can be used for transferring large files between PCs, for storing personal information or as a backup to the hard disk. One Zip disk can store about the same amount of data as 70 floppy disks. Staffordshire Careers, who build their own PCs, provide PCs on site with a removable Zip drive built in to them, and report that careers advisers are very pleased with them.

Minimising the risks of laptop work by improving work organisation

Work targets and 'action plans'

If laptops have not been eliminated but are still in use for whatever reason, the employer should minimise the risks as far as possible. Risks can be minimised by reviewing the way the use of laptops has been integrated into the organisation of work.

For example, in the case of careers advisers this should involve reviewing the procedures for producing action plans. In a number of organisations the way action plan requirements have been introduced has been a contributory factor in putting additional pressures on careers advisers and placing them at increased risk of physical and mental stress. Many other public service workers using laptops are working under similar pressures from unrealistic performance targets and inflexible deadlines.

In the careers service example, representatives should negotiate with the employer to ensure that individual action plan targets are realistic and take account of staffing levels. Representatives should also negotiate with the employer to ensure that timetables for completing action plans are flexible. Staff should have discretion over whether to complete and sign action plans

on the spot or to send them out within an agreed timescale. They should not be required to complete and sign all plans during the interview merely because the technology enables this to be done or because it avoids the need for posting the plan on for signature and return.

Careers advisers should have the option of completing action plans at a desk top PC in their office. This is particularly important for outreach workers who are unlikely to have access to a PC at the sort of sites they visit, such as youth centres or probation offices. It is also in line with the HSE recommendation that long periods of laptop use should be avoided when full-sized equipment is available.

Consideration should also be given to using clerical support for data input whenever possible. The clerical tasks will, of course, also need to be risk assessed so that clerical workers do not spend all their time doing intensive work at a keyboard. Staffing levels should be increased rather than allow workloads to build up excessively.

The work organisation of other laptop users should be critically examined in a similar way.

Breaks and changes in activity

The DSE Regulations require employers to plan work to allow users to take regular breaks from keyboard work and to undertake different activities so that they do not have to maintain awkward or static positions for a long time. This is particularly important with laptops. Representatives should ensure that careers advisers have a say in the organisation of their work and discretion over when to take breaks or perform different tasks. They should also be given information about the importance of doing so.

Negotiating a policy on laptops

Representatives should negotiate a policy for work with laptop computers which sets out best practice. For example, UNISON representatives have already achieved this in some careers service companies (see above). The basis of the policy should be risk assessment and there should be joint agreement about the 'competent persons' to be used to undertake the assessments.

Laptops should not be used if it is possible to use a desktop computer. For example with careers advisers, representatives should seek to agree a timetable for the substitution of laptops by PCs at the clients' sites. In circumstances where laptops may still be needed—such as for certain types of outreach work where it is not feasible to arrange for a PC on site—or where they are still being phased out, the policy will have to identify the different procedures for laptops and PCs, as appropriate. The policy should state what the employer is doing to comply with health and safety law and should cover:

- The choice of equipment.
- The health and safety information and training to be provided to laptop and PC users.
- The questionnaires etc to be used for individual workstation analysis and assessment.
- The provision of eye tests and any spectacles needed for screen based work.
- The organisation of work and the ability to take regular breaks from work on laptops and PCs.

- Procedures for reporting problems.
- Procedures for reporting ill-health symptoms.
- Job protection for individuals reporting symptoms (for example of WRULDs).
- Co-operation with clients.
- Procedures for monitoring and review.

Safety representatives should remember, too, that the law sets minimum standards, which can be improved upon by negotiation so they should try to agree a policy which gives maximum protection to everyone who uses a laptop and everyone who uses a PC. The need for adequate breaks is especially important for laptop work.

Safety representatives should also negotiate health and safety policies which cover manual handling, violence and stress.

Co-operation between employers— partnership agreements

By law your employer has overall responsibility for the health and safety of employees but client employers also have duties. They must ensure the health and safety of visitors to their premises under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and provide a contractor's employees with appropriate health and safety information under the Management Regulations. If DSE users use another employer's DSE workstation, that employer also has specified duties under the DSE Regulations. Under the Management Regulations, employers have a duty to co-operate with each other about health and safety if they share the same site.

