

# COMMON OFFICE SAFETY HAZARDS

To address any electrical, structural, and/or design safety issue within your immediate office space or outside of the space including hallways, common areas, stairwells, etc., please notify the Architect of the Capitol (AOC), landlord, or building maintenance staff.



## ELECTRICAL:

- Power cords, plugs, and electrical outlets must not be damaged or frayed.
- Three-prong plugs must have their ground prong in place.
- All electrical wires must be covered leaving no bare wires exposed.
- Outlets near wet surface areas such as bathrooms or kitchens must have functioning Ground Fault Circuit Interrupters (GFCI). *See picture below.*
- Test GFCI outlets periodically using the test button. Reset the unit by pushing the reset button. *See [video tutorial](#).*



*Example of GFCI*

- Modular furniture with electrical outlets must have covers over all wires.
- Extension cords cannot be used to make permanent wiring connections.
- All power strips should be plugged directly into outlets and not “daisy-chained” (plugged in a series).

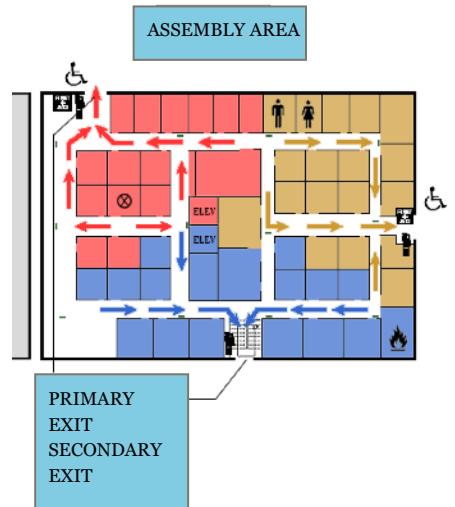
- Plug appliances directly into grounded outlets, appropriately sized for power supply.
- There should be a 36-inch clearance in front of all electrical panels.
- Electrical equipment and appliances must be approved by a Nationally Recognized Testing Laboratory.
- Electrical panel doors must be closed. If open, DO NOT APPROACH. Immediately notify the appropriate party (AOC/landlord/maintenance staff).

## CHEMICAL SAFETY:

- Safety Data Sheets (SDS) must be available for all hazardous chemicals located in the workplace.
- Chemical containers must be properly labeled and kept closed when not in use.
- Follow label or SDS instructions for all chemicals used in the workplace.

## EMERGENCY RESPONSE:

- Emergency Action Plans must be in place and all employees must be trained on the plans. This includes an up-to-date emergency telephone list, including first responders.
- Emergency duties should be assigned to employees according to the office’s Emergency Action Plan.
- Employees must know where to go when required to evacuate the building or “shelter in place.”
- Exit routes must be adequate, i.e., 18 inches for a single person and 28 inches or more for multiple persons.
- Each office must have enough exit routes to enable employees to evacuate safely.



*Evacuation Map*

- Exit doors designated as emergency exits cannot be obstructed. Aisles, stairways, and hallways must be kept clear of obstructions that could block egress and exit from the building.
- All areas must have functional emergency lighting.
- Exit signs must be working and visible in all conditions and locations.
- Office annunciators must be working properly, kept charged, and reset after each emergency.



Immediately report any malfunctioning alarms and/or office annunciators to the appropriate entity.

• First Aid supplies should be available in the absence of a close-by infirmary, clinic, or hospital. If you elect to have a kit, contents must be up to date.



## ENVIRONMENTAL:

- Keep workplaces free from clutter and debris that could cause fire, rodent, or vector problems (i.e., certain insects that transmit disease).
- Floors should be clean, dry, and free from tripping hazards.
- Lighting should be adequate to allow employees to see their work without eye strain.
- Properly identify areas containing asbestos and properly maintain surfaces to minimize fiber releases.

