

# Health and Safety Issues

**A Safety Statement is essential for safeguarding health and safety of all employees while at work. The responsibilities of the employer, managers and employees should all be outlined in this statement**

The Safety, Health & Welfare at Work Act 1989 places an onus on employers to ensure the safety, health and welfare of all employees, including employees who carry out work within their own home.

A Safety Statement is management's programme, in writing, for safeguarding the health and safety of all employees while at work. The responsibilities of the employer, local managers and employees should all be outlined in this statement. In the case of e-workers, this Safety Statement should be individually tailored to take account of their own particular situation.

Under the legislation an employer is obliged to undertake risk assessments of all workplace hazards. A checklist should be provided so that e-workers and their managers can identify the control measures required.

## Display Screen Equipment (VDU's)

Working with display screen equipment is not an activity which carries high risk. Legislation is in place because of the very large numbers of people who use this equipment while at work and to protect the few who operate at speed and without a break. If the proper control measures are not implemented, health problems associated with this kind of work are:

- *Upper limb disorders (including pains in the neck, arms, elbows, wrists, hands, fingers)*
- *Temporary eyestrain (but not eye damage) and headaches*
- *Fatigue and stress*

All e-workers should be provided with chairs that are adjustable at seat height, backrest height and angle, and document holders and footrests can be provided if required. Document holders can be arranged to minimise frequent head and eye movement. Eyesight tests should be available for all VDU operators.

## Work Equipment

The equipment required for working at home should be maintained by the employer organisation. All equipment defects should be notified without delay.

### Electricity

Defective plugs, sockets and leads cause more electrical accidents than the appliances themselves. Overloaded sockets are a fire hazard, and the minimum amount of equipment required at any one time should be plugged in. A visual inspection of all plugs and leads should be carried out and repaired promptly by a competent person. Faults to look out for include physical damage to the lead, failure of the grip cord at the plug and signs of overheating. Residual current devices (RCD) should be fitted to all electrical equipment and appliances with regular testing of this device.

### Slips, Trips and Falls

These can occur due to trailing leads, spillages, broken floor coverings, poor lighting and poor housekeeping and the e-worker should be aware of these within their own home. Wooden floors, tiles or lino can cause excessive movement of the chair and measures need to be taken to prevent falls.

### Chemicals

Small quantities of chemicals may be used in the office, e.g. correction fluids, cleaning chemicals. These should be locked away when not in use, particularly if there are children in the home.

### Fire

All e-workers should be provided with fire safety training by an appointed Fire Officer. A smoke detector and fire extinguisher should be provided for all e-workers which are to be installed in the office area. E-workers must take into consideration other people in the household, who may be affected by their activities while e-working.

### Insurance

The employers insurance policy should be checked to ensure the home office is covered. The e-worker should also check with their insurer for any implications.

For further information go to [www.familyfriendly.ie/ease-to-eworking](http://www.familyfriendly.ie/ease-to-eworking)



*“ Well, initially, I have to say, ours – and a lot of other unions as well – would have been a bit sceptical about e-working, and would have been concerned that the same standards and conditions which would apply to people in work wouldn’t be applied in the home office. In essence they wouldn’t have enjoyed, perhaps, the same protection – if you want to call it that – by being part of a group at work.*

*Now, I have to say where schemes have been put in place on a structured, logical basis that have taken account of those types of issues there hasn’t really been any problems ”*

### **Billy Hannigan**

*Assistant General Secretary,  
PSEU*