

## **Appendix 3 - Working with Display Screen Equipment (DSE) - Employee Guide**

### **1. Introduction**

Display Screen Equipment (DSE) also known as visual display units (VDUs) is used in most offices nowadays. This leaflet is a guide for people who use DSE. It aims to:

- Answer questions that are most commonly asked about DSE and health
- Provide a brief summary of the Health & Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 2003 on work with DSE and explain how it can affect you.
- Suggest some simple adjustments that can be made to your workstation and screen to ensure your comfort and ease of use.

### **2. Frequently asked questions about health and DSE use**

#### **Am I at risk?**

DSE has been blamed (often wrongly) for a wide range of health problems. Only a small proportion of people using it suffer health problems as a result, but because of the volume of people using DSE across the country the numbers can add up significantly so that it appears to be a big problem. You should remember that in most cases, problems do not arise directly from the DSE itself, but from the way in which it is used. These problems can be eliminated or reduced by good workplace and job design and by ensuring that you use your equipment and workstation properly.

#### **Can work with DSE affect eyesight?**

There are no indications, from extensive research, that DSE will cause disease or permanent damage to your eyes. But the fatigue of intensive DSE work can cause discomfort, even to healthy eyes. Because prolonged DSE use gives your eyes more demanding tasks, you might become aware of an

eye problem that you had not known about before. DSE users can get headaches if they need to squint in order to see the screen (see later), or if the DSE is badly positioned, or if the workplace is poorly lit. Drifting, flickering or jittering images can also be very tiring and should be corrected.

**I wear bi-focals  
will I be able to use DSE?**

Yes. However it is important that you can see the screen comfortably without having to constantly raise and lower your head, for this reason, bi-focals might not be ideal for DSE work. You may find you need a different type of prescription in your glasses to allow you to work more comfortably. You should consult your Doctor or Optician about this if you are in doubt.

**I wear contact lenses  
will this cause any  
special problems if I  
work with DSE?**

Users of contact lenses can find any dry environment uncomfortable and the heat generated by DSE can make the atmosphere drier than in rooms without it. You may find it helps to blink more often, or use tear substitute drops. It will help if you look away from the screen on a regular basis. An alternative might be to wear glasses instead of your lenses for DSE work.

**I sometimes see a  
coloured 'after image'  
after working with DSE  
– is this serious?**

No. This is common when someone looks at an object for a long time and then looks elsewhere. It does not harm your vision in any way. It helps to look away from the screen on a fairly frequent basis.

**Are aches and pains  
caused by using DSE?**

Some DSE users may experience aches and pains in their hands, wrists, arms, neck, shoulders or back, (that is to their musculo-skeletal system), especially after long periods of uninterrupted DSE work. If this happens you should alert your Line Manager or HR Officer. Usually these aches and pains do not last, but in a few cases if not treated they may become more persistent or even disabling. Problems of this

nature can generally be prevented by good workplace design and good working practices.

**Can work with DSE be stressful?**

Some people find working with DSE stressful in one or more ways. Often it is not so much because of the DSE itself, but because of the increased pace or pressure to meet deadlines. Some DSE users experience less pressure because the DSE gives them better access to information, but for others the pressures are intensified. This can happen, for instance, when a system does not function well or when training has not been sufficient to properly operate the system.

**Can DSE cause headaches?**

No, however headaches can arise from many factors associated DSE work. For example, pressures from the pace of work, a persons anxiety/tension levels, the need for new glasses or a change of lenses, poor image quality, glare form the screen, poor posture, or a combination of these. There are also many other reasons why someone may get a headache which are not related to DSE use.

**How long should I work with a DSE?**

This depends entirely on the type of work you are doing. See page 8 for further information.

**Does DSE give out harmful levels of radiation?**

No. DSE gives out both visible light (which enables us to see the screen) and other forms of electromagnetic radiation that can be harmful above certain levels i.e. in high doses). However, the levels emitted from DSE are well below the safe levels set out in international recommendations i.e. less than a domestic TV set. So Dudley Mind doesn't have to check radiation levels from your DSE and you don't need special devices such as protective spectacles, screens or aprons when using it.

**What should I do**

### **if I am pregnant?**

You don't need to stop working with DSE. There have been some concerns about reports of higher levels of miscarriage and birth defects among some groups of DSE workers. Many scientific studies have been carried out which, taken as a whole, do not show any link between miscarriages or birth defects and working with DSE. If you are anxious about working with DSE or about work generally during pregnancy, you should contact your Doctor or talk to someone who is well informed on current authoritative scientific information and the latest advice about DSE.

### **Can working with DSE cause skin rashes?**

A small number of people have experienced irritation, skin rashes or had existing skin problems, which seems to be aggravated by DSE use. The exact cause is not known, but it seems possible that a combination of dry air, the electrostatic charge in the room and individual susceptibility may be involved. If this is the case, reducing the electrostatic charge in the room and increasing the humidity may help.