If one employer's staff regularly visit another employer's workplace this should be treated as if they were sharing the workplace and both employers should co-operate on health and safety matters. The most effective way of ensuring co-operation is to have a written agreement setting out in detail how each party will comply with their legal duties, who will be responsible for what etc.

For the careers service the most appropriate way of doing this is as part of the partnership (formerly service level) agreement which sets out details of the contract between the company and the client. Similar contract agreements may exist for other services where staff use laptops which can be used in this way too.

UNISON safety representatives should ensure that they are involved when agreements are drawn up between the employer and the different clients. They should ensure that the agreement contains a health and safety clause setting out in detail precisely what the requirements are for workstations, safe access to the building etc. This clause should identify who is responsible for what (for example, in the careers service the employer will provide a suitable PC and the client will provide a suitable interview room, desk, adjustable chair etc). It should also set out the procedures to be followed if problems arise.

Some UNISON representatives have already been successful in achieving comprehensive health and safety clauses. Several careers service companies have acknowledged that partnership agreements need to detail much more tightly the health and safety requirements that have to be met and have indicated that they will be looking to strengthen these.

APPENDIX 1

Health and safety checklist for negotiators

UNISON safety representatives and stewards can use the following checklist to identify any shortcomings in their employers' arrangements for ensuring the health and safety at work of careers advisers using laptops.

Lifting and carrying

- Does the employer have a policy for the prevention of back injury?
- Have manual handling risk assessments been carried out?
- Have risks been avoided by eliminating use of laptops?
- Have risks been reduced by
 - reducing the load?
 - providing carrying aids?
 - reducing carrying distances involved?
 - providing training in safe and handling techniques?
- Are all manual handling accidents reported?

Violence

- Does the employer have a policy for the prevention of violence?
- Do risk assessments include the risk of violence?
- Have risks been prevented by eliminating the need to carry laptops?
- Have risks been reduced by
 - ensuring locations, car parks are safe?
 - minimising occasions on which laptops are carried, not requiring people to take them home etc.?
 - providing training and ensuring people know not to put themselves at risk to protect equipment?
 - ensuring itineraries are known, having reporting in procedures?
 - providing means of summoning help e.g. mobile phones?
- Are all incidents reported and are forms provided for that purpose?
- Is support provided for people who have suffered violence?

Work with laptops

- Does the employer have a policy for preventing risks from laptop work?
- Have risk assessments been carried out for laptop work?
- Was the assessor competent?
- Were laptop users involved in the assessments?
- Are problems dealt with promptly?
- Is there a timetable for replacing laptops with PCs?
- Is the use of laptops restricted to specific work situations where the provision of PCs is impracticable e.g. outreach work etc.?
- In such situations are users able to complete action plans etc. at a PC on return to their office?
- Is clerical support available for data inputting?
- Are laptops used on a firm surface at the right height for keying?
- Are users provided with an adjustable chair?
- Can users organise their work to allow breaks and changes in activity?
- Are laptop users able to take more frequent breaks than PC users?
- Are laptop users provided with eye tests and glasses if they are shown to need them for this work?
- Are laptop users provided with training in the risks of this work and how to minimise them?
- Are users aware of the symptoms of WRULDs and the importance of reporting these early?
- Are there procedures for reporting ill-health symptoms and are users encouraged to report symptoms without fear for their job security?
- Does the employer carry out monitoring and regular review?

Work with PCs

- Does the employer have a policy for preventing risks from PC work?
- Have risk assessments been carried out for PC work?
- Was the assessor competent?
- Were users themselves involved in the assessments?
- Are there clear procedures for dealing with any problems identified?
- Are problems identified dealt with promptly?
- Does equipment meet the standards laid down?

- Do desks, chairs and the work environment meet the standards laid down?
- Are users provide with eye tests and glasses where needed?
- Can users organise their work to allow breaks and changes in activity?
- Are PC users provided with training in the risks and how to minimise them?
- Are users aware of the symptoms of WRULDs and the importance of reporting these early?
- Are there procedures for reporting ill-health symptoms and are users encouraged to report symptoms without fear for job security?
- Does the employer carry out monitoring and regular review?

Work-related stress

- Does the employer have a policy for the prevention of stress?
- Do risk assessments include the risks of stress?
- Do risk assessments address
- the use of laptops?
 - work targets—are they realistic?
 - work deadlines—are they flexible?
 - employees' control over their own work organisation?
 - employees' participation in decision making?
 - training provision—is it adequate?
 - staffing levels—are they adequate?
- Are there procedures for reporting stress?
- Is support provided to employees who are suffering stress?

