

Remote and Mobile Workers: Employee Factsheet

Even if most of the time you work in a busy office or factory, you may be a remote and mobile worker (RMW) at some time. Working late, travelling for work, or working at home can all constitute remote working. 'Working Alone' or 'Lone Working' means working in an area, or in circumstances, where there are no other workers present. In the event of an emergency there is no one to give assistance, or summon help. If you work alone see the working alone fact sheet.

Are you a RMW? Do you work...?

- alone in premises, eg in small workshops, petrol stations, kiosks or shops
- from home
- separately from others, eg in factories, warehouses, some research and training establishments, leisure centres or fairgrounds
- outside normal hours, eg cleaners and security, production, maintenance or repair staff
- in construction, plant installation, maintenance and cleaning work, electrical repairs, lift repairs, painting and decorating or vehicle recovery
- in agriculture and forestry
- in the service and public sectors, eg rent collectors, postal staff, social workers, home helps, doctors, district nurses, pest control workers, drivers, engineers, architects, estate agents, sales representatives and similar professionals visiting domestic and commercial premises.

Working from home - key issues:

The use of computer workstations at home is covered by The Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 (as amended).

Research shows that home-based users are especially likely to suffer musculoskeletal problems (back-pain, elbow pain etc) due to misuse of laptop computers. Therefore:

- consider whether there is enough space at home for a permanent desk
- ensure that equipment is at the right height
- assess how home-working might affect children or adult dependents
- address safety issues of lone working
- keep up with current workplace information, especially in relation to health-and-safety procedures
- avoid overworking as a result of guilt about not being 'at work'
- be honest about your level of motivation and self-discipline when working remotely.

Driving - key issues:

- high mileage and long hours are associated with lower back, neck and shoulder symptoms
- vehicle ergonomics should be assessed; adjustable lumbar support and an adjustable steering wheel can reduce musculoskeletal pain
- lack of contact with colleagues is associated with an increase in depression.

Employees' legal duties:

Under The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 (HASWA) and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 employees have a duty:

- to take reasonable care of themselves and of anyone else who might be affected by their acts or omissions and also co-operate with employers regarding health and safety issues
- to use the equipment provided for their health and safety and comply with any information and instruction given to them
- to report any hazards not addressed by procedures or risk assessment.

Hazards for RMWs:

- manual handling
- violence against the person
- breaking down in a vehicle
- accidents whilst alone
- working excessive hours
- undertaking work alone, which requires a second person such as a confined space entry or some types of live electrical work.

Control for hazards:

- a system for raising alarm
- provision of lifting and handling aids
- training in diffusing confrontation, negotiation etc
- reducing cash handling
- prohibition of work which requires a second person to undertake it safely
- varying the routes for vehicles carrying cash
- provision of personal alarms and effective means of two-way communication
- panic buttons in confidential interview rooms
- supply of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
- use of a reliable and well maintained vehicle
- membership of a road-side rescue organisation.

Did you know?

Fact 1:
64% of RMWs report mental ill health above the level defined as 'psychological distress'. Stress is also linked with driving high mileages.

Fact 2:
Just under half of RMWs had suffered road rage at least once in the past year and 11% had been assaulted.

Fact 3:
Advancements in technology now enable RMWs to work from practically anywhere in the world.

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