



POOR ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

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WHAT ARE POOR ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS?

Poor environmental conditions refers to the negative psychological and social impacts that arise from poor quality, hazardous or inadequate physical working conditions. These conditions may include factors such as poor ventilation, extreme temperatures, excessive noise or vibration, inadequate lighting, uncomfortable ergonomic setups, or exposure to hazardous substances.

Poor environmental conditions can not only lead to physical injury, but they can contribute to increased stress levels, discomfort, decreased productivity, and potential health issues among workers. It can also lead to social and interpersonal challenges, as the unpleasant working environment can affect communication, morale, and overall job satisfaction.

EXAMPLES OF POOR ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

There can be many examples of what poor environmental conditions might look like in the workplace, which can vary depending on the type of work, industry and location of the workplace. Some examples include:

Performing hazardous tasks:

- Handling toxic chemicals without proper protective measures.
- Operating heavy machinery or equipment with potential risks of injury.
- Working in confined spaces with limited ventilation.

Working in hazardous conditions:

- Exposure to high levels of noise and dust (i.e., construction workers)
- environments with smoke, flames, and potential structural collapse (i.e., firefighters)
- Exposure to hazardous substances or fume (i.e., chemical factories, swimming pool operations)
- Operating in temperatures that are too hot or too cold.

Performing demanding work while wearing uncomfortable PPE or other equipment:

- Performing physically demanding tasks while wearing ill-fitting or heavy protective gear (i.e., construction workers).
- Working long shifts while wearing tight-fitting or uncomfortable equipment (i.e., healthcare professionals)



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Using heavy machinery with restrictive safety harnesses or gloves (i.e., factory workers)

Workplace conditions that affect concentration or ability to complete tasks:

Open office environments with excessive noise from conversations, phone calls, or equipment.
Insufficient lighting in a workspace, causing eye strain and difficulty in reading documents or operating equipment.
Overcrowded workstations with limited space for movement and concentration.

Unpleasant workplace conditions:

Poorly maintained restrooms with broken fixtures or unclean facilities.
Work areas with unpleasant odours from chemicals, garbage, or unsanitary conditions.
Playing loud music in common areas without considering employees' preferences or need for concentration.

Working with poorly maintained equipment:

Using malfunctioning power tools or machinery that poses a risk of injury or malfunction.
Operating vehicles with worn-out brakes or inadequate safety features.
Working with outdated computer systems or software that impairs productivity and efficiency.

Work-related accommodation, facilities, and amenities that cause or contribute to worker fatigue:

Inadequate rest areas with uncomfortable seating or no designated spaces for breaks.
Long work shifts without sufficient rest periods or opportunities for recovery.
Lack of proper lighting or temperature control in employee restrooms or break rooms, leading to discomfort and fatigue.

Indicators include situations where:

- when physical work health and safety procedures, including audits and regular risk assessments, are not done
- workers aren't given the equipment and resources they need to do their work safely
- the work environment isn't monitored to test for decibel levels, air quality, and so on
- workers do not receive information, instruction and training on how to perform hazardous tasks or how risks can be eliminated or appropriately controlled.



IMPACTS OF POOR ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

The impacts of remote or isolated work on both workers and organisations is numerous. Some impacts to consider include:

ON WORKERS

Physical health issues: Exposure to factors like inadequate ventilation, extreme temperatures, or exposure to hazardous substances can lead to respiratory problems, allergies, fatigue, or other physical health issues. Risks of accidents and injuries are increased.

Psychological effects: Unpleasant working conditions, such as excessive noise, uncomfortable temperatures, or poor lighting, can contribute to increased stress levels, irritability, and decreased job satisfaction. It may also negatively impact concentration, focus, and overall mental well-being.

Decreased job satisfaction and morale: Working in unpleasant environments with suboptimal amenities, unpleasant smells, or inadequate facilities can significantly impact job satisfaction and overall morale. This can contribute to increased turnover rates, absenteeism, and reduced engagement among workers.

Long term impacts on health and well-being: Prolonged exposure to poor environmental conditions can have long-term consequences on workers' physical and mental health. It may result in chronic health issues, increased stress levels, and a decline in overall well-being.

ON ORGANISATIONS

Decreased productivity: Poor working conditions can lead to reduced productivity among employees. Factors such as excessive noise, uncomfortable temperatures, or inadequate lighting can create distractions, decrease focus, and impede workflow efficiency, ultimately impacting overall productivity levels within the organization.

Increased absenteeism and turnover: Poor environmental conditions can contribute to higher rates of absenteeism and employee turnover. Unpleasant working conditions, inadequate amenities, or discomfort caused by factors like poor ventilation or ergonomic issues can make employees more likely to take time off or seek employment elsewhere.

Decline in employee morale and engagement: Working in poor environments can negatively affect employee morale and engagement. Employees may feel demotivated, dissatisfied, or disengaged when dealing with issues like poor facilities, unpleasant smells, or inadequate equipment. This can impact teamwork, collaboration, and overall organisational culture.

Increased Workers Compensation Claims: Poor environmental conditions can increase the risk of accidents, injuries, and occupational hazards within the workplace, leading to increase compensation claims and associated costs.

Negative reputation and image: Organisations with poor environmental conditions may develop a negative reputation among employees, customers, and the wider community. Negative word-of-mouth, low employee satisfaction, and concerns about health and safety can harm the organisation's brand image, making it challenging to attract and retain talent or maintain positive relationships with stakeholders.



Increased costs: Addressing the consequences of poor environmental conditions, such as dealing with increased absenteeism, turnover, or potential legal issues, can lead to financial burdens for the organisation.