Accidents and ill-health at work

- Are all accidents, near misses and work-related ill-health cases reported in the accident book?
- Are all accidents, near misses and cases of ill-health investigated by the employer?
- Are safety representatives using their rights to investigate accidents, near misses and cases of ill-health?
- Are accident and ill-health records considered by the joint safety committee?
- Are accident and ill-health records used to monitor the employer's health and safety performance?

Appendix 2

Checklist for laptop users

If you use a laptop, use this checklist to help you minimise the risks to your health and safety. You may also find it useful to consult UNISON's guide to *Office health and safety* (see *Further Information*).

- Make sure this work has been assessed for health and safety risks, including manual handling and violence.
- Make sure you have received information and training about what the risks are and how you can minimise them.
- Make sure that you have received training in good posture and its importance.
- Make sure you are provided with a proper eye and eyesight test and appropriate glasses if you need them for screen work.
- Avoid prolonged laptop work.
- Try to do as much of the inputting as possible at a PC in the office, and particularly if large amounts of data input are required.
- Use clerical support when possible for data inputting.
- Make sure that you take frequent breaks if you are using a laptop for long periods.
- Use the breaks to change activity, to move around and flex and stretch your muscles.
- Do simple exercises, especially stretching, at regular intervals.
- Use the laptop on a firm surface at the right height for keying.
- Make sure you have a chair that can be adjusted for seat and back height and back tilt.
- Make sure you adjust your chair so that you can sit comfortably with your arms and wrists horizontal and your back upright and supported.
- Get into a comfortable position that suits you: you make adjustments automatically when you get into the driving seat of a car—do the same at your workstation.
- Sit square on to the keyboard and screen and angle the screen to minimise reflections and glare and to avoid the need to bend your neck excessively.
- Make sure your wrists are not bent upwards or sideways when keying
- Use a separate keyboard if this helps posture problems but don't overload yourself with equipment.
- Learn to be more aware of your body so that you can recognise unnecessary muscle tension and release it.

- Check your posture at regular intervals—you may start in a good position but it's easy to collapse down on your spine once you become engrossed in the work.

- Don't use the laptop on your lap, in the car, or at a low coffee table.

- Make sure you can organise your day to allow a variety of different tasks.

- Avoid carrying excessive loads in addition to the laptop (such as a printer, paper, files etc).

- Ask for a carrying aid (such as a trolley or backpack) if you need one, or make several journeys between car and interview room.

- Ask if you can use a more convenient parking area, at least for unloading and loading.

- Make sure you have been shown safe lifting and handling techniques.

- Try to ensure you can use a room on the ground floor of the client's site.

- Let the office know your itinerary when working away from base.

- Make sure you know what to do in the event of threats or a violent attack.

- Don't try to resist or pursue a thief—your safety is more important than the laptop.

- Don't carry the laptop around or take it home just because the employer hasn't made proper arrangements for their building security.

- Check laptop leads and plugs visually before you connect it and don't use them if they look worn or damaged.

- Use the laptop's protective carrying case when outdoors.

- Make sure you know who to report problems to, including problems at the client's site.

- Let your UNISON safety representative know about any problems as well.

- Report any ill-health symptoms (aches and pains, tingling, numbness etc.) immediately.

- Report any accident, injury or ill-health in the accident book, however minor it appears.

- Report any incident of violence.

- If your employer does not respond adequately to any problems you raise, contact your UNISON safety representative or steward.

Checking for symptoms of RSI/WRULDs

The symptoms of RSI are very similar to the aches and pains of every day, especially after physical effort. But whereas those everyday aches die away after a day or so, RSI pains linger or come on even when you have not exercised. These lingering pains are what you should watch out for. The symptoms of RSI include:

- Numbness or tingling in the arm or hand.

- Aches and pains in the muscles or at the joints.

- Loss of strength and grip in the hand.

- Occasionally, loss of sensation and even whiteness in the fingers.

- Crackling in the joints or muscles.

- Sometimes, a cyst-like swelling near a joint or a tender swelling in the affected area.

If you think you have RSI

RSI can develop relatively rapidly from apparently slight aches and pains to a crippling and chronic condition if prompt remedial action is not taken. If you think that your work has caused you to develop an RSI you should:

- Report your symptoms to your employer quickly.

