Office Relocation Fact Sheets



WHY LOOK AT OFFICE RELOCATION?

Whether an individual is moving across the hall, or the entire company is moving to a different building or to a new city, relocating an office can introduce health and safety concerns that are not a “normal” part of business.

This document examines some of the health and safety aspects of moving a typical office. It does not cover contractor safety, building codes, permits etc. Check with your local municipality and provincial departments for more information on these topics.

What are the first steps?

In the early stages, it is important to get a good idea of what needs to be done, and when. Establish a time line of major tasks and requirements. Communicate clearly to staff why some tasks need to be done, when, and why they need to be done early.

You should also try to plan the moving date around business cycles (i.e. move during production downtime or a “less busy” time of year).

It is important to get a good understanding of the company’s needs. For example, conduct a job task analysis and determine how each job task is done. Decide if you need new furniture or if a new layout of existing furniture will better meet the needs of your staff and their duties.

How should I plan for the new space?

Start by taking an inventory of what you have.

- Make sure your inventory is up to date. Inspect all areas to ensure that nothing has been missed.
- Move only items of use or value to the new facility. Be sure that all equipment brought to the new space is in good working order. Also make sure that what you move will fit in the spaces available at the new location.
- Dispose of unwanted materials appropriately. For furniture, supplies and equipment that are in good repair but no longer needed, you may be able to donate these items to local charities, or “sell” them to staff for home use. You may also be able to sell your used furniture or be able to trade it in for new equipment.

In addition, you must evaluate the new facility. Whether it is a new building or a

renovated space, remember the following:

- Plan desk areas, communal work spaces, photocopy areas, lunch rooms, first aid room, coffee areas, kitchens, storage areas, library/book storage, meeting rooms, other special use areas, coat closets, etc. All areas of the building should meet accessibility requirements in “barrier free” policies or legislation that apply in your location.
- Determine if staff need privacy due to the work they do (walls/doors vs cubicles), separate telephone/teleconference rooms.
- Determine the number and placement of electrical outlets, computer cabling, telephone lines, etc.
- Determine the number of washroom facilities, toilets, showers, etc. (some of these items may be determined by building codes or other legislation).
- If you have special needs – such as a waste product that needs to be disposed of in a special way – remember to plan space for “holding” such materials until they can be picked up.
- Review all policies such as emergency response and security to ensure they match the needs of the new building.
- Check both the ventilation (air movement) and the air quality (possible contaminants, off-gassing, etc.).
- Do a complete inspection before moving in.

It would be a good idea to hold an orientation session to familiarize staff with the new office setup.

- Monitor staff adjustment to new facility. Do some policies or office etiquette guidelines need to be changed?

What are some duties for individuals?

All staff should be made aware of new safety hazards that may be present and participate in the decision-making process. It is important that staff know they will be able to resume their job tasks and functions as soon as possible. Prioritize essential start-up items such as computers, network requirements, phone, mail, etc. Communicate this schedule in advance to all staff.

Individual staff responsibilities may include:

- Organize office files for packing and transportation.
- Clean-up of storage and common areas.
- Clean-up of computer disk/network space.
- Personal belongings. It may be best to take such items of value or “breakables” home before the move. Items you want in the new office can be brought back after the move.

What may be other concerns?

An important part of relocating, whether it is across town or to a new city is to be aware of the impacts on the employees from a social perspective. These concerns may be on many issues such as:

- Parking
- Accessible bus transportation.
- Local services, restaurants, etc.
- Housing and moving services.
- Any cultural and language challenges.
- The differences between moving from a large to a small community and vice versa.

- Where necessary, career assistance, relocation assistance, Employee Assistance Program (EAP), etc.
- Family needs: elder care, spousal employment, child care, child education needs, etc.
- List of local clubs or charities, as well as a recommended list of service companies (plumbing, electrical, heating, etc.).

What are some hazards that may be introduced when moving?

Hazards that are introduced include:

- Trip and fall hazards due to clutter from boxes, furniture, trolleys, etc.
- Obstruction of thoroughfares, corridors, hallways, etc.
- Manual Materials Handling (MMH) issues such as lifting, shifting, pushing, pulling, packing, unpacking, etc.
- Use of cleaning products.
- Dust.
- Work-station set up – new arrangement of furniture or in a different space will need an ergonomic evaluation to ensure fit to worker, no glare from lights or windows, etc.

What are some packing and lifting tips?

When packing, be sure to keep the hallways clear from clutter. Boxes and containers can be placed in a common area if there is not enough room in the work space to pack and store them.

Be sure you have the appropriate moving supplies on hand. These include:

- Boxes or containers (with good handles).
- Packing materials (paper, foam chips, etc.).
- Markers, labels, tape.
- Hand carts, trolleys, etc.

When lifting, remember:

- Boxes should be closed and taped shut. They should also be light enough for one person to carry safely.
- Label clearly. Mark the box if it must remain upright.
- Use good lifting techniques.
    - Do not twist, reach etc.
    - Do not lift boxes above your shoulder.
    - Get as close as possible to the box before attempting to lift.

What precautions should be taken when moving collections of books and paper?

In addition to the safety hazards (falls, trips over boxes), and lifting concerns, you may experience problems with dust, dust mites, mould and book lice, especially if papers or books have been stored for a while.

The three major inhalation hazards are dust, dust mites and mold. If these are present, then it is likely that they will become airborne when staff are handling the materials. Once these materials are airborne then there is potential for staff to be exposed.

Dust mites are invisible and are a fairly common allergen. People who are allergic to dust mites may experience symptoms such as itchy, irritated eyes, runny nose, cough

and in more severe cases, shortness of breath and difficulty breathing (asthma). Onset of severe symptoms can be delayed and occur during the night.

Mould grows in warm areas where there is high humidity (greater than 70%) or in materials which have become wet. There are many different kinds of molds. There are extremely toxic molds which can make you very sick and there are molds which are non-toxic. If mold is visible, then it is active. It can be many different colours. It will appear as spots on the cover or on the exposed pages of the books.

Mould will likely be present if there is high humidity during the spring and fall although it is not particularly warm. If there is no gross contamination observed, then materials should be checked for limited contamination. This check can be done by using a cotton swab to wipe the outside of the book. If there appears to be mold on the cotton swab after swabbing, then there probably is mould present.

It is helpful to use a hand lens and flashlight for detection. Booklice avoid light and prefer temperatures of approximately 24°C to 30°C (75°F to 85°F) with relative humidity of 75 to 90 percent. They do not bite humans or animals or spread disease. However, skin irritation may occur in some sensitive individuals.

Recommended procedures and precautions for staff cleaning or packing these materials include:

- A thorough inspection of the materials should be conducted. Check. for mold contamination.
- Wear gloves (Type of gloves depends on the hazards present. Are cleaning agents or bleach being used?).
- Institute a respirator program.
    - If mold is present, all staff should wear disposable half-mask respirator with a HEPA filter (100 level filter for dust with no oil particulates, N100. This recommendation assumes that the concentrations of airborne ammonia or chlorine from cleaning products or bleaches are low enough so that chemical cartridge do not have to be used with the particulate filter).
    - If there is no mold present, only staff having dust mite allergy should wear disposable half-mask respirator with a HEPA filter. All other staff should wear a disposable particulate respirator (N95).
- Wear clothes that can be machine washed. Wash clothes after packing and before wearing again.
- Inform the staff as to the potential hazards and necessary precautions.

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