RISK MANAGEMENT

Risk Management involves identifying potential risks, assessing their likelihood and impact, and developing strategies to mitigate or control them. It is a proactive process that seeks to prevent risks from occurring or minimise their impact if they do occur.

No person should be injured in their workplace, including psychological injury. To meet their duties to ensure health and safety, employers must identify and eliminate or minimise psychosocial risks so far as is reasonably practicable. How long (duration), how often (frequency) and how significantly (severity) workers are exposed to psychosocial hazards impacts the level of risks. Hazards interacting or combining with each other may also impact this. Further guidance on the risk management process is available in the Code of Practice: [How to manage work health and safety risks](#). For more information on the risk management process for psychosocial hazards, please view [Section 2 of the Model Code of Practice](#).

Mind Your Head advocates for *prevention* – that is, identifying risk, implementing or changing systems to prevent worker harm or injury *before it occurs*.

Examples of Risk Management Strategies for Poor Environmental Conditions include:

- **Risk Assessment:** Conduct thorough risk assessments specific to environments to identify potential hazards and vulnerabilities. Evaluate factors such as lighting, temperature, ventilation, noise levels, ergonomic issues, and overall comfort.
- **Establish a robust health and safety policy:** Develop a comprehensive policy that addresses environmental conditions and emphasizes the organization's commitment to providing a safe and healthy work environment. Clearly outline expectations, procedures, and responsibilities related to environmental conditions.
- **Training and education:** Provide training and education to employees on the importance of environmental conditions, their impact on health and productivity, and how to identify and report any issues. This includes training on proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and ergonomic practices.



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- **Regular monitoring and inspections:** Conduct regular inspections and monitoring of environmental conditions to identify and address any potential issues promptly. This includes assessing lighting levels, air quality, temperature control systems, noise levels, and overall cleanliness.

WAYS TO MANAGE RISKS

Consult workers and HSRs. Establish Health and Safety Committees with at least 50% representation from workers. Encourage feedback, especially on any changes.

Consider how long, how often and how severely workers are exposed to hazards. The longer, more often and worse the low job control, the higher the risk that workers may be harmed.

Utilise surveys and tools to assess psychosocial risks in the workplace, particularly for businesses with over 20 employees.

Establish a system for workers to report their concerns, while ensuring anonymity and treating their concerns with respect and seriousness to encourage reporting.

Observe work and behaviours, such as prolonged work duration, excessive paperwork, or customer frustration, which may indicate low job control.

Review available information, including employee retention, incident reports, complaints, time-off records, injuries, incidents, and workers' compensation to identify potential hazards.

Identify other hazards present and evaluate how they may interact or combine to create new, heightened risks. For instance, low job control could pose a greater risk in workplaces with high job demands if workers are unable to take breaks or switch tasks to manage fatigue. Finally, consider the duration, frequency, and severity of workers' exposure to hazards, as prolonged and severe exposure to low job control could increase the risk of harm.

CONTROL MEASURES

Control measures are specific actions or procedures that are put in place to manage or mitigate identified risks. They are reactive measures that are implemented after risks have been identified and assessed as part of the risk management process. Control measures are designed to reduce the likelihood or impact of risks, and they can take many forms, including administrative controls, engineering controls, and personal protective equipment.



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Improve ventilation and air quality: Implement proper ventilation systems to ensure adequate airflow and maintain good air quality. This may include installing air purifiers, maintaining effective heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC systems, and regularly cleaning air ducts and filters.

Enhance lighting conditions: Ensure appropriate lighting levels throughout the workplace to minimise eye strain and promote productivity. Use a combination of natural and artificial lighting, and consider individual lighting preferences and task requirements.

Optimise temperature control: Maintain comfortable temperature levels in the workplace through effective heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems. Consider individual comfort preferences and address any hot or cold spots.

Provide ergonomic equipment and furniture: Supply employees with ergonomic chairs, adjustable workstations, and tools that promote proper posture and reduce the risk of musculoskeletal injuries. Encourage regular breaks and stretching exercises.

Maintain clean and well-maintained facilities: Regularly clean and maintain restrooms, break rooms, and other facilities to ensure hygiene and a pleasant working environment. Address issues such as unpleasant odours, cleanliness, and functioning amenities.

Implement effective noise control measures: Take steps to minimize excessive noise levels in the workplace through soundproofing, implementing quiet zones, or providing noise-cancelling headphones. Consider noise reduction strategies in open office environments.

Regular equipment maintenance: Establish a maintenance schedule for equipment and machinery to ensure they are regularly inspected, serviced, and kept in proper working order. Promptly address any reported issues or malfunctioning equipment.

Employee feedback and involvement: Encourage employees to provide feedback on environmental conditions and involve them in identifying and implementing improvement measures. Create channels for reporting concerns and suggestions.

DO

Regularly evaluate the environmental conditions in the workplace, including factors like temperature, noise levels, airborne chemicals, and dust, among others.

Conduct specific monitoring at the precise locations where workers are situated.

Implement appropriate control measures to safeguard workers, such as providing scheduled rest breaks, supplying personal protective

DO NOT

Neglect the risk assessment process and the implementation of appropriate controls.

Disregard any feedback received from workers concerning the environmental conditions in the workplace.

Fail to provide sufficient or suitable personal protective equipment (PPE), considering it a futile expenditure with potential non-compliance from workers and ineffective protection.



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equipment (PPE) like hearing protection, masks, or ventilated hoods, ensuring the availability of safety glasses, and utilising suitable materials for uniforms.

Conduct thorough risk assessments of tasks to ascertain the presence of adequate controls and take necessary actions to mitigate potential risks.

Conduct monitoring in areas that would yield impractical or misleading results.