- Follow this up in writing, making it clear that your work is to blame.

- Keep a copy of the letter for future reference.

- Make sure your GP records your symptoms and that they are work-related in your notes.

- Let your UNISON safety representative know.

- Find out more information about RSI, for example from UNISON health and safety publications (see *Further information*).

Appendix 3

UNISON risk assessment checklist

Safety representatives can use this checklist to monitor their employer's risk assessments and action plan.

- Is your employer carrying out risk assessments?
- Have assessments been carried out?
- If not are arrangements in hand for them to be done?
- Are resources available to carry out risk assessments properly?
- Do risk assessors have the necessary time, resources, training and authority to do proper risk assessments?
- Who carries out risk assessments?
 - Are they competent (do they have knowledge and understanding of the work involved, of the principles of risk assessment and prevention and control, and of current health and safety applications)?
 - What qualifications/experience do they have?
 - What information, instruction and training have they been provided with?
- Are outside consultants being used?
- Are specialists, such as ergonomists, brought in where necessary?
- Have safety representatives been consulted over the appointment of the 'competent persons'?
- How will safety representatives and employees be involved?

- Do assessments cover all the hazards and risks at work?
- Do assessments cover all areas, activities, processes, substances, equipment and departments?
- Do assessments cover systems of work, training, supervision and working environment?
- Do assessments cover work organisation and content?
- Do assessments cover hazards which you/members have identified?

- Do assessments look at what actually happens in practice and include non-routine operations such as maintenance?
- Do assessments cover all those who could be affected?
- Are those working outside normal hours, visitors and sub-contractors covered?
- Have those particularly at risk (for example lone workers) been identified?
- Are specific risk assessments done for pregnant workers?
- Do individual assessments need to be carried out for some workers (for example those working outside the main place of work)?
- Are existing preventive measures being used properly?
- Are the control measures followed?
- Do the control measures work?
- Are they monitored?
- Is information, instruction and training provision adequate?
- Have measures been identified to prevent or control the risks to health and safety?
- Can hazards be eliminated?
- If not, can hazards be controlled at source?
- If not, can hazards be isolated?
- If not, is suitable personal protective equipment provided as a last resort?
- Is health surveillance necessary?
- Have procedures for serious and imminent danger been drawn up?
- Have safety representatives been consulted about the employer's plan to control risks?
- Have safety representatives been given copies or access to the written risk assessments?
 - do they explain the hazards?
 - do they explain the control measures?
 - do they explain who is at risk?
 - do they contain sufficient detail to allow safety representatives to judge whether they are adequate?
- Are control measures being implemented?

- Has a plan of action been drawn up for implementing the control measures identified in the risk assessment?
- does the plan identify priorities?
- does the plan set out an agreed timetable for action?
- does the plan identify who is responsible for taking the action?
- has money been made available to implement the measures?
- Are risk assessments kept up to date?
- Do planned reviews of risk assessments take place at regular intervals?
- Are risk assessments redone before changes are introduced into the workplace e.g. new equipment, new ways of working?
- Are risk assessments reviewed if evidence suggests that control measures are not adequate e.g. following accidents, near misses, reports of ill-health, findings from safety representatives' inspections?
- Are risk assessments reviewed if there are other reasons to suspect they are invalid, for example in the light of new legislation, new medical evidence?

Appendix 4

UNISON risk assessment form

The Management of Health and Safety Regulations 1992 require employers to carry out risk assessments of all work activities and introduce control measures. I am concerned that a 'suitable and sufficient' risk assessment has not been carried out on the hazards, problems, tasks or work areas listed below:

Task or work area:

Description of problems/hazard

Name of safety representative:

Date report submitted:

Management reply: (action taken with date or reasons why action not taken)

Name of manager:

Date of reply:

(Keep a copy of this form)

Appendix 5

UNISON request for risk assessment records

The Management of Health and Safety Regulations 1992 require employers to carry out 'suitable and sufficient' risk assessments of hazards and work tasks and bring in prevention and control measures based on the risk assessments. Employers are required to provide safety representatives with copies of the results of risk assessments.

Please can you provide me with a copy of your assessment record(s) for the hazards, tasks, work area or jobs listed below:

From: (name of safety representative)

To: (name of manager)

Date request submitted:

(Keep a copy of this form)

Appendix 6

UNISON request for risk assessment review

I am concerned that the risk assessment for the hazard, task, work area or job listed below may no longer be valid. This means that the hazards to which it relates are no longer being adequately prevented or controlled.

