

# INSTRUCTIONS TO FACULTY & STAFF ON ENVIRONMENT, HEALTH AND SAFETY ISSUES

**UNIVERSITY OF NICOSIA**

Environment, Health and Safety Office

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## **1. INSTRUCTIONS TO STAFF ON ENVIRONMENT, HEALTH AND SAFETY ISSUES**

Every year, thousands of employees have accidents in offices, many of them serious, yet each thought “it will never happen to me”.

Accidents are a menace to everyone, and their prevention is everyone’s concern, including yours. This booklet is a summary of a number of documents namely (a) Internal Procedures for EH&S, (b) Emergency Plan, and (c) Risk Assessment. It describes the main causes of accidents and ill health in the Campus, and gives advice on how to avoid them.

Risks to your health can be reduced by making sure that you understand the health and safety arrangements in the Campus, and that you play your part.

According to the statistics, the following five main types of accidents cause over 90% of serious injuries in office environments.

- (a) Slips, Trips and Falls (including falls from heights)
- (b) Handling, Lifting & Carrying
- (c) Struck by flying or falling objects
- (d) Striking against objects
- (e) Exposure to harmful substances

## 2. RISK ASSESSMENT (Health & Safety Management System, UNIC-HSI-01)

Risk affects all of our lives. Our health and safety is affected not just by what happens at work but by things we do at home and in our leisure time. Risk is a way of describing how likely it is that something –usually harmful or unpleasant- will happen. Risk can never be reduced to nothing, but it can be managed and reduced to acceptable levels.

It is important to understand the difference between hazard and risk:

**HAZARD** is the potential of something to cause harm.

**RISK** is the likelihood (chance) of harm occurring.

For instance, a car speeding down a busy street at 80 km/h is a safety hazard to everybody but particularly to children. The more children playing in the street, the greater the risk that the car will injure or kill a child. But the hazard –the speeding car- is just the same. However, if the car goes even faster the hazard increases, and this also increases the risk of injury.

It is important to know about hazards and who might be exposed to them, if we are to understand risks to health and safety.

Compared with other working activities, office work is relatively low risk, but as we will see, there are plenty of health and safety topics to think about.

### **3. EMERGENCY PROCEDURE (Health & Safety Management System, UNIC-HSP-07)**

In case of fire (and/or emergency liable to put in danger people, equipment, infrastructures and environment) sound the alarm immediately by breaking the glass of the nearest Fire Alarm Operating Point, and then by calling the telephone number below:

- Reception: 22 841 500
- Fire Brigade: 112

When reporting an emergency, always state the area/floor of the building concerned.

Moreover, provide details of any damage and, where appropriate, specify the number of persons involved.

#### **3.1 Floor Leaders**

The Floor Leaders are the nominated employees that information was given about:

- the location and use of the escape routes from where they are working; and
- the location, operation and meaning of the fire warning system where they are working.

#### **3.2 Evacuation Instructions**

- Once the alarm has been sounded, all those present must leave the “danger area” via the closest emergency exit (Escape Route Maps are posted on the corridor walls), and go to the Assembly Point.
- Leave behind all your personal belongings except those strictly necessary (glasses, lenses, etc).
- Leave the area from the nearest emergency exit (unless otherwise instructed by the rescue team).
- Keep calm and silent.
- Do not come back for anything.
- Suspend any jobs.
- As far as possible try to help those in a difficult situation..
- Do not use lifts or elevators.
- Do not block building access points.
- Keep away from emergency vehicles while in operation

- Rush to the nearest gathering point

### 3.3 Means of escape in case of fire

The principle on which means of escape provisions are based on is that the **time available for escape** (an assessment of the length of time between the fire starting and it making the means of escape from the workplace unsafe) is greater than the **time needed for escape** (the length of time it will take everyone to evacuate once a fire has been discovered and warning given).

Regardless of the location of a fire, once people are aware of it, they should be able to proceed safely along a recognisable escape route to a place of safety.

### 3.4 Arrangements for evacuating the workplace

These arrangements form an integral part of the Emergency Plan and are included in the instruction and training of the employees.

The evacuation in case of fire will be by means of everyone reacting to the warning signal given when the fire is discovered and making their way, by the means of escape, to a place of safety away from the workplace. This is known as a 'simultaneous' evacuation and will normally be initiated by the sounding of the general alarm over the fire warning system.

