

Home working: Management Briefing

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

Assessing the risks:

- a risk assessment must be undertaken which identifies the hazards relating to the homeworkers' work activities and deciding whether enough steps 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, although homeworkers can also help in identifying the hazards for their employers
- 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 family members and 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. To ensure that the controls remain adequate, the risk assessment must be reviewed periodically
- the risk assessment must pay attention to 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, backaches, eyestrain, breathing difficulties, skin irritation and dizziness.

Legal duties

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

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

Some common hazards associated with homeworking are:

- 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. Employers are 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.

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