Hazard, task, work area or job:

The risk assessment must be reviewed because:

1. An assessment has never been done

2. People carrying out the assessment were not able to carry out a suitable and sufficient assessment because they did not

● consult with safety representatives

● have enough training

● have enough time

● have enough information

3. An accident/near miss or incidence of ill-health or violence has occurred (give details)

4. The following control measures are not working/being used: (give details)

5. There has been a significant change in the matters it relates to:

● change in work method

● change in work equipment

● change in staffing

● change in hours, shift pattern

● change in clerical, management responsibilities or structure

● other

6. The assessment carried out on.....(date) has not been reviewed for over a year

From: (name of safety representative)

Date:

To: (name of manager)

Date of reply:

(Keep a copy of this form)

Appendix 7

UNISON survey on laptop computers

UNISON members are reporting an increased use of laptop computers for their work. Staff have experienced health problems such as eyestrain and headaches from prolonged use of laptops. The survey is being conducted to find out how widespread the use of laptops are and the health and safety problems associated with use of them. Your individual responses will remain confidential to UNISON.

1. Your details

Work area / department

Job

Please tick or circle where appropriate

2. Has your employer introduced the use of laptop computers for your job

Yes No

3. Does your employer provide or arrange for use of a personal computer as an alternative to laptops use?

Yes No

4. How many continuous hours do you use your laptop in a day?

- a. up to 1/2 hour
- b. 1/2–1 hour
- c. 1–3 hours
- d. 3–5 hours
- e. 5 hours or more

5. If you use a laptop do you also use a personal computer as part of your daily work?

- a. No
- b. less than 1/2 hour
- c. 1/2–1 hour
- d. 1–3 hours
- e. 3–5 hours
- f. 5 hours or more

6. What do you use laptop for? e.g inputting client records, inputting job details, writing plans, assessing information

7. Is it an important requirement for any of the duties listed in question 6 that you transfer information to the laptop quickly and accurately?

Yes No

8. Have you received any training on how and where to use you laptop computer?

Yes No

9. Have you been informed of and trained on the health and safety risks associated with your use of laptop computers?

Yes No

10. Where do you use your laptop computer?

- a. On your lap
- b. On the train
- c. At a desk
- d. Other, please describe

11. How heavy do you find you laptop?

- Light
- Medium
- Heavy

12. Are you concerned about the risks of assault from carrying around your laptop?

Yes No

13. Have you had any of the following health problems arising from the use of your laptop computer?

- a. Eyestrain
- b. Headaches
- c. Back pain
- d. Neck pain
- e. Pain in arms/hands

14. Please give any other comments below

Please return this survey to your UNISON representatives

by

Thank you for your help

Further information

UNISON publications

Report on UNISON survey on the health and safety problems of careers service advisers using laptop computers—obtainable from Local Government Service Group, UNISON, 1 Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9AJ.

The following health and safety publications are obtainable from UNISON Communications Department, 20 Grand Depot Road, London SE18 6SF. Please ask your branch secretary to order them, using the stock numbers listed.

Stock no	Title
1201	<i>Bullying at work: guidance for safety reps and members</i> (A5 pamphlet)
1281	<i>Bullying at work—guidelines for branches, stewards and safety reps</i> (A4 booklet)
1352	<i>Campaigning on health and safety</i> (A4 handbook for safety reps)
1450	<i>Control or management?</i> Guide to sickness absence policies for branches and reps (A4 booklet)
1407	<i>Dealing with Lindane</i> (A4 booklet by Pesticides Trust)
0906	<i>Dealing with violence and stress in social services</i> (A4 booklet by UNISON Local Government and British Association of Social Workers)
1183	<i>Dermatitis at work: guidance for safety reps and members</i> (A5 pamphlet)
0722	<i>Does your work make you sick?</i> (A5 leaflet for members)
1525	<i>Health and safety and the use of laptop computers</i> (this booklet)
Health and safety regulations 1992:	
	0917 <i>Manual handling operations</i>
	0918 <i>Management of health and safety at work</i>
	0919 <i>Workplace health, safety and welfare</i>
	0920 <i>Display screen equipment</i>
	0921 <i>Provision and use of work equipment</i>
	0922 <i>Personal protective equipment at work</i>
1419	<i>Inspection report form pad</i> (100 A4 forms for safety reps)
1227	<i>Office health and safety—a guide to risk prevention</i> (A4 booklet by City Centre)
1057	<i>Repetitive strain injury: guidance for safety reps and members</i> (A5 pamphlet)