### 3.5 Emergency escape and fire exit signs

Emergency escape routes and exit doors that are not in common use are clearly indicated, as appropriate, by suitable signs. The signs have the form of a pictogram which may incorporate a directional arrow. The sign can also be supplemented by words such as 'Fire Exit'.



*Examples of pictographic fire exit signs*

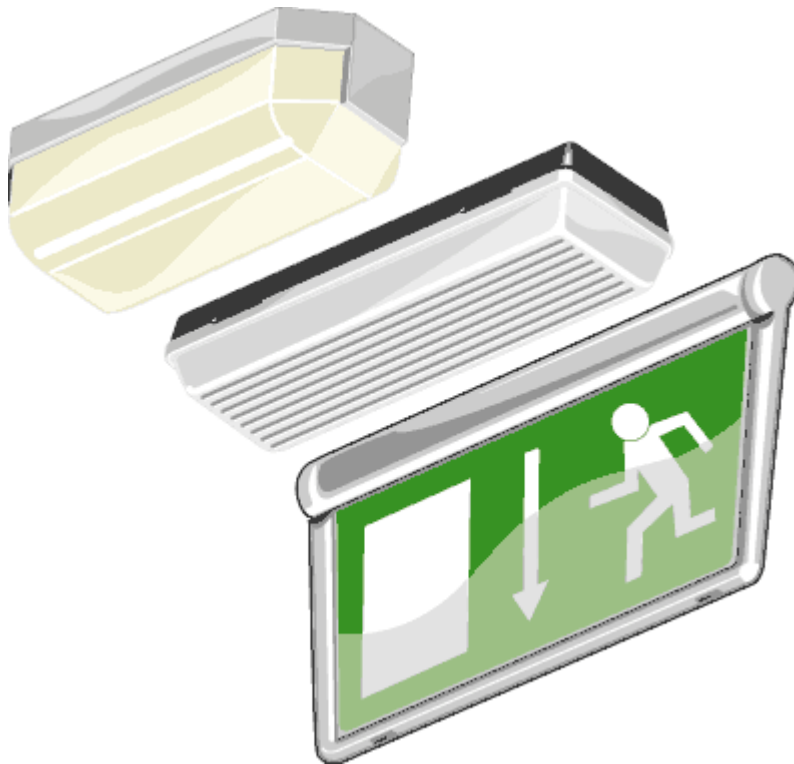
### 3.6 Lighting of escape routes

All escape routes have sufficient lighting for people to see their way out safely.

Emergency escape lighting should:

- indicate the escape routes clearly;
- provide illumination along escape routes to allow safe movement towards the final exits; and
- ensure that fire alarm call points and fire-fighting equipment can be readily located.

The emergency escape lighting take the form of battery-operated torches placed in suitable positions where employees can quickly get access to them in an emergency, e.g. on an escape route.



*Typical emergency lighting units*

Emergency lighting units should be sited to cover specific areas, for example:

- at each exit door;
- near each staircase so that each flight of stairs receives direct light;
- close to a change in floor level;
- outside each final exit.



## **4. FIRE AND THE FIRE TRIANGLE (Health & Safety Management System, UNIC-HSI-17)**

For a fire to start, three things are needed:

- a source of ignition;
- fuel; and
- oxygen.

If any one of these is missing, a fire cannot start. Taking steps to avoid the three coming together will therefore reduce the chances of a fire occurring.

### **4.1 Identifying sources of ignition**

You can identify the potential ignition sources in your workplace by looking for possible sources of heat which could get hot enough to ignite the material in the workplace.

### **4.2 Identifying sources of fuel**

Anything that burns is fuel for a fire. So you need to look for the things that will burn reasonably easily and are in sufficient quantity to provide fuel for a fire or cause it to spread to another fuel source.

### **4.3 Identifying sources of oxygen**

The main source of oxygen for a fire is in the air around us. In an enclosed building this is provided by the ventilation system in use. This generally falls into one of two categories: natural airflow through doors, windows and other openings; or mechanical air conditioning systems and air handling systems. In many buildings there will be a combination of systems, which will be capable of introducing/extracting air to and from the building.

#### 4.4 Fire detection

During working hours, fires are often detected through observation or smell. The University of Nicosia has installed fire alarm systems for detecting fire.

However, you need to think about any parts of the workplace where a fire could start and spread undetected. This could be a storage area or a basement that is not visited on a regular basis or a part of the workplace that has been temporarily vacated, for example at mealtimes. Fires that start and develop unnoticed can pose a serious danger to people in the workplace.

