



Working From Home

If managed correctly there are many benefits to homeworking. For example, reduced travel costs, less stress, and a reduction in the hazards associated with travel (particularly by road). People may be more efficient if they can work at home without a long commute to work. It also enables organisations to retain some workers who need the flexibility of homeworking, perhaps to care for an elderly relative or child, or to deal with personal health issues.

As long as “out-of-site” employees are not “out-of-mind” and are given the same health and safety protection as other workers, working from home can be a safe, healthy and productive way of working for both employee and employer.

What does the Law say?

All of the health and safety legislation that applies in the normal workplace also applies to homeworkers. For example:

- Risk assessments are needed as stated in the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.
- DSE use at home requires a risk assessment under the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 (as amended, 2002).
- Any movement of equipment or stock should be managed within the Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992.
- All electrical equipment used, including that provided by the employee, should be checked and managed according to the Electricity at Work Regulations 1989 (HSE, 1989).
- Use of chemicals (e.g. solder, glue, spray-on ironing products) should be controlled by the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (COSHH) 2002.
- Protective equipment, if needed, should be supplied free according to the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) at Work Regulations 1992, and the organisation must be able to show that they have taken all reasonable steps to ensure the PPE is worn correctly.
- Accidents at home must be reported according to RIDDOR rules as stated in the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995.
- Homeworkers should be represented in consultations with employers about safety as required in the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977 and the Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations 1996.
- The hours employees work at home should be controlled under the Working Time Regulations 1998.



What are the dangers of working from home?

Below suggests some of the dangers of working from home, and some measures you can put in place to safeguard the health and safety of homeworkers.

Hazard: Computer use can result in eyestrain, musculoskeletal disorders (such as back ache) and stress.

Protective Measure: Display Screen Equipment (DSE) assessment. The result of this should be that the worker uses an appropriate desk / chair / computer set-up, in a suitable environment (eg lighting), and takes regular breaks from work.

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Hazard: Injuries from hazardous equipment such as sewing machines, glue guns, domestic irons, soldering irons and sharp objects such as scalpels.

Protective Measure: Risk assessments need to consider whether the homeworker has had sufficient training to use the equipment safely, particularly as there will be little opportunity for supervision and monitoring. Consider the risk to other people (particularly children) who may be present whilst the homeworker is using equipment.

Hazard: Musculoskeletal injuries from repetitive movements or from inappropriate manual handling.

Protective Measure: Train employees to handle materials safely, for example correct lifting technique and varying the work to allow one set of muscles to rest while another is used.

Consider how job design can reduce repetitive movements and heavy lifting. For example, provide the homeworker with help to design the workplace layout to reduce carrying distances; provide lifting aids such as trolleys; send smaller batches of raw materials more often.

Piece work may encourage over-work, so payment schedules should be carefully considered. 75% of users suffered from shoulder, back or neck pain.

Hazard: If an employee has an accident it may be many hours before anyone else is aware of the problem.

Protective Measure: An alarm system may be appropriate, with the employee able to call for help by pressing a single button. Discuss with an employee what local arrangements they have for help (e.g. neighbours).

Hazard: An unsupervised homeworker may not take appropriate breaks. The resulting tiredness increases the likelihood of dangerous mistakes.

Protective Measure: Consider if payment schedules encourage workers to skip meal breaks. Where workers log on to a company computer, time spent online can be monitored, with reminders sent to those not taking breaks.

Hazard: Isolation can lead to depression and stress.

Protective Measure: Ensure regular contact between a homeworker and someone from the organisation (including other homeworkers). This could include a daily phone call and emails providing news about the organisation (including social events). It should also include regular face-to-face meetings.

Hazard: Electrocutation and fire from electrical equipment.

Protective Measure: Ensure that the domestic electrical system is adequate for the electrical equipment provided.

All electrical equipment used for work to be checked and maintained. Plugs must be correctly wired and fused; leads, wires and cables undamaged.

Circuit breakers and smoke detectors should be provided.

Note: Whilst this fact sheet gives general guidance on the law relating to this topic at the time of drafting, it is not intended to be a comprehensive guide to this area of law. You are advised to seek specific advice in relation to any particular issues that need to be addressed in relation to this topic by a competent person.

