

Office Moves: Safety Guidelines

Employee Safety and Wellness



University
of Windsor

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The following safety guidelines will help minimize the risk of injuries and incidents that can be associated with office moves. For more information, please contact a member of the [Employee Safety and Wellness](#) team.

Identify Potential Hazards

Potential hazards associated with packing and moving can include:

- Strains/sprains caused by the lifting / carrying of heavy items;
- Ergonomic hazards associated with material handling, including awkward postures, overreaching, deep bending, and twisting;
- Cuts from the use of box cutters, scissors, or sharp edges;
- Contusions from being struck by or against objects, moving of furniture, material handling, etc.;
- Trips and falls caused by clutter/items stored within workspaces.

Preparation

In preparation for the office move:

- Coordinate with the departmental contact regarding move logistics, including the delivery of moving crates, boxes, and packing supplies.
- Ensure adequate supplies, tools, and equipment are available as needed (e.g., carts and dollies).
- Allow sufficient time for packing activities to be completed safely and efficiently.
- Wipe down item surfaces with a damp cloth before packing to reduce dust during unpacking.
- Confirm that appropriate controls have been implemented to address any identified hazards.

Personal Protective Equipment (as applicable)

If identified hazards cannot be eliminated or adequately controlled, wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), such as:

- Gloves (protection from boxes and other materials with sharp edges)
- Appropriate footwear (i.e., closed-toe shoes)
- Other PPE as prescribed for the task

Safe Work Practices: Packing

When packing for an office move, follow these safe work practices:

- Pack heavier, sturdier items at the bottom of boxes or crates and lighter items on top.
- Avoid overpacking; ensure boxes and crates can safely support the weight of their contents. Reinforce cardboard boxes as needed, across the seams.
- Alternate tasks and take regular micro-breaks to reduce muscle fatigue.
- Avoid overreaching, deep bending, and twisting while packing or handling materials.
- Do not pack liquids in cardboard boxes.
- Use caution around sharp edges (e.g., boxes, filing cabinets) and when using sharp tools such as box cutters or scissors.
- Ensure the tops of packed boxes are flat to allow for safe stacking.
- Use a proper stepladder when accessing items at height; never stand on chairs.
- Stack heavier boxes on the bottom and limit stacks to a maximum of three boxes high. Ensure stacks are stable and secure.
- Use a team lift or mechanical aid (cart, dolly, etc.) for items that are heavy, bulky, or awkward to handle safely.
- Do not move, assemble, or disassemble furniture without assistance.

- Keep work areas organized and aisles, walkways, and floors free of clutter and debris to prevent slip and trip hazards.

Safe Work Practices: Safe Lifting Technique

When lifting or moving materials, follow these safe lifting techniques:

- Assess the load before lifting, including its weight, size, shape, and condition. Watch for sharp edges, splinters, or other hazards, and wear gloves where appropriate.
- Ensure sufficient space, stable footing, clear visibility, and a secure load and grip before lifting.
- Lift only within personal capabilities. Whenever possible, use a team lift or mechanical aid such as a cart or dolly.
- Maintain clear communication during team lifts to ensure movements are coordinated.
- Bend at the hips and knees, keep the spine in a neutral position, and hold the load close to the body.
- Lift with the legs rather than the back.
- Keep arms and elbows close to the body and maintain a clear line of sight while carrying a load.
- Avoid twisting while lifting or carrying. To change direction, pivot with the feet and turn the entire body.
- When placing a load on a shelf, table, or other surface, set it down on the edge and slide it into position where possible.
- Lower loads using the same technique used for lifting: keep the load close to the body and bend at the hips and knees.

Safe Work Practices: Unpacking / Moving In

- Arrange for furniture moving, assembly, or disassembly as required. Furniture should not be moved, assembled, or disassembled without assistance.
- Ensure appropriate equipment is available to minimize lifting and carrying. Use mechanical aids (e.g., carts and dollies) whenever possible.
- Unpack stacked boxes from the top down. If a box is too heavy or awkward to lift safely, unpack its contents first or obtain assistance.
- Be aware of sharp edges and objects during unpacking and setup activities.
- Alternate tasks and take regular micro-breaks to help reduce muscle fatigue.
- When setting up a new workstation, adjust the monitor, keyboard, mouse, and chair to maintain neutral postures and support proper ergonomic positioning. Refer to the Employee Safety and Wellness [Ergonomic Workstation Setup Guide](#) for additional information.
- Complete the [Office Workstation Self-Assessment Checklist](#) to help identify and correct ergonomic concerns that may contribute to discomfort, fatigue, eyestrain, or repetitive strain injuries.

Fire Safety Considerations

It is important to maintain fire safety requirements throughout the moving process:

- Keep aiseways and walkways clear to maintain a path to emergency exit routes. Maintain a minimum aisle width of 3.5 feet (1.1 metres).
- Do not store items in front of doors, exits, or electrical panels; maintain a minimum clearance of 3 feet (0.9 metres).
- Ensure fire exit doors, exit signs, and fire extinguishers remain clearly visible and free of obstructions.

In Case of Injury – Incident Reporting

In the event of an injury, accident, or incident:

- Obtain first aid assistance, or seek medical attention as required;
- Report the incident to your Supervisor;
- Together with your Supervisor, complete the [Accident/Incident report](#); and
- Follow up with the [Employee Safety and Wellness](#) office as required, regarding incident investigation and medical documentation, if applicable.

For more information, visit the Employee Safety and Wellness website at www.uwindsor.ca/safety