#### 4.5 Portable fire extinguishers (Health & Safety Management System, UNIC-HSI-09)

Portable fire extinguishers enable suitably trained people to tackle a fire in its early stages, if they can do so without putting themselves in danger.

All University workplaces are provided with means of fighting fire for use by people in the premises.

Fires are classified in accordance with British Standard EN 2 as follows:

- Class A fires involving solid materials where combustion normally takes place with the formation of glowing embers;
- Class B fires involving liquids or liquefiable solids;
- Class C fires involving gases;
- Class D fires involving metals;

#### 4.6 Types of portable fire extinguishers (Health & Safety Management System, UNIC-HSI-09)

The fire-fighting extinguishing medium in portable extinguishers is expelled by internal pressure, either permanently stored or by means of a gas cartridge. Generally speaking, the following three types of portable fire extinguishers are located in the University premises:

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## Fire Extinguisher Chart

Extinguisher		Type of Fire				
Colour	Type	Solids (wood, paper, cloth, etc)	Flammable Liquids	Flammable Gasses	Electrical Equipment	Cooking Oils & Fats
	Water	✓ Yes	✗ No	✗ No	✗ No	✗ No
	Foam	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	✗ No	✗ No	✓ Yes
	Dry Powder	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	✗ No
	Carbon Dioxide (CO <sub>2</sub> )	✗ No	✓ Yes	✗ No	✓ Yes	✓ Yes

Some fire extinguishers can be used on more than one type of fire. For instance, the dry powder extinguisher can be used on Class 'A' fires, Class 'B' fires, and Class 'C' fires.

The most useful form of fire-fighting equipment for general fire risks is the water-type extinguisher or hose reel. Each floor has a hose reel which is known to be in working order and of sufficient length for the floor it serves. DO NOT use water for fires involving flammable liquids or electrical equipment.

Fire extinguishers are properly maintained and serviced. They are located in conspicuous positions on escape routes, preferably near exit doors and are clearly visible.

### 4.7 Hose reels and fire blankets

Where hose reels are provided, they should be located where they are conspicuous and always accessible, such as in corridors.

Fire blankets are located in the vicinity of the fire hazard they are to be used on, but in a position that can be safely accessed in the event of a fire, e.g. in the kitchen. These light-duty fire blankets are suitable for dealing with small fires in containers of cooking oils or fats and fires involving clothing.

## **5. SLIPS, TRIPS AND FALLS**

Slips, trips and falls are the biggest cause of serious office accidents. Without proper attention from managers and employees, they can happen to everyone.

When moving around the office:

- Always walk-never run.
- Look where you are going, make sure there is nothing on the floor which will cause you or someone else to slip or trip, such as carpet, spilt liquids, trailing leads or cables, boxes, papers or briefcases.
- Do clean up spillages!
- Keep all corridors clean.
- Keep to the recognized walkways.
- On staircases use the handrail, and do not to read documents or carry bulky loads.
- At “blind” corners and doors think about people approaching from the other side.

Inattention when going from place to place can lead to serious accidents, either to yourself or others.

DO deal with obstructions in walkways or emergency exits.

Keep the office environment tidy. This will help with everyday work and emergencies and it will also help prevent slips, trips and falls.

### **5.1 Filling cabinets**

Do not leave the drawers of filing cabinets projecting into the office since they can cause serious accidents.

Do not overload the top drawers of filing cabinets or load top drawers before bottom drawers – they may fall over. Close one drawer before opening the next.

## **5.2 Stacking materials**

Many injuries are caused by toppled goods or materials, so stack items neatly and securely in order to prevent toppling. If you are not using secure racking or shelving, stack no greater than chest height so the top item can be reached easily and ensure the stack is stable.

Leave sufficient space between stacks for walkways and see that there are no dangerous projections into the walkways.

Do not climb stacks or racks – use steps or a ladder.

## **6. ERGONOMICS (Health & Safety Management System, UNIC-HSI-12)**

### **6.1 Movement, posture and repetitive work**

Ergonomics is about the relationship between you and the things you use –the way you operate equipment, sit at your workstation, or carry out repetitive tasks. It is about the correct working method for you.

Repetitive finger, hand or arm movements, and body movements such as twisting, are known as 'ergonomic' factors.

Poor ergonomics can lead to musculoskeletal disorders which affect the joints, the muscles, tendons and bones, especially in the back, hands and arms. Symptoms vary from mild aching or 'pins and needles' to restricted movement, inflammation or severe swelling.

