Flinders University
Faculty of Social Sciences
Safe Work Practice

Guidelines for the safe use of Floor Standing Bookshelves

Potential Hazards

- Tipping Over
- Do not place items on top of bookshelf
- Distribute loads on shelves equally
- Do not overload shelves
- Do not climb

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Summary of potential hazards

- Unstable - tipping over of bookshelf
- Falling objects – loose objects on top
- Collapse of shelves - overloading

General

- This guideline applies to all staff, students (undergraduate and postgraduate), visitors and contractors in the Faculty of Social Sciences.
- The aim is to ensure that bookshelves are used in a safe manner and that use does not impact on the health and safety of users and others in the Faculty.
- Accidents with bookshelves can cause major injury. Most incidents are caused by overloading and instability.

Guidelines

- Do not overload individual shelves. If the shelves show signs of bowing then this is an indication that you need to reduce or redistribute the load.
- Adjustable shelves cannot generally support as much weight as fixed shelves. If the shelves bow too much they can collapse. Ensure adjustable shelves have all the required supports fitted.
- Select a bookshelf that has fixed shelves if it is going to hold mainly books or heavy items. If only adjustable shelves are available then they should be a minimum of 25mm thick.
- Bookshelves that have adjustable shelves should have at least one shelf that is fixed, usually near the centre. This will ensure the sides of the bookshelf remain straight.
- Load the bookshelves correctly. Place the heavier items on the lower shelves and stack the shelves equally, i.e. do not skip the lower shelves.
- Do not place a foot on the bottom shelf and hold onto a higher shelf when reaching for items at the top. This will tend to tip the bookshelf over.
- If the bookshelves are further away from the wall at the top than at the bottom, it may be an indication that the bookshelves may need securing to the wall. Placing some folded paper under the front is not an acceptable solution. Bookshelves placed on carpeted floors are more prone to exhibit this leaning away from the wall effect.
• Do not place items on the very top of bookshelves. It makes it very hard to access these items safely without the use of a step ladder, and there is the danger that the items could be dislodged and fall. This practice can make the bookshelves unstable.

• Ensure the backing of the bookshelves is secure and have not been dislodged by books when being placed on the shelves. This backing material provides structural support to the bookshelves.

• Ensure that bookshelves are not placed in front of power outlets, power cords, cable ducting, noticeboards or picture hooks.

• Bookshelves are designed to be placed on the floor. They are not designed to rest on filing cabinets or tables.

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