

## Serious but Unregulated Health Hazards in the Office

**IN CASE OF EMERGENCY, CALL x66911 FROM A TUFTS CAMPUS PHONE.**

From a wireless or off-campus phone:  
Boston: 617.636.6911  
Dorham: 508.839.7921  
Medford/Somerville: 617.627.6911

Program your campus number into your phone for quick access.

**Non-Emergency Numbers**

DESCRIPTION	CAMPUS	NUMBER
Public & Environmental Safety	All	617.627.2500
Controlling & Medical Health Services	Medford/Somerville	617.627.2506
Environmental Health & Safety	All	617.636.3815
Fire Safety	All	617.627.2503
Fire Marshal's Office	All	617.636.3615
Facilities Services	Dorham	508.839.7925
Health Services	Medford/Somerville	617.627.2506
Health Services	Medford/Somerville	617.627.2506
Risk Management & Insurance	All	617.627.2668
Worker's Compensation Program	All	617.627.2668
Tufts Emergency Medical Services	Medford/Somerville	617.627.2668
University Police (on-campus)	Dorham	508.839.8000
University Police (off-campus)	Medford/Somerville	617.627.2668
Weather Emergency Helpline	Dorham	508.839.8014
Weather Emergency Helpline	Medford/Somerville	617.627.2668

**Helpful Web Sites**

DESCRIPTION	URL
Emergency Response Guide	<a href="http://emergency.tufts.edu/erg">http://emergency.tufts.edu/erg</a>
Public & Environmental Safety	<a href="http://publicsafety.tufts.edu">http://publicsafety.tufts.edu</a>
Accident Reporting	<a href="http://publicsafety.tufts.edu/accident">http://publicsafety.tufts.edu/accident</a>
Controlling & Medical Health Services	<a href="http://www.tufts.edu/controlling">http://www.tufts.edu/controlling</a>
Environmental Health & Safety	<a href="http://publicsafety.tufts.edu/ehs">http://publicsafety.tufts.edu/ehs</a>
Fire Safety	
Fire Marshal's Office	<a href="http://publicsafety.tufts.edu/firemarshal">http://publicsafety.tufts.edu/firemarshal</a>
Medical Safety Data Sheets	<a href="http://ehs.tufts.edu/mssds">http://ehs.tufts.edu/mssds</a>
Facilities Services	<a href="http://www.tufts.edu/facilities">http://www.tufts.edu/facilities</a>
Health Services	<a href="http://ehs.tufts.edu/healthservices">http://ehs.tufts.edu/healthservices</a>
International Travel Information	<a href="http://www.tufts.edu/international">http://www.tufts.edu/international</a>
Risk Management & Insurance	<a href="http://www.tufts.edu/risk">http://www.tufts.edu/risk</a>
Worker's Compensation Program	<a href="http://www.tufts.edu/wcp">http://www.tufts.edu/wcp</a>
Tufts Emergency Alert System	<a href="http://www.tufts.edu/alert">http://www.tufts.edu/alert</a>
Tufts Emergency Medical Services	<a href="http://www.tufts.edu/emt">http://www.tufts.edu/emt</a>
University Police	<a href="http://publicsafety.tufts.edu/police">http://publicsafety.tufts.edu/police</a>
Weather Helpline	<a href="http://www.tufts.edu/weather">http://www.tufts.edu/weather</a>
Campus Classics	<a href="http://www.tufts.edu">http://www.tufts.edu</a>

**Tufts**  
Department of Public and Environmental Safety  
475 Boston Avenue, Medford, MA 02155  
Tel: 617.627.2500  
Fax: 617.627.2515  
[emergency.tufts.edu](http://emergency.tufts.edu)

**MOST** Tufts employees work in offices at least some part of every day. Although offices are usually safe and healthful places to work, all new employees at Tufts receive a booklet entitled, “Working Safely at Tufts: A Guide for New and Current Employees.” The Tufts Emergency Response Guide is another document intended to provide each employee with essential actions to take.

Each of these identifies potential hazards in the office environment and methods to reduce or eliminate those hazards.

At Tufts, office workers contact Tufts EHS staff to investigate many issues including strong or annoying odors and allergens such as mold, pollen or animal products which are referred to as indoor air quality concerns. Another concern is workstation design and potential ergonomic issues such as a sore back, neck or wrist. Moving heavy materials and equipment can lead to overexertion and strains with associated pain and discomfort.