### **6.2 How can I avoid musculoskeletal disorders?**

The aim is to reduce prolonged strain to parts of the body, by ensuring correct posture so:

- Adjust your work equipment so that it is comfortable for you;
- Use a footrest if you can't put your feet flat on the floor when the seat is adjusted;
- Avoid long periods of repetitive work in one position;
- Try short, regular spells doing different types of work;
- Use stretching exercises which involve different kinds of movement;
- Ensure :
  - your chair is the correct height;
  - your lower back is supported;
  - the lighting is comfortable and adequate for the work you are doing.

### **6.3 Pregnant women should:**

- be aware that their back is more vulnerable, particularly during the later stages of pregnancy;
- cut down on strenuous physical work or prolonged spells at workstations. Maintain fitness through gentle exercises.

### **6.4 Manual handling**

Lifting and moving loads manually is a major cause of office injury, so use any lifting or carrying equipment provided such as sack trucks or trolleys. If you do have to lift manually, follow these simple safety hints:

- look out for sharp edges, wire or other projections;
- assess the weight, get help if the load is awkward or beyond your capacity, or you are uncertain;
- plan your lift-remove any obstructions that may be in your path, and make sure you can see over or round the load when carrying it. Ensure that there is sufficient space to put down the load after you have moved it.

Bend your knees and keep your back straight when picking up or putting down a load. Put it down on a suitable table or stand if possible. Put the load down if you want to change grip.

## **7. WORKING WITH OFFICE EQUIPMENT**

### **7.1 Visual Display Units (VDU's)**

The VDUs are common place and need to be used properly to prevent health problems arising. There is no evidence that VDUs can cause disease or permanent damage to the eyes, but fatigue due to intensive VDU work can cause discomfort, even to healthy eyes.

Contact lens wearers will find a dry office environment uncomfortable and the heat generated by VDUs can make the atmosphere drier. An alternative might be to wear glasses instead of your lenses for VDU work.

Some VDU users experience aches and pains in their hands and wrists, arms, neck and shoulders or back after sustained periods of VDU work. It is important to try to vary your work and adjust your working position. Most of these 'ergonomic' or postural problems can be prevented by good workplace design and sensible working practices.

While pregnant women do not have to worry about VDU radiation, poor ergonomics can lead to discomfort and anxiety, particularly in the later stage of pregnancy. If you are anxious about working with VDUs during pregnancy then advice your supervisor and talk to your doctor.

Some people have suffered from radiation or skin rashes aggravated by VDUs. It is possible that a combination of dry air and electrostatic charges are involved. If you are suffering from these symptoms, again, tell your supervisor.

### **7.2 Photocopiers**

The biggest photocopier hazard is electricity. Never tamper with the equipment. Switch off the power where necessary. Inside, beware of hot surfaces. Always follow the supplier's instructions for dealing with faults such as paper jams.

Wash your hands if you come into contact with toner.

Two other hazards associated with photocopiers are the extremely bright photocopying 'light bar' and the generation of ozone gas during the photocopying. However, neither of these are a significant risk if you take sensible precautions.

Photocopy with the lid down whenever possible and if the lid is up, do not look at the moving light bar. To prevent any build up of ozone, ensure that the photocopier is working in a well ventilated and reasonably sized area.



### **7.3 Cutting equipment**

Guillotines and paper shredders should be guarded. Avoid leaving knives and blades lying around, store them safely.

## **8. ELECTRICITY (Health & Safety Management System, UNIC-HSI-07)**

Electricity can kill.

### **8.1 Always:**

- Switch off equipment at the mains before opening or cleaning electrical appliances.
- Visually check electrical equipment plugs and cables before use. Report details of any faulty or damaged electrical equipment to your office supervisor, and don't use it until it is repaired.
- Ensure that portable electrical equipment has been checked by a competent electrician as suitable for use in the office.

### **8.2 Never:**

- Misuse electrical equipment;
- Use equipment where cable insulation has pulled free from the plug exposing the coloured wires;
- Jam wires or force the wrong plugs into sockets;
- Leave cables where they can cause a trip hazard be damaged or get wet, or use them to lift or pull the equipment to which they are connected;
- Interfere with any electrical apparatus or equipment, or attempt to repair it (unless you are competent and authorized to do the work);
- Allow water to contact electrical appliances.

Remember overloaded sockets can also lead to fire.

### **8.3 In case of electric shock**

Know what to do if someone suffers from an electric shock.

If the victim is still in contact with the electric current, switch off the power (or remove the plug). Call for medical help immediately (Reception telephone number: 22 841 500 or 112).

