



Managing the Health and Safety of Home Workers

INTRODUCTION

Many businesses are now adopting hybrid or full-time home working, for some, or all of their employees. An employer has the same health and safety responsibilities for a home worker as for any other employee. Home workers are those who:

- Work at home full time.
- Split their time between the workplace and home (hybrid working).
- Are working at home temporarily due to Covid-19 restrictions.

This guidance will steer you through what you need to do.

The majority of home workers will be employed in 'office-type' work and the risks will therefore be low. Whilst an employer will still need to carry out a risk assessment, the control measures that will be needed to protect home workers are likely to be simple and straightforward. As part of your risk assessment, consider the following:

- Working with display screen equipment.
- The working environment.
- Stress and mental health.

Working from home will not be suitable for everyone. Communicate with your employees about their home working arrangements. Where you consider that an employee's home is not a suitable work environment and/or that you are unable to put in place control measures to protect them, you will need to consider alternative arrangements.

RISK ASSESSMENT

Your risk assessments must cover home workers. While it is important to maintain a balanced and proportionate approach and you may not need to physically assess their home, you do need to be satisfied that they are able to work in a healthy and safe environment. It may be necessary to physically inspect the home if, for example, the employee has special requirements due to a disability, or the work involves the use of machinery, tools, chemicals, etc.

When considering the risk of someone working from home, think about the following:

- The type of work they will be doing and for how long.
- How the work can be done safely.
- What control measures will be required to protect them.
- How you will keep in regular contact.

Practical ways to do this include:

- Using questionnaires and self-assessment tools.
- Providing advice and guidance on how to set up their home working environment.
- Regular face to face conversations and meetings, either using video calls or over the phone.

WORKING WITH DISPLAY SCREEN EQUIPMENT (DSE)

As mentioned earlier, the majority of home workers will be involved in 'office-type' work. As an employer, you have a responsibility to protect your workers from the risks of working with computers and laptops (DSE).

Employees that use DSE, whether it's in the workplace or at home (or both), should be provided with appropriate DSE training and complete a self-assessment form for both workplace and home environment. The control measures arising from a DSE assessment should ensure that:

- The employee can achieve a comfortable and sustainable position while working with DSE.
- Equipment provided is safe and suitable for use.

Home workers may not necessarily require office furniture in order to achieve an ergonomic work position. By the same token, their own furniture may not be suitable. The results of the risk assessment will decide the control measures that are required. The risks should be reduced 'as far as is reasonably practicable' by balancing the level of risk against the measures needed to control it terms of time, effort and cost.



WORKING ENVIRONMENT

A home working environment is simply an extension of the workplace. An employer has a duty to ensure that employees have a safe place to work.

Provide guidance to employees on being able to visually inspect electrical equipment, plugs, leads and sockets, and the hazards of overloaded extension cables. While the employer is only responsible for the electrical equipment that is provided, it is important to ensure that it is being used in a safe environment.

Encourage employees to keep their work areas clear of obstructions, spillages, and trailing cables in order to reduce the risk of slips and trips.

Establish emergency procedures for home and lone workers. These should include guidance on how and when employers can contact you including any emergency contact details. Also consider what you would do if you were unable to contact a home worker.

A work-related accident at home should be treated in exactly the same way as if it occurred in the workplace. Put in place guidance and procedures for home workers should they have an accident whilst working at home.

STRESS AND MENTAL HEALTH

Home workers face many of the same pressures and issues as employees in the workplace, but it can be more difficult to provide support and social contact. A sense of deprivation from social contact at work can leave an employee feeling isolated or disconnected, resulting in stress and pressure or aggravating pre-existing mental health problems.

Stress and mental health must form part of your risk assessment. The control measures for the prevention of stress and mental health could include the following:

- Regular telephone or video calls to touch base and allow the employee to share any concerns.
- Keep home workers updated with developments so that they feel involved and reassured.
- Discuss openly the possibility of employees becoming stressed or mentally unwell. Have them complete stress risk assessments to help identify potential problems.
- Make home workers aware of any occupational support available to them.

It is important to encourage home workers to maintain a good work/life balance. Home workers often fall into the trap of working longer hours resulting in stress and tiredness. Have regular discussions to review workloads and demands and identify any training needs.

Encourage employees working at home to take regular breaks and use their annual leave. Home workers will often work long hours in order to meet deadlines or respond to emails and this should be discouraged.

USEFUL WEBSITES

Health & Safety Executive www.hse.gov.uk