Spot The Safety Violation: 10 Tips for Safe Use of Laptops

Is it safe to use a laptop computer while sitting in this position'

Laptop computers have become commonplace equipment in many workplaces, even replacing desktop computers completely in some. Because laptop computers are portable, workers can use them just about anywhere, which is both good and bad. It's good in that it gives workers flexibility. It's bad because using laptops in the field, in bed or at a coffee shop can lead to poor posture and result in musculoskeletal injuries (MSIs).

For example, although they're called laptop computers, actually using them on your lap'like the man in this

picture'can put stress on your back, neck and wrists.

10 Tips for Safe Laptop Use

The [OHS laws](#) in all Canadian jurisdictions'either expressly or implicitly'require employers to protect workers from ergonomics-related hazards, such as using laptop computers in unsafe positions that expose workers to the risk of developing MSIs.

So if your workers regularly use laptops on the job, encourage them to follow these 10 tips from [Nova Scotia Labour and Workforce Development](#) to do so safely:

1. For people who key on a steady, regular basis:
   - use a full-size, stand-alone keyboard;
   - position the laptop to minimize reflective glare from overhead or surrounding light sources;
   - position the screen to optimize screen viewing (i.e. head erect with chin tucked in).
2. When choosing a laptop, select one with a full-size keyboard area.
3. If you use a pointing device on a frequent basis, especially for precision pointing tasks, use of a stand-alone mouse (or other full-size pointing device) is recommended.
4. Select a laptop model with a screen that can be opened to tilt back fully.
5. When choosing a work location for the laptop, consider any other equipment, books or materials that will need to be in close proximity. Ensure adequate space is available.
6. Select or create a surface that allows for the following body positioning while keying and using a mouse or other pointing device:
   - shoulders relaxed'not elevated or 'shrugged'
   - upper arms hanging by sides
   - right angle at the elbow (approximate)

- forearms, wrists and hands in alignment'no bent wrists!
- fingers resting lightly on the keys.

7. If the laptop has a smaller sized keyboard area and/or the integrated pointing device must be used, take frequent mini-breaks from the task to stretch the hands and 'make a fist.'
8. Select a carry-case designed to hold only the laptop and associated cords. Larger bags have a tendency to fill up with other items, making them heavier.
9. If the laptop and other materials must be carried regularly and/or for lengthy distances, consider using a backpack-style bag or a pullman-style case that has wheels and can be pulled. Avoid carrying the laptop and other heavy loads over one shoulder.
10. When placing the laptop in a vehicle (or putting it down anywhere), set the weight down close to the body. Avoid reaching across a car seat or deep into the trunk while holding the weight of the laptop.

To keep your workers from developing MSIs regardless of the type of computers or other equipment they use, you should:

- Understand [employers' legal obligations](#) under the OHS laws
- [Identify and assess](#) ergonomics-related hazards
- Implement measures to address those hazards, using these techniques to [cut through senior management's resistance](#) and [get money](#) for ergonomics improvements
- Use these [seven strategies](#) to make your ergonomics program a success.

Go to the [Ergonomics Compliance Centre](#) for additional resources, including articles, studies and tools, such as an [office ergonomics checklist](#).