



4. EYE STRAIN

According to the London Hazards Centre, more than 70% of people working with a VDU for more than six hours a day have found that they experience visual problems. The most common of these are eyestrain, double vision, temporary short-sightedness and visual fatigue. Although computer usage has not been proven to cause permanent damage to healthy eyes, there is evidence to suggest that small vision defects may start to cause problems when carrying out more visually demanding tasks.



It is important to take regular breaks when using a VDU, and it is not just your eyes that will benefit - research has found that computer workers who take short breaks are more productive and 13% more accurate in their work than those who don't take breaks.

Under the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992, people who use a VDU as a habitual part of their job are entitled to an eye and eyesight test that will be paid for by their employer. Employers are required to pay for any prescription spectacles needed by their employees to carry out their VDU work.

1. What is a VDU, and what harm can VDUs cause to users?

2. How could ICT be used to remind staff to take regular breaks? What other measures could be taken to reduce damage to eyes from VDUs? Give examples. Think of screens, lighting, monitor design.



All display screens that use a TV-style tube emit small quantities of electromagnetic radiation but there is still no conclusive proof about the possible long-term effects of this radiation on users of the equipment, or those sitting nearby (as the strongest emissions are to the back and sides of the display screens). Despite public concern about the possibility of miscarriage and birth defects among some groups of visual display workers, and the much lower radiation figures felt to be acceptable in countries such as Sweden, the EC directive states that:

"In the light of scientific evidence pregnant women do not need to stop working with VDUs. However, to avoid stress and anxiety, women working with VDUs should be given the opportunity to discuss their concerns with someone adequately informed of current authoritative scientific information and advice."

The London-based VDU Worker's Rights Campaign, who have been working on VDU safety for some time, hold a somewhat different view: that the issue should be a cause for concern until there is conclusive proof one way or the other.

3. What are the dangers of using monitors that have TV-style tubes? What could be done to reduce, or prevent the radiation that these VDUs give out?

4. Do you agree with the EC or the VDU Worker's Campaign about the use of monitors? Explain why.