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eyboards

Despite the development of voice recognition software, touch-screens, pen devices and the like, the keyboard is still the most common device for direct input into computers. The design of keyboards has changed little over the years and still essentially mimics the “Qwerty” layout of the old typewriter but with additional keys requiring combinations to effect set commands.

The continuous use of any keyboard may cause injury such as carpal tunnel syndrome or other repetitive strain injury to hands, wrists, arms, neck or back. For this reason keyboards are considered to be Display Screen Equipment under The Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 and should be included in DSE assessments

The risks of injuries can be reduced by taking frequent short breaks. Users are also advised to vary tasks throughout the day, to avoid overuse of the hands and wrists. When inputting at the keyboard, users are advised to keep their shoulders relaxed with their elbows at their side and with the keyboard and mouse positioned so that reaching is not necessary. The chair height and keyboard tray should be adjusted so that the wrists are straight, and the wrists should not be rested on sharp table edges. Wrist or palm rests should not be used while typing.

There has been a good deal of media coverage following concerns about keyboard hygiene. Consumer group “Which” carried out studies in 2008 which are often quoted. During this study one keyboard was so dirty that a microbiologist ordered it to be removed, quarantined and cleaned. It had 150 times the acceptable limit for bacteria and was five times as filthy as a typical lavatory seat. This was blamed on poor personal hygiene, eating lunch at the desk and a lack of effective cleaning regimes.

Regular cleaning can protect keyboards from building up dirt from everyday use as well as protecting staff from bacteria on the keyboard. Keyboards can get dirty very easily although cleaning the surface is very straightforward and can be done by users. However, dirt and dust can coat the top of the keys and get hidden underneath and the accumulated mixture of this could cause the keys to stop working. This may require a specialist clean.

Information on the Display Screen Equipment Regulations is available from www.hse.gov.uk

The British Institute of Cleaning Science (BICSc) provides technical guidance on all cleaning matters to the industry and its clients www.bics.org.uk