1340	<i>Risk assessment campaign</i> leaflet
1341	<i>Risk assessment campaign</i> A4 noticeboard poster
0726	<i>Stickers</i> (sheets of 12)
1410	<i>Stop the strain drain</i> (TUC leaflet on musculo-skeletal disorders)
1226	<i>Stress at work: a trade union response</i> (A5 pamphlet by Labour Research Department)
0848	<i>Stress at work</i> (A5 leaflet for members)
0723	<i>UNISON members need health and safety reps</i> (leaflet to recruit safety reps)
1346	<i>Violence at work: guidelines for branches, stewards and safety reps</i> (A4 booklet)
0818	<i>Women's health and safety: a trade union guide</i> (A5 pamphlet from Labour Research Department)
1351	<i>Work—it's a risky business! Guide to risk assessment</i> (A4 book for safety reps)
0724	<i>Your job as a health and safety representative</i> (leaflet for new safety reps)
1241	<i>Your right to an eye test</i> (TUC leaflet for VDU users)
1459	<i>Your rights in pregnancy and after childbirth</i> (leaflet by Maternity Alliance)
Four A4 noticeboard posters:	
	1028 <i>Is your workplace safe and healthy?</i>
	1029 <i>UNISON members have rights</i>
	1030 <i>Are you suffering in silence?</i>
	1031 <i>Why not become a safety rep?</i>
1171	Set of seven A4 noticeboard posters (8 sets on gummed pad)

National Back Pain Association publications

1177	Severe spinal damage—poster
1178	Serious accidents—poster
1179	I want to help my patients—poster
1181	Back facts (general)
1182	Better backs for office workers

Priced items

Prices include post and packing

0796	<i>Asbestos hazards handbook</i> (UNISON edition of London Hazards Centre book) £2.50
0988	<i>Branch health and safety officer badge</i> £1.00

- 1235 *Hazards at work* (UNISON edition of TUC's comprehensive 310 page guide) £10.00
- 1094 *Health and safety representative badge* £1.00
- 1395 *RSI hazards handbook* (UNISON/London Hazards Centre) £2.50

UNISON's Health and Safety Unit circulates regular health and safety briefings to branches. Safety representatives should make sure they also consult this useful source of information.

Health and Safety Executive publications

Priced publications

(available from HSE Books, PO Box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk, CO10 6FS)

Successful health and safety management (HSG65), £12.50 (revised 1997)

Management of health and safety at work—approved code of practice (L21), £5.75

Display screen equipment work—guidance on regulations (L26) £5.75

Manual handling—guidance on regulations (L23), £5.75

Work equipment—guidance on regulations (L22), £5.75

VDUs: an easy guide to the regulations (HSG90), £5.00

Stress at work: a guide for employers (HSG116), £5.50

Seating at work (HSG57), £5.95 (revised 1997)

Lighting at work (HSG38), £9.25 (revised 1997)

New and expectant mothers at work: a guide for employers (HSG122), £6.25

Work related upper limb disorders: a guide to prevention (HSG60), £4.75

Manual handling: solutions you can handle (HSG115), £7.95

A pain in your workplace? Ergonomics problems and solutions (HSG121), £10.95

Preventing violence to staff (HSE/Tavistock Institute), £3.75

Free leaflets

(available from HSE Books, as above)

Everyone's guide to RIDDOR (HSE31)

Your firm's injury records and how to use them (INDG113)

5 steps to risk assessment (INDG163)

Guide to risk assessment requirements: common provisions in health and safety law (INDG218)

5 steps to information, instruction and training: meeting risk assessment requirements (INDG213)

Working with VDUs (INDG36), revised 1998

Violence to staff (INDG69)

Working alone in safety (INDG73), revised 1998

If the task fits—ergonomics at work (INDG90)

Getting to grips with manual handling: a short guide for employers (INDG143)

Upper limb disorders: assessing the risks (INDG171)

Officewise (INDG173)

Maintaining portable electrical equipment in offices and other low risk environments (INDG236)