

## Retail Work

Opportunities for part time work in shops and supermarkets mean that women form a large percentage of the retail workforce . A very large number of shopworkers are under 20 and often in their first job - and may be less aware of hazards at work. Employers owe special duties to young workers under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

Women tend to work as checkout operators although they could be involved in other jobs such as shelf filling – or, at larger supermarkets, on the various food counters. There is also a large behind the scenes workforce in the storerooms, meat preparation and bakery areas.

Shop workers encounter a variety of hazards -

- supermarket checkout operators can develop musculo-skeletal disorders (“aches and pains” brought on by awkward or repetitive work
- exposure to certain foods may cause allergies
- threatening behaviour, violence and verbal abuse from customers on a daily basis – not only in small shops

Violence is an increasing problem for shop workers. It is often linked to drug or alcohol abuse. The British Retail Consortium's 9<sup>th</sup> Crime survey found that 2000/1 about 20,000 retail staff were victims of physical violence, there were more than 28,000 incidents reported where they were threatened with violence - and many more workers were verbally abused.

See next page for **Hazards of Retail Work & Action Checklist**

### **Relevant law**

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999

The Workplace (Health Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992

The Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992

Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002

### **Some further information from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE)**

Checkouts and Musculoskeletal Disorders INDG 269 - free

Violence at Work - a guide for employers INDG 69L - free

Workroom temperatures in places where food is handled – FIS No.3 - free

Working Alone in Safety INDG73 - free

Health and Safety of New and Expectant Mothers in the Catering Industry

Catering information sheet No.19 – free

Occupational Dermatitis in the Catering and Food Industries FS No.17- free

Preventing Asthma at Work L55

Preventing Dermatitis at Work INDG233 - free

### **Hazards of Retail Work**

- Checkout work - fast pace of work, poor checkout design and long periods without rest breaks can all lead to RSI, back, neck and shoulder ache.
- Lifting, Pushing and Pulling - can lead to back and other handling injuries
- Pressure of work, difficult customers and bullying bosses can all lead to stress
- Exposure to certain food products such as flour and seafood can lead to allergies and skin problems such as baker's asthma and dermatitis.
- Violence - women are more at risk particularly those working alone in late night retail establishments.
- Shift work and long working hours can lead to stress and fatigue
- Spillages, wet floors and obstructed walkways can lead to slips, trips and falls.
- Extremes of temperature in freezers, cold stores, baking areas can cause health problems.
- Machinery - equipment used in meat and fish preparation areas can cause serious injuries.

### **Action check list**

- 1.** Have risk assessments been carried out on all repetitive work such as checkout work or packing?
- 2.** Have manual handling risk assessments been carried out?
- 3.** Is there a stress policy and stress risk assessments?
- 4.** Are controls in place to reduce workers' exposure to allergens such as flour dust?
- 5.** Are procedures in place to reduce the risk of violence to workers, eg those who handle cash or who work alone?
- 6.** Is the employer complying with the Working Time Regulations and are adequate rest breaks given?
- 7.** Are adequate controls in place to reduce workers exposure to extremes of temperature?
- 8.** Are machines and equipment regularly maintained, & moving parts, eg blades guarded?
- 9.** Are workers trained in the safe use of machinery?
- 10.** Are workers trained in safe lifting techniques?

### **Pregnancy Hazards**

Heavy repetitive work, cramped and prolonged seating, prolonged standing, stress, shiftwork, long working hours, violence, extremes of temperature, slippery floors, food smells (causing nausea), working alone.