## MACHINE GUARDING:

- Portable fans should have fan-blade guard openings of .5-inch diameter or less.
- Paper cutters must have a finger guard in front of the blade arm, and blade arm tension must be adjusted to prevent free fall.

## SLIPS, TRIPS, FALLS:

- Rungs and feet of portable ladders and steps of stools should be supplied with non-slip material.
- Cords, wires, and cables should not run across aisles, walkways, or exit route pathways.
- Carpets and rugs must be secured and in good condition.

- Practice good housekeeping by immediately cleaning up spills.
- Stairways should have non-slip treads and proper lighting.
- Keep walking surfaces dry during inclement weather.

## MATERIAL STORAGE:

- Secure materials stored on overhead racks and ensure that the racks are attached to walls.
- Heaviest items should be loaded in the bottom of file drawers to prevent the cabinet from tipping.
- Drawers of file cabinets should not be left standing open.
- Secure heavy items on top of shelves.
- Have step stools or ladders available to reach high places.

## FIRE:

- Make sure that items are stored no closer than 18 inches under sprinkler heads.
- Ensure that fire extinguishers within your office space are fully charged, have monthly and annual tags affixed, and are not damaged. Contact the appropriate entity to correct issues.
- Fire extinguishers, pull stations, exit signs, and strobe lights must be visible and accessible.

- Store combustible materials away from ignition sources, exit stairwells, and electrical closets.
- All ceiling tiles should be intact.
- Plug space heaters directly into outlets and ensure that they are equipped with tip-over switches.



• Cords and wires should be protected from damage and pinch points and not run through ceilings, doorways, walls, or other openings, or under rugs or chair mats.

- Fire doors must not be blocked, locked, or obstructed, and must be free from flammable materials such as posters and fliers.
- Use flame retardant draperies.
- Fire doors must be working properly and close securely.
- All fire wall penetrations must be sealed.
- All stairways, corridors, and exits should be clear of obstructions.
- Fire sprinklers should be in good condition and free from corrosion.

## WORKPLACE:

- “Your Rights in the Congressional Workplace” poster should be placed in an area visible to employees.

**YOUR RIGHTS**  
in the Congressional Workplace

The Office of Congressional Workplace Rights (OCWR) enforces the rights and protections of the Congressional Accountability Act (CAA) for covered employees of the legislative branch, including, in some cases, unpaid staff. The OCWR administers a process to resolve claims alleging violations of these laws.

1. **Unlawful Discrimination & Harassment**  
Prohibits discrimination and harassment based on race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, or disability.

2. **Protection for Program Workers**  
Requires that the program provide reasonable accommodations for an employee known to be pregnant, a child's parent, or related medical condition.

3. **Fair Labor Standards**  
Requires that employees receive overtime compensation to non-exempt employees, restricts child labor, and prohibits employers from paying piece rates.

4. **Confidential Information**  
Requires the disclosure of private information as a basis for taking a personnel action.

5. **Mass Layoffs**  
Requires that employees be notified of an office closing or of a mass layoff.

6. **Fair Chance to Compete for Jobs**  
Prohibits employing offices from asking about job seekers' previous arrests or convictions prior to making conditional offers of employment.

All claims alleging violations of the above laws must be filed with the OCWR during the 180-day period that begins on the date of the alleged violation. The statute of limitations for filing a claim is three years. An employee may file a complaint with the Federal Circuit after filing a claim with the OCWR or after preliminary review. The OCWR also offers voluntary mediation and confidential arbitration services.

The OCWR also enforces the laws below. Contact us to learn more.

Access to equal legislative branch facilities, services, programs, and activities for anyone with a disability

Collective Bargaining & Unionization

Hazard-Free Workplaces

## NEED HELP WITH AN ISSUE?

Contact:  
House Service Center at (202) 225-4141 or  
Senate Service Center at (202) 224-3141

For more information on workplace safety under the Congressional Accountability Act, call (202) 724-9250 or visit [ocwr.gov](http://ocwr.gov)

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