



Australian Government

Comcare

HSR HELPER 2

Issue: complaints of sore eyes in the workplace

As a health and safety representative (HSR) you have been elected by members of your work group to represent them in health and safety matters. Your role is not to fix health and safety problems in the workplace, nor are you expected to be an expert on work health and safety (WHS) issues.

Further information on your role as a HSR can be found in Comcare's [Health and Safety Representative Handbook](#) and Comcare's [HSR pocket guide](#). Please make sure you are familiar with the purpose of your role as a HSR.

This Helper does not contain every circumstance you may encounter, but is designed to give you some ideas about what you can do, and where to find further information.

WHAT COULD BE CAUSING THIS?

Looking at computer screens and using electronic devices (tablets, smart phones etc.) are commonly cited as the cause of sore eyes in the workplace. However the actual underlying issue is a person's blink rate. We tend to blink less when using electronic devices that result in our eyes feeling like they are drying out. Frequent blinking provides natural lubrication to the eyes. Screen use makes us stare which means we miss out on this vital lubrication.

The ergonomic set up of the workstation and task to be undertaken may not suit the worker, causing sore eyes. It is also possible that the worker has an undiagnosed eye problem that may require medical attention, or optometry advice (they may need reading glasses).

WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT IT?

As a HSR, it is not your job to establish the cause of workers having sore eyes. However, you can consult with management to help to resolve this health and safety issue.

Comcare's [Eye health in the workplace: a guide for PCBU's](#) publication and [Eye health in the workplace](#) fact sheet provide useful tips for addressing the issue. The material also covers many of the issues faced by office workers with regard to visual comfort. Other actions you can implement can be found in the visual comfort action table.

If you can understand the contributing factors to sore eyes then you might notice some of the triggers in the workplace. This will place you in a better position to discuss eye health with workers when they raise issues.

You could check with workers to identify how many in your work group are experiencing similar problems in the building. You don't have to ask each individual; rather you want to get an idea of the number of people that are affected, their location, the extent to which they are experiencing discomfort and if they have any suggestions to remedy the problem.

You will then be better informed to discuss the issue with management.

OTHER RESOURCES

[Managing Hazards landing page](#)

[Eye health in the workplace: A guide for PCBU's and workers](#)

[Eye health in the workplace—A factsheet](#)

[Call centres: A guide for safe work](#)

[Virtual Office](#)

[Officewise](#)

[Managing the Work Environment and Facilities Code of Practice](#)

Visual comfort action table

Objects	Hazards	Considerations
Computer screens	Dry, tired eyes, blurred vision, irritated eyes, and headaches.	<p>Is the ergonomic set up correct including font size? Are screens clean and positioned to avoid glare? Workers should be encouraged to rest eyes regularly and look into the distance. Workers should be encouraged to blink often. Use the 20-20-20 rule every 20 minutes look away from the screen at an object 20 feet away for 20 seconds. Software packages that automatically prompt workers to take breaks could be considered.</p>
Smart phones, tablets, electronic devices	<p>Dry, tired eyes, blurred vision, irritated eyes, and headaches (digital eye strain). Sore neck and shoulders from leaning to see the screen.</p>	<p>Ergonomics can be tricky with these small devices. Where possible:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > minimise use > use a separate keyboard and/ or screen > increase the size of the font on your screen > adjust your device's brightness and/or contrast settings > use a device with a higher resolution screen > hold your device at least 25 to 30 centimeters from your eyes.
Lighting	<p>Dry, tired eyes, blurred vision, irritated eyes, and headaches Sore neck and shoulders from leaning to see the screen.</p>	<p>Workers should position screens to avoid glare. If low light is the issue, use task lighting. Ask the worker when they last had their eyes tested (if at all).</p>
Poor eyesight (not corrected by glasses)	Poor posture leaning forward to see the screen.	Ask the worker when they last had their eyes tested (if at all).
Visually demanding work	Work tasks that require near work, intense visual work and use of screen based equipment or visual display units for prolonged periods	See computer screens and smart phones, tablets and electronic devices considerations.

Is your workplace safe? Use the table following for a quick check

Things to consider

Print out this table to get you started on what to look for in your workplace with regards to visual discomfort. Where you identify an issue then a further risk assessment might be warranted. Report issues to your supervisor, manager or via your internal hazard reporting system.

	True	Requires follow up
Lighting is at the right level for the task being undertaken		
People are able to adjust the font size on their computer		
People adjust the contrast and bright functionalities on their screen to suit the task		
Task specific lights are used when required		
Glare from windows is controlled		
Portable computing devices have been ergonomically assessed for the type of use		
Non-operating light bulbs are replaced		
People are encouraged to take time away from the computer screen		
People are sitting up straight and not leaning towards their screen (they may need their eyes tested)		