

Employers have a duty to protect the health and safety of all employees, including homeworkers.

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Assessing the risks

- A risk assessment must be carried out which identifies the hazards relating to the homeworkers' work activities and show the steps that have been taken to prevent harm to them or to anyone else who may be affected by their work.
- It may be necessary for the employer to visit their homeworkers to carry out a risk assessment particularly for higher risk work, however a system of self-assessment that is supported by photographs and detailed descriptions, may be adequate to ensure sufficient controls are in place. Risk assessments must be reviewed periodically.
- When deciding who may be affected by the work done at home and how they may be affected, this should include the homeworker and members of the household, including visitors.
- Appropriate steps need to be taken to eliminate or reduce any identified risks and if the employer has five or more employees the assessment must be written down – however it is good practice to always do this.
- The risk assessment must consider homeworkers who are new and expectant mothers. Risks include those to the unborn child or to the child of a woman who is still breast feeding, not just risks to the mother herself.

The most common health problems experienced by homeworkers are headaches, back/neck ache and eyestrain.

Legal duties

The main areas of health and safety law relevant to home working are:

- Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (as amended) (COSHH)
- Fire (Scotland) Act 2005
- Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974
- Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 (as amended)
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (as amended)
- Manual Handling Operation Regulations 1992 (as amended)
- Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (as amended)
- Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

Some common hazards associated with homeworking

- Manual handling – loads that are heavy, bulky, difficult to grasp or unstable; awkward lifting, reaching or handling; pushing or pulling; repetitive handling with insufficient rest breaks; twisting and stooping
- Use of work equipment at home – incorrect equipment for the job, insufficient provision of training or information, lack of maintenance, insufficient controls/guards, failure to provide suitable and sufficient personal protective equipment
- Using electrical equipment at home
- Using substances and materials
- Fire safety, particularly if the working area is above the ground floor
- Working with DSE
- Lone working.

If homeworkers use electrical equipment provided by the employer as part of their work, the employer is responsible for its maintenance. Employers are only responsible for the equipment they supply and not responsible for any electrical sockets and other parts of the homeworkers' domestic electrical system.

The employer must give consideration to any first aid needs of the homeworker.

Working from home in exceptional circumstances

Employers need to be practical, flexible and sensitive to a worker's situation when it is necessary for them to work from home in extreme circumstances, such as during a pandemic. Always follow government guidance and ensure you are following the most up to date advice.

In general, employers should:

- Talk to their employees and workers about how they might improve working from home arrangements
- Continue to consider which roles and tasks can be done from home – this may mean that things need to be done differently
- Support employees to adjust to remote working and be mindful that some may not be used to working from home
- Consider individual employees' needs, such as those with childcare responsibilities, or a long-term health condition
- Write down the arrangements that have been agreed so that everyone is clear
- Check on the employee's health and wellbeing
- Be mindful that some employees may be personally affected by the situation.

Employer responsibilities

During a pandemic, for example, it's very unlikely that employers can carry out the usual health and safety risk assessments at an employee's home. However, an employer should still check that:

- Each employee feels the work they're being asked to do at home can be done safely
- Employees have the right equipment to work safely and the necessary technology is enabled
- Managers keep in regular contact with their teams, including making sure they do not feel isolated
- Reasonable adjustments are made for an employee who has a disability.
If changes are needed, employers are responsible for making sure they happen.

DSE

The HSE advise that employers protect their workers from the health risks of working with display screen equipment (DSE). DSE includes PCs, laptops, tablets and smartphones.

The Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations apply to workers who use DSE daily, for an hour or more at a time. Such workers are described as 'DSE users'. The regulations don't apply to workers who use DSE infrequently or only use it for a short time.

The HSE issued guidance in relation to DSE work from home during the Covid-19 pandemic. This guidance stated that there was no increased risk from DSE work for those working from home temporarily and in this situation a home work station assessment was not necessary. But it was advised that workers were encouraged to complete their own basis assessment.

The law applies if users are, for example:

- At a fixed workstation
- Mobile workers
- Home workers.

Employers must:

- Do a DSE workstation assessment
- Reduce risks, including making sure workers take breaks from DSE work or do something different
- Provide an eye test if a worker asks for one
- Provide training and information for workers.



Working with display screen equipment (DSE)

A brief guide



Introduction

This leaflet will help you to comply with the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 and explains what you, as an employer, may need to do to protect your employees from any risks associated with Display Screen Equipment (DSE) (ie computers and laptops). It will also be useful to employees and their representatives.

These Regulations only apply to employers whose workers regularly use DSE as a significant part of their normal work (daily, for continuous periods of an hour or more). These workers are known as DSE users.

Information provided by: Barbour (www.barbour-ehs.com)