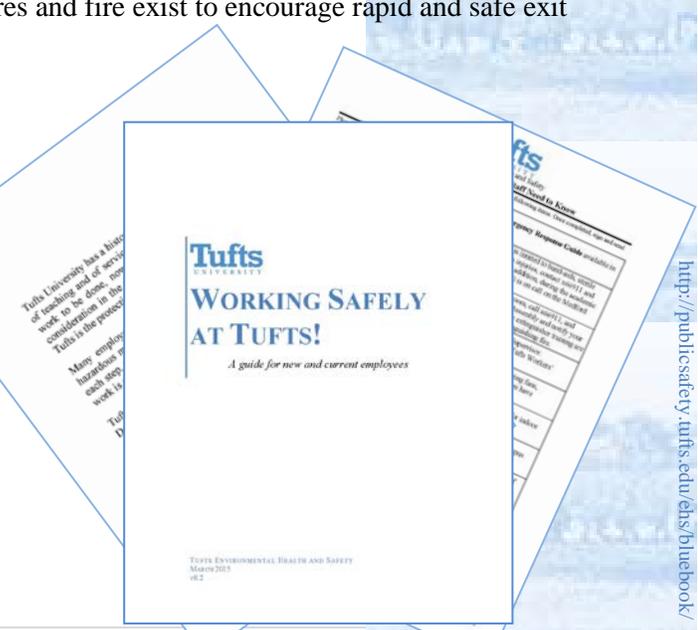
In summary, among the most serious health concerns in the office are indoor air quality, workstation design and lifting materials. Surprisingly, OSHA has no regulations for any of these potential hazards. However, Tufts is committed to the intent of OSHA of “providing safe and healthful working conditions” for all of its employees, regulations or not. Where there are no regulations, Tufts adopts best practice policies and procedures to identify and control these threats to health.

This Emergency Response Guide contains instructions to assist members of the Tufts Community in responding to a variety of emergencies that may affect a Tufts campus. <http://emergency.tufts.edu/guide/>

Other office hazards are regulated by OSHA such as dry, smooth and unobstructed floors to prevent falls, electrical safety practices to prevent shocks and electrical fires and fire exits to encourage rapid and safe exit from the office in an emergency, where evacuation is the best decision.

Please contact the Campus EHS Manager for your campus to discuss any of these issues and any other health concerns you have.

*Tufts is committed to the intent of OSHA of ‘providing safe and healthful working conditions’ for all of its employees...*



## *IAQ: Breathing Free and Safe Around Construction Projects*



*Potential issues affecting your office space can range from loud banging noises, dust, odors, or even possibly damage resulting from an unanticipated accident during the construction process.*

from the clinic setting at the Dental School, to a very busy small animal clinic at the Cummings Veterinary School. Other examples include a dining hall kitchen, a humid mechanical room or a busy research laboratory. However the most common work environment is the office.

Keeping these work environments safe lies with the individual departments and schools. However assisting with this is the competent and often underappreciated Facilities Services Department and the Construction Project Managers.

With a number of both major and minor construction projects currently on all three Tufts campuses the potential impact on our offices can range from a small nuisance to a major indoor air quality (IAQ) problem.

Potential issues affecting your office space can range from loud banging noises, dust, odors, or even possibly damage resulting from an unanticipated accident during the construction process.

Generally, it is the universities policy to review safety concerns and issues well before construction begins. Then steps are taken to ensure that issues are mitigated adjoining work spaces are safe and impact to these areas are minimized. However unexpected incidents can happen. A classic example is, the building next to your office is getting a new roof. Unexpectedly, the wind picks up and the roof chemical odors are drawn into your buildings ventilation system. Although often not a significant hazard, the resulting odor can be pungent and unpleasant.

In the event of this type of incident, the first step is to contact the work order center on your campus to inform them of the issue and request an immediate response. Among other corrective actions Facilities Services may temporarily shut off the air intake to your floor or building to minimize the entry of pollutants.

If an issue is serious or you are unsure whether it's serious do not hesitate to contact Tufts Police at extension 6-6911 to get an immediate response.

With a large project such as the new Science and Engineering Building (SEC) underway in Medford, loud noises, vibrations and dust are inevitable and cannot be completely prevented. Tufts, recognizes these issues and has taken steps to mitigate.