## **9. CONTRACTORS AND LONE WORKERS (Health & Safety Management System, UNIC-HSI-06, UNIC After Hours Work Policy)**

Contractors can include cleaners, builders and refurbishers, electricians, and of course, “office temps”. These people may have less knowledge of the hazards and risks in your workplace than you or your colleagues.

Your employer is required to consider the health and safety aspects of allowing contractors to work in the company, but think about possible risks both to them and yourselves.

If you see a worker, a student, or even a visitor, doing something which you think could be a danger to them or the people around them, tell your supervisor at once.

Keep away from hazardous work areas.

### **9.1 Lone Working**

The University takes reasonable steps to ensure your health and safety when you work alone, but you also have a duty to take reasonable care of yourself.

Before working “out of hours”:

- Check with your supervisor that it is permitted;
- Make sure that what you are doing can be done safely by one person;
- Make sure you know how to get help quickly if you need it;
- Know what to do in case of emergency (such as fire) and make sure there is a safe exit.

If you are working in the office well out of office hours, then ensure that somebody (such as your supervisor) knows where you are and when you intend to finish.

If you think there are any medical reasons why you should not work alone then tell your supervisor or if you prefer a personnel or employee representative. Don't risk your own safety because of a medical condition.





## **10. HAZARDOUS SUBSTANCES (Health & Safety Management System, UNIC-HSI-13)**

Hazardous substances can be in various forms. They can be liquids (such as paints, cleaners and solvents), dusts (for example, from maintenance work), fibres (such as fiber glass), vapours or gases.

How a substance causes harm will depend on its form and how it enters the body, for example by being breathed in (inhaled), absorbed through the skin, or a combination of routes. In addition, contact with some of the substances can cause irritation or corrosive burns.

Health problems can also be caused by bacteria (such as legionella), or fungal spores.

Hazardous substances are classified according to the type of hazard they present. These are the symbols for certain hazards:

-  Flammable: will ignite easily and act as a fuel in a fire
-  Very toxic / Toxic: only small amounts can cause serious illness or death
-  Harmful: has a risk to health or can damage skin
-  Corrosive: “eats” into materials including skin

Hazardous substances may have more than one symbol and warning. The risk of harm from a substance will depend on its hazard(s), its concentration (strength), and the degree of exposure of individuals.

### **10.1 How to reduce the risk**

If you work with hazardous substances then you must have clear instructions on their use, and have read and understood the supplier’s health and safety data sheet (MSDS). If you are working in an area where others are using hazardous substances then check with your supervisor that you are not at risk.

You should:

- Make sure any substances are safely returned to their correct storage place after use;

- Keep substances separate from each other unless the instructions say it is safe to mix them;
- Know what to do if you spill something;
- Keep hazardous substances away from food and from where food is consumed;
- Dispose of empty containers properly – don't re-use them for a different substance or purpose.

Women are advised to let employers know if they are pregnant, so that the employer can take this into account.

## **11. THE WORKING ENVIRONMENT**

We have already seen how a tidy office can help towards preventing accidents, but there are other aspects of health and safety to think about.

### **11.1 Smoking**

The University of Nicosia in compliance with the Cyprus legislation on Smoking [Ο περί Προστασίας της Υγείας (Έλεγχος του καπνίσματος) Νόμος 2002-2009] has been kept smoke-free since 1st January, 2010. The Council endorsed all the provisions of the aforementioned law and declared ALL its premises SMOKE-FREE.

### **11.2 Noise**

Noise levels in offices are unlikely to affect your hearing, but particularly noisy office equipment or other sources can put stress on individuals. If you are working in noisy conditions, talk to your supervisor.

### **11.3 Lighting, heating and ventilation**

The University of Nicosia is required by law to provide proper lighting, heating and ventilation.

The recommended office temperature is between 19-26 °C. Humidity is usually kept to around 40 – 70%. Too low and this increases the likelihood of dry eyes, irritation and shocks from static electricity, too high and this encourages the growth of moulds in ventilation ducts for example.

The usage of portable heaters is prohibited in all University offices, classrooms and labs.

### **11.4 Workspace**

You should have enough space to work in without the risk of tripping or banging into people, furniture or other objects.

If you have a problem with your working environment, talk to your supervisor.

### **11.5 “Sick building syndrome” (SBS)**

There are occasions when, for no obvious reason, people working in a particular building experience certain symptoms more often than most of the population might through flu or other illness.

