

1 Introduction

The participating organisations recognise their legal and moral obligations to ensure the safety, health and welfare of employees and of members of the public who may be effected by its operations. It is each organisations policy to comply with legal safety, health and welfare requirements as a minimum standard and thereby ensure that the risk to safety and health from any article or substance is reduced to the lowest level reasonably practicable. This policy is detailed in each organisation's Safety Statement.

The term 'Homeworking' is used in this document to refer to the performance of work by employees in their home rather than on Company premises for a significant proportion of their working hours and generally involving the use of telecommunications and/or computer equipment. The employee will be referred to as an e-worker. This term is not used to refer to people who may informally bring work home on an occasional basis. This term is not used to refer to self-employed persons contracting their services to any of the participating organisations.

Each organisation recognises that it, as an employer, has the same overall duty to protect the health, safety and welfare of the e-worker as conventional workers.

This document has been produced to give guidance to employees (and their managers), engaged in e-working, on a fulltime or part time basis, on the health and safety issues associated with e-working. It gives guidance to line managers as to the minimum controls, which should be adopted, when an employee is working in their own home, as an e-worker. These guidelines will assist in conforming with, but not replace the requirements of relevant legislation and company policy and in particular the following, which apply to homeworkers in the same way as other workers: -

- *The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act, 1989*
- *The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations, 1993*
- *The participating organisations Health & Safety policies*

2 Main Hazards / Risks

- *Using work equipment*
- *Using electrical equipment provided for work in the designated office space*
- *Using potentially hazardous substances and materials for work in the home*
- *Working with VDUs*
- *Handling of loads*

3 Groups exposed to Hazards/Risks

- *The subject employee or homeworker*
- *Family members of the e-worker*
- *Any other visitors to the home of the homeworker*

4 Responsibilities of the Line Manager

It is the responsibility of the line manager to take all reasonable steps to protect the health, safety and welfare of the e-worker, on behalf of each participating organisation, while he/she is engaged on e-working duty, on a basis agreed with the line manager. The line manager fulfils these responsibilities, in the first place, by having a risk assessment conducted and Safety Statement draw up for the home workplace.

5 Control Procedures

5.1 Risk Assessment

The primary control procedure is to carry out a risk assessment of the work activities carried out by e-workers and put in place any necessary controls to eliminate or sufficiently reduce hazards identified. Employees using their home as a base from which to work have different requirements and each case should be assessed on its individual merits. This should be undertaken on a case by case basis and in consideration of the specific work location. This risk assessment should take place before the e-working arrangement begins.

The e-worker should contribute to the preparation of the risk assessment and facilitate any visits to the home, considered necessary for its completion. Any such visit could involve the line manager or representative of the Health & Safety.

Completing a risk assessment (see appendix 1) involves identifying the hazards relating to the e-worker's activities and deciding whether enough steps have been taken to prevent harm to them or anyone else who may be affected by his or her work or work equipment. A risk is a chance, great or small, that someone will be harmed by a hazard. A hazard is anything that may cause harm. Children should be given particular consideration in this risk assessment.

The risk assessment should cover: -

- *Furniture: e.g. adequate space for a workstation, office chairs and tables which should comply with VDU health and safety regulations.*
- *Electrical safety e.g. avoiding overloading of sockets and safely stowing cables*
- *Fire safety e.g. provision of fire extinguishers*
- *Lighting levels*
- *Provision of heating and ventilation*
- *Maintenance procedures for the equipment provided*
- *Carrying heavy equipment*
- *VDU requirements - information on ergonomic posture for prolonged use of computer workstations and use of portable computers and on the importance of eye sight tests for all regular VDU users*
- *Procedures for reporting of workplace accidents*

5.2 Safety Statement

A Safety Statement must comprehend every place of work including a home office.

The Safety Statement is a programme in writing, for safeguarding the health and safety of employees while they work. It represents the participating organisation's commitment to their health and safety and states what steps will be taken and the resources necessary to maintain health and safety standards. It is based on an identification of the hazards and an assessment of the risks in the workplace and specifies any necessary control measures.

A local safety statement should be prepared specifically for the home workplace. In the case of the home workplace it is likely to be brief. A risk assessment should be used as a basis from which to prepare this safety statement. The Line Manager must ensure that the risk assessment is completed and the Safety Statement prepared and approved. Advice can be obtained from the participating organisation's Health & Safety personnel.

The manager should ensure that contents of this Safety Statement are brought to the attention of the e-worker. There is an ongoing responsibility to ensure that the employee is aware of the Safety Statement and understands its terms.

The complete Safety Statement can be found on each participating organisations Intranet.

5.3 Work space in the Home

The e-worker must provide at his/her home adequate designated office space (typically a spare room) separate from the rest of the living area which is suitable for e-working.

As a minimum there must be sufficient space for the work to be carried out with adequate lighting, heating and ventilation. The use of garages or sheds or an un-converted attic would not be acceptable.

The exact area to be used should be agreed and recorded by the line manager. If a suitable workspace cannot be agreed then the e-working arrangement should not proceed.

The provisions of the participating organisations Health & Safety Guide to Office Work apply to the home workspace also, in so far as they are relevant.

5.4 Inspections of the Home Workplace

Each participating organisation may conduct a health & safety audit of any home work-place.