Large and small construction projects are an important factor in Tufts growth and renewal. That should not mean that your health and safety will be at risk. If there is a concern about a project near your work space, speak up. Talk to your supervisor, contact Facilities Service, or contact Tufts Environmental Health and Safety (TEHS). For more information, please review the Construction Guidelines by visiting our website at <http://publicsafety.tufts.edu/ehs/facilities-and-construction-safety/>

## *Hearing Loss from Office Work: Is that Possible?*

**THERE** is significant scientific evidence that exposure to sound below an intensity of 77 to 80 dBA will not cause any hearing loss, tinnitus or other sound related disease. In 2015, the average office both open and private has sound levels between 45 and 60 dBA. However, that does not mean that there are not sound issues in the office.

Noise is defined as any unwanted sound. Music, voice conversation, iPhone use, email alarms, keyboard keying, printer operation are all sounds that some would define as noise. Even the ventilation system with fans and air vibration can also be a source of unwanted sound.

To reduce this noise, some office workers use personal listening devices such as headphones or ear buds attached to iPhones, pads or laptops to overcome background noise levels and, ineffectively, block out office sounds. In June 2015, a study of 180 college students found that 25% of the students set the sound level in their ear at 80dBA and 94% were unaware that sound levels of this intensity could result in hearing diseases. (Marron,K.et al.Int.J.Audiology)



Intensity is only one of three properties of sound that cause sound discomfort: frequency or pitch and rate of repetition or impact are the other two. All three characteristics have to be considered when evaluating the noise problem.

Not all office tasks are equally affected by sound or noise. Reading comprehension and memory tasks are more affected.

There are private offices, cubicle offices, and shared open offices. Noise and sound can be managed to achieve sound conditions that are acceptable to most workers. However, there needs to be visually and aurally isolated spaces where workers can have privacy to meet, read or think with a lower noise level, typical of a library reading room.

Attempting to block sound with music or white noise through a public address system is likely to add to the overall sound intensity and create more annoyance while employees try to overcome the added interfering noise.

Offices rarely, if ever, have noise that is hazardous but it can cause discomfort and adversely impact job performance. Blocking out noise with headphones may actually be hazardous and could prevent attention to voices and alarms essential for communication among others in the office.

Tufts EHS can assist in evaluating the office sound and make suggestions for identifying sources and controls.

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## *Sit/Stand Workstations*

A “sit-stand” workstation may not be for everyone. Requests for information about these products are becoming more common. Whether this is due to an increase in marketing, the release of recent studies supporting such products or simply a heightened awareness of ergonomics in general, personnel have become interested in the concept of standing when performing sedentary tasks. Recent studies show that such products have the potential to benefit some people (Pronk, Katz, Lowry & Payfer, 2011). However, while this may be encouraging, automatically switching to a “sit-stand” workstation may not be necessary.

At a recent seminar, an ergonomist reported that roughly 45% people who used a “sit-stand” workstation eventually reverted back to your traditional sitting position within 30 days. Comfort and fatigue cannot be ignored, as the standing position can be tiring in addition to adding stress to the lower joints. In addition, depending on the product, supporting tasks such as writing and using the phone may be at a sitting position height which presents additional challenges. Due to these factors coupled with costs that run from several hundred dollars to several thousand dollars, it is recommended that prior to purchasing a “sit-stand” workstation, the following is considered:

- Apply engineering controls such as setting up your sitting workstation correctly.
- Apply administrative control such as breaking up or reducing the time and duration of sitting.
- Apply work practice controls such as maintaining proper posture.
- If there is an injury, consult with your health care professional to explore treatment options.
- If still interested in a “sit-stand” workstation, contact Tufts approved vendors at the following link:  
<http://publicsafety.tufts.edu/ehs/ergonomics/>

While a “sit-stand” workstation may benefit some, they are not for everyone. Consider other actions prior to purchasing. As always, Tufts Environmental Health and Safety is happy to assist.



The QuickStand height-adjustable workstation is an intuitive product created by the Humanscale Design Studio [www.humanscale.com](http://www.humanscale.com)

*Comfort and fatigue cannot be ignored, as the standing position can be tiring in addition to adding stress to the lower joints*

### References

1. Pronk NP, Katz AS, Lowry M, Payfer JR. Reducing Occupational Sitting Time and Improving Worker Health: The Take-a-Stand Project, 2011. *Prev Chronic Dis* 2012;9:110323.