The main symptoms associated with SBS are dry or itchy skin or skin rash, headaches, lethargy, irritability or poor concentration, stuffy or runny nose, dry or itchy eyes, nose or throat.

The causes are largely unknown but are likely to be due to a combination of factors which can include poor ventilation, cigarette smoke, lack of cleaning and maintenance, and other things such as poor lighting, very dry or very humid air and even the way in which work is organized and managed.

### **11.6 Food hygiene**

Don't leave food lying around in offices or tea rooms – it can encourage insects and rodents.

Do clean up in the kitchen and wherever food is eaten – this will help reduce any risk of contamination, and help prevent pests. Do wash your hands before handling food.

### **11.7 Portable Gas Burners**

The existence or use of portable gas burners in any of the University kitchenettes is prohibited.

## **12. STRESS**

Stress is the reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed upon them. It arises when they worry that they can't cope.

Stress can be caused by an imbalance between expectations on you – self-imposed or from others – and your ability to meet those expectations. The bigger the difference between the two, the greater the stress.

Excessive stress can weaken your body's natural defenses, making it more likely that you will get colds or other infections. In the most serious cases stress can lead to nervous breakdown.

### **12.1 What are the main causes of stress?**

Stress is difficult to measure because you may react differently to somebody else faced with the same situation. One of the biggest causes of stress is "relationships", whether at home or at work. Other causes include bereavement, moving house and financial worries.

Stress at work might also be related to poor management, lack of control over what's happening, too little or too much responsibility, insufficient training, significant change, or even poor or unhealthy working conditions.



### **13. FIRST AID**

Office slips, trips and falls can lead to serious injuries and even a scratch can become serious if not properly treated, so it is important that you:

- Know TODAY who the First-Aider or “Appointed Person” is in your department (and how to contact them in an emergency) and where the first-aid room or first-aid equipment is. If in doubt - contact the main reception or the EH&S office.
- Ensure any injury is recorded in the company “Accident Log Book”;
- If you suffer an injury, however slight, tell your supervisor at once and go to the first-aid post for proper treatment and advice;
- If you get chemicals on your skin or in your eye, immediately wash the affected area thoroughly with clean water. Check with the First Aider and Supervisor as soon as possible afterwards.

Injuries – especially foreign bodies in the eye – should only be treated by someone with knowledge of first-aid.

Do not move a serious casualty unless they are exposed to further danger (for example, electricity). If you need help, send for it immediately.

## **14. PREPARE FOR AN EARTHQUAKE**

Here's what you can do to prepare for such an emergency.

### **14.1 Prepare an Earthquake Plan**

- Choose a safe place in every room – under a sturdy table or desk or against an inside wall where nothing can fall on you.
- Practice:

**DROP** – Drop to the floor and crouch down.

**COVER** – Seek cover under a sturdy desk or table. If there's no table or desk nearby, sit on the floor against an interior wall away from the windows, bookcases, or tall furniture that could fall on you. Protect your eyes by pressing your face against your arm.

**HOLD ON** – If possible hold on tight to something substantial, such as a desk leg or door frame. During the “shaking” phase of an earthquake **DON'T MOVE** as you may suffer serious from falling masonry, objects or debris.

- Practice at least twice a year.
- Teach students to **DROP, COVER, AND HOLD ON!**
- Keep a list of emergency phone numbers.
- Know the Floor Leaders of your area in the University and the location of the First Aid kits.
- Be aware about the University Emergency Plan, how to turn off gas, electricity and water if you are instructed to do so.

### **14.2 Know what to do when the shaking begins**

- **DROP, COVER, AND HOLD ON!** Move only a few steps to a nearby safe place. Stay indoors until the shaking stops, and then make sure it's safe to exit. Stay away from windows.
- If you are outdoors, find a clear spot away from buildings, trees, and power lines. Drop to the ground.
- If you are in a car, slow down and drive to a clear place (as described above). Stay in the car until the shaking stops.

### 14.3 Identify what to do after the shaking stops

- Check yourself for injuries. Protect yourself from further danger.
- Check others for injuries. Give first aid for serious injuries, either your self or the First Aider of your area.
- Expect aftershocks. Each time you feel one, **DROP, COVER, AND HOLD ON!**
- Look for and extinguish small fire. Eliminate fire hazards. In the kitchen area, turn off the gas if you smell gas or think it's leaking.
- Get everyone out in the Assembly Point, according the Emergency Plan.
- Use the telephone only to report life-threatening emergencies.

Prepared by:

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