Inspectors from the Health & Safety Authority (HSA) have a statutory right to visit all work places, including home work-places.

Hence, the e-worker must facilitate health and safety inspections of the home workplace, whether announced or unannounced, from:

1. Authorised personnel from the participating organisations Health & Safety personnel.
2. Authorised inspectors from the HSA

The Line Manager may also carry out health and safety inspections as required.

5.5 Main Hazards control

5.5.1 Using Work equipment at home

Suitable work furniture should be used in the e-working base to allow the work to be conducted in comfort and safety.

Most employees will require: -

- *A suitable desk and adjustable chair*
- *Computer accessories, e.g. document holder, footstool*
- *Storage of adequate size*
- *Lockable storage is required to keep small hazardous items away from children. A lockable desk drawer(s) may be sufficient in many cases*
- *A work surface suitable for equipment such as printers and faxes*

See each participating organisations Health & Safety Guide to Office Work for further guidance

Where the organisation provides equipment, whether electrical or otherwise, to the e-worker, the line manager should make every effort to ensure that:

- *The equipment is suitable for the job*
- *Proper information and/or training is provided in the use of the equipment*
- *The equipment is serviced and maintained in an appropriate manner*
- *The equipment does not cause harm to the e-worker or others who may come in contact with the equipment*

The e-worker must look for and report faults in a timely manner and make arrangements for appropriate repair.

The e-worker should ensure that checks on equipment are carried out safely; for example machines are switched off while being checked.

5.5.2 Electrical equipment for work at home

Electrical sockets and other parts of the e-worker's domestic electrical system are the e-worker's responsibility. The e-worker must ensure that the provided equipment can be used safely, with due regard to electrical load and electrical trip switches/fuses.

Particular attention should be paid to cables and trailing leads as these are a frequent trip hazard especially when /if children are present.

All cables and trailing leads should be secured in a manner that will not cause a trip hazard.

The e-worker should ensure that nothing is stored on electrical equipment in a manner that would block ventilation holes or otherwise result in a fire hazard.

Suitable fire extinguishers should be provided to the home workplace where necessary.

5.5.3 Working with VDUs

The provisions of the participating organisations Health & Safety Guide to Working with Visual Display Units also apply to e-workers. This document contains guidelines on the appropriate use of VDUs, desks, chairs and appropriate lighting.

Laptop and palmtop Computers were never designed for prolonged use. Because of the need for portability, some compromises are necessarily made in the construction in terms of smaller screens, keyboards, integral mice, etc. These aspects tend to make laptops less comfortable in prolonged use by encouraging the user to adopt poor posture.

Typically laptop or palmtop computers are not considered suitable for prolonged use. A full sized screen and keyboard and separate mouse should be provided where prolonged use is required. A laptop and docking station may be a suitable solution, where a laptop is required. A risk assessment may be required.

The e-worker should ensure that nothing is stored on top of the VDU as this would result in a fire hazard.

6 Responsibilities of the e-worker

The e-worker is obliged to take every step possible to protect his/her health and safety and that of anyone else affected by the e-working arrangement. In practice this means that the e-worker will need to be extra vigilant to guard against any hazards which may occur in the home but not in the traditional office environment.

The e-worker should not use inappropriate equipment or materials for work purposes, which may be found in the home e.g. knives, blades or solvents.

The e-worker is obliged to co-operate with the employer to protect his/her health safety and welfare and to use any safety equipment or safe work procedure provided.

Appendix 1

How to do a risk assessment guide

There are 5 steps that the manager of a potential e-worker needs to take to make sure that a proper risk assessment is done:

1. Identify the hazards
2. Decide who might be harmed and how
3. Assess the risks and take appropriate action to remove them or reduce them as far as possible
4. Record the findings
5. Check the risks from time to time and take further steps if necessary.

Steps 1: Identify any hazards

It is the line manager's duty to consider what may cause harm to the e-worker, or others as a result of work being done in the home. Although the e-worker can identify or assist in identifying most hazards, it may be necessary for the line manager (or his / her representative) to visit the e-worker's home to complete such a risk assessment.

Small hazards should not be ignored as they may result in harm, e.g. keeping harmful substances out of the reach of children.

Step 2: Decide who might be harmed and how

Employers must look at who may be affected by the work done at home and how they may be affected. This may include the e-worker and members of the household including children and any visitors to the house. Guidance can be obtained from the participating organisations Safety Statement and Health & Safety Guides.

Step 3: Assess the risks and take appropriate actions

If a hazard which may pose a risk to the e-worker or anyone else is identified the line manager needs to decide what steps are to be taken to reduce those risks as far as possible. This can be determined by looking at what type of harm or injury may arise and how frequently.

Whenever possible, a hazardous substance or item should be replaced with a less hazardous one, in line current legislation and good safety practice.

If there is no risk present then no action needs to be taken by the employer.

Where a manager is in doubt about the risk present advice can be obtained from the relevant organisation's Health & Safety personnel.

Step 4: Record the Findings

The manager should ensure the findings of the risk assessment are recorded. He/she should inform the e-worker or anyone else affected by the work being done, about the findings and any step necessary to reduce the risk from the hazard to an acceptable level.

Step 5: Review

The Line Manager should ensure that risks are re-assessed following any changes in work practices or circumstances in the home. In any event, an annual review is recommended. Any changes should be recorded in the Safety Statement.