Call Centres – Fact Sheets



WHAT DOES A CALL CENTRE WORKER DO?

Call centres are typically found in industries such as banking and finance, insurance, travel services, telecommunications, road services, utilities, and sales. The main function is to provide customer service through telephone or computer.

The general tasks done by a person who works in a call centre may include the following:

- Provide product support and information to customers over the phone
- Dial or answer telephone and electronic requests
- Resolve customer complaints
- Address aggressive behavior or other issues when a client is not satisfied

What are some health and safety issues for call centre workers?

There are several potential health and safety hazards associated with call centre worker's duties, including:

Biological hazards

- Spread of infections if workstations are seated close to each other, or when desks and equipment are shared without cleaning between uses

Chemical hazards

- Exposure to cleaning products, photocopier toner, and other products

Ergonomic hazards

- Sitting for long hours.
- Repetitive Motion injuries (RMIs)
- Inadequate lighting (e.g., glare, low levels, etc.) which may cause workers to adopt awkward postures.
- Small workspaces

Physical hazards

- Poor indoor air quality
- Exposure to acoustic noise or an acoustic incident through the headset (e.g., crackles, whistles, hisses or high-pitched sounds, feedback, or phone receivers being slammed or dropped)
- Temperature (heat and cold stress)

Psychosocial hazards

- Exposure to threats of violence, harassment, or verbal abuse
- Workplace stress due to performance targets, monetary incentives for increased output, quotas, targets, or demands from the customers

Safety

- Slips, trips, and falls
- Electrical hazards
- Fire hazards

Other

- Call centre workers may experience voice fatigue due to extensive talking (e.g., total or intermittent loss of voice, changes in pitch and decrease in voice volume, constant throat clearing, drying in the throat and excessive mucous, the sensation of a lump or pain in the throat, increased effort to talk, difficulty swallowing, and shortness of breath).

What are some preventive measures for call centres and workers?

Biological hazards

- Space workstations apart, as necessary
- Clean and disinfect workstations and equipment between users
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces such as door handles, knobs, photocopier, kettles, etc.
- Wash hands regularly

Chemical hazards

- Know how to work safely with the products used near you, including any training required by the Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS)

Ergonomic hazards

- Use and provide training on adjustable furniture and equipment. Consider providing workstations that allow workers to alternate positions (including sitting and standing)
- Schedule breaks and allow sufficient time between calls to update client files when appropriate
- Use headsets to prevent cradling of the phone receiver between the head and shoulder
- Provide user-friendly software
- Provide lighting appropriate for the nature of the work and the work location
- Provide enough space at the workstation for the equipment needed, and some

personal items or privacy as needed

Physical hazards

- Make sure the ventilation system is well maintained and adjusted for the number of workers in the space
- Control noise levels by minimizing background noise, using sound reducing materials, etc.
- Investigate equipment that can help reduce acoustic shock
- Keep equipment in good repair

Psychosocial hazards

- Know about your organization’s workplace harassment and violence prevention policies, and how to report incidents
- Know how to recognize warning signs of workplace violence
- Address issues that contribute to stress

Safety

- Report any places where slips, trips, and falls may happen, such as spills, torn carpets, etc.
- Follow fire and electrical safety measures

Others

- Provide access to drinking water to help with voice strain

What are some good general safe work practices?

Call centre workers should consider the following safe work practices:

- Practice good hand washing techniques.
- Know about WHMIS and SDSs. Follow safety data sheet (SDS) recommendations when working with products.
- Follow the organization’s safety rules.
- Know your hazard reporting procedures.
- Follow good housekeeping procedures.

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