### **Can DSE trigger epileptic seizures?**

Most people with epilepsy are completely unaffected. A small number of people who suffer from photosensitive epilepsy and are susceptible to flickering lights and striped patterns may be affected in some circumstances, but even they can often work successfully with DSE without provoking an attack.

### **I am taking tablets prescribed by my Doctor. Can I still use DSE?**

Yes. All medications can safely be taken whilst you are using DSE. A few tranquillisers, and drugs that affect 'brain function' and certain eye drops prescribed from glaucoma can temporarily affect the way their eyes change focus, but this is not harmful. Ask your Doctor if he/she prescribes you such medications.

## **2. The Regulations and how they affect you.**

### **What are the regulations?**

## The Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 2003.

### **Who is covered?**

Everyone that uses DSE.

### **Am I eligible for an eye test?**

Not everyone who uses DSE is entitled to a free eye test. Although the regulations in general apply to people who *habitually* use DSE as an integral part of their normal work i.e. for significant lengths of time, rather than people who may use it for short, infrequent periods). Habitual DSE users do not have discretion to 'spread' their DSE related job tasks throughout the day alongside other non DSE related job tasks. Examples of habitual DSE users are data input clerks/ copy typists etc. Many managers are able to use their discretion about how and when they use DSE and therefore would not be classed as habitual DSE users.

A Dudley Mind habitual DSE user is therefore a permanent colleague whose duties on an ongoing basis require him/her to work with DSE as an integral part of their work for either:

- Continuous or near continuous spells of one hour or more at a time
- Use DSE in this way more or less daily.
- Have to transfer information quickly to or from the DSE, and also,
- Need to apply high levels of attention and concentration to do their job.
- Have little/no opportunity to break away from DSE work to undertake alternative non DSE related tasks.

### **What do Line Managers have to do to comply with the Regulations?**

Line Managers must ensure that work station assessments are undertaken for all colleagues using DSE, including the hardware, the environment, and any factors specific to the colleagues use of the equipment. Colleague input should be sought as part of the assessment.

Where risks to health are identified, Line Managers must take steps to reduce them.

Line Managers must also ensure that workstations meet minimum requirements.

There are good features that should be found in a workstation. For example, the screen should have adjustable brightness and contrast controls. This allows individuals to find a comfortable level for their eyes, helping to avoid the problems of tired eyes and eyestrain.

Line Managers should plan work so there are breaks or changes of activity. The length or number of these is not specified precisely in the Regulations, as the need for breaks depends how intensely and for how long the colleague has been using the DSE. But short, frequent breaks are better than longer, less frequent ones and ideally an individual should have some discretion over when the breaks are taken.

Line Managers must ensure that (on request) habitual DSE users have access to eyesight tests and provide a contribution towards corrective spectacles if needed for DSE use.

**Are home-workers covered?**

Yes, if required to use a workstation at home, for work purposes.

**Are laptops covered?**

Yes

**What about temporary workers?**

All of the requirements of the Regulations apply to temporary/agency workers – with the exception of the requirement for Dudley Mind to provide eyesight tests – this is the responsibility of the temporary workers own employer.

**3. Adjusting your workstation to suit you**

**What can I do to help myself?**

Lots! You should make full use of the adjustment facilities on your DSE and in addition make adjustments to your work environment to avoid potential health problems. Here are some specific tips.

- Adjust your chair and the DSE to find the most comfortable position for your work. As a broad

guide, your arms should be positioned in a natural L shape with the forearms in a horizontal position on the desk. Your eyes should be at approximately the same height as the top of the DSE casing. Your chair should support most of the back of your thigh when your feet are on the floor or footrest.

- Make sure there is enough space underneath your desk to move your legs freely. Move any obstacles such as boxes or equipment.
- Avoid excess pressure on the back of your legs and knees. A foot-rest may be helpful if you have shorter legs.
- Don't sit in the same position for long periods. Make sure you change posture as often as practicable.
- Adjust your keyboard and screen to get a good keying and viewing position. A space in front of the keyboard is sometimes helpful for resting the hands and wrists whilst not keying.
- Don't bend your hands up at the wrist when keying. Try to keep a soft touch on the keys and don't overstretch your fingers. Good keyboard technique is important.
- Try different layouts of keyboard, screen and document holder to find the best arrangement for you. Try not to keep looking from the desk to the screen repeatedly.
- Make sure you have enough workspace to take whatever documents you need. A document holder may help you avoid awkward neck movements.
- Arrange your desk and screen so that bright lights are not reflected on the screen. You shouldn't be directly facing windows or bright lights. Adjust curtains or lights to prevent unwanted light.
- Adjust the brightness control on the screen to suit the lighting conditions in the room.
- Make sure the characters on your screen are sharply focussed and can be read easily. They shouldn't flicker or move. Make sure the font is large enough to see without straining.
- Make sure there are no layers of dirt, grime or finger marks on the screen.

### **What should I do if I have any problems?**

If you have problems you think may be connected to your DSE work you should talk to your Line Manager or HR Officer.