**WORKING FROM HOME OVERVIEW**

Under health and safety legislation in all jurisdictions, you must take reasonably practicable steps to minimise health and safety risks to all workers, including those who work from home. This means ensuring the physical layout of the home workplace is safe and without risks to health, and that these standards are maintained by the worker.

**Reasonably Practicable**

Reasonably practicable, in relation to health and safety, refers to what is reasonably able to be done when ensuring health and safety, taking into account and weighing all the relevant matters, including:

1. the likelihood of the hazard or risk occurring;
2. the degree of harm that may result from the hazard or risk;
3. what the person concerned knows or ought reasonably to know about:
   1. the hazard or risk; and
   2. ways of eliminating or minimising the risk;
4. the availability and suitability of ways to eliminate or minimise the risk; and
5. the cost associated with available ways of eliminating or minimising the risk, including whether the cost is grossly disproportionate to the risk.

**6 Things you must do before allowing a worker to work from home**

Before allowing a worker to work from home, you should:

1. Determine whether it is appropriate for the worker to work from home.
2. Inspect the home workplace before the worker commences working from home to identify health and safety risks.
3. Manage any risks you have identified in your inspection.
4. Train the worker in your policies and safe operating procedures.
5. Provide and maintain equipment that is safe and without risk to health.
6. Have the worker complete a 6-monthly home workplace inspection.

**How to manage electrical risk in a home workplace**

All electrical appliances, including computers, printers, lighting and cleaning equipment, have a risk of causing harm, particularly through electric shock.

To meet your duty of care to home-based workers, ensure the risk of injury from electric shock is eliminated if possible, or at least reduced as far as reasonably practicable.

To do this, you should:

* have an electrical safety policy in place if the worker is likely to be exposed to equipment that poses a significant risk of electric shock; and
* have a competent person inspect and test all electrical equipment the worker needs to ensure it is safe for use.

**How to manage ergonomic risks in a home workplace**

Poor posture and repetitive movements can cause soft tissue injuries, such as muscle strains.

Take a proactive approach to posture and repetitive movement hazards. Rather than responding to an incident when it occurs, look for and address areas needing improvement. Be sure to include home-based workers in any training programs you conduct in your business.

To reduce posture and movement hazards for home-based workers, incorporate the principles of ergonomic design into your worker’s home workplace.

**How to set up and ergonomic homework station**

Check with your workers before they begin working from home that they have the following set-up. This can be used on an ongoing basis to audit the arrangements in place to ensure they remain safe.

**Desk and Chair**

Optimally, the desk should be height adjustable, or at least 680 millimetres from the floor, and the seat should be adjustable and stable. The keyboard and mouse should be positioned in front of the worker so that their wrists can be kept in a neutral position, i.e. remaining relatively stable during operation.

The desk should be big enough to provide adequate space for the worker to write without needing to twist their body, and the telephone should be within easy reach.

**Monitor**

Monitors should be placed directly in front of the worker and positioned approximately an arm’s length away. The worker’s eye level should fall within the top third of the screen when the worker is looking straight ahead. The screen should be placed in a location that reduces glare.

**Accessories**

Consider if the worker requires any of the following:

* a writing slope or document holder;
* a footrest;
* a monitor stand;
* a hands-free headset; or
* a larger monitor.

You may need to provide the worker with more suitable equipment if you determine there is a high risk of injury from not having the equipment.

**How to manage manual handling risks in a home workplace**

Manual handling injuries can arise from:

* handling loads that are heavy, unstable or difficult to grasp;
* awkward lifting, reaching or handling involving pushing, pulling, twisting or stooping; and
* repetitive handling that does not allow enough rest time between handling loads.

If your workers need to undertake manual handling tasks as part of their work, ensure they are properly trained and competent in correct manual handling techniques.

To reduce manual handling risks in a home workplace, you must:

* identify any manual handling tasks the worker is required to perform as part of their work;
* conduct a risk assessment for each identified manual handling task; and
* control the risks associated with manual handling tasks.

There may be particular manual handling issues with working in the home environment that need to be taken into account, such as:

* restricted or confined spaces;
* poor ergonomic furniture; and
* poor access or egress.

Your workers can use this checklist to identify what manual handling risks exist in their home workplace:

* Are there any areas where you cannot move easily and without restriction to do work tasks?
* Do you need to undertake excessive bending, twisting or reaching?
* Do you have to handle any unstable or unbalanced equipment?
* Will you be required to physically assist in moving a person up or down stairs?
* If transfer of a person to a vehicle is required, will this result in an awkward posture?
* Do you have to use any furniture or equipment at the home for an extended period that has poor ergonomic design?

**How to ensure emergency support for home-based workers**

You must ensure anyone who works from home has adequate access to medical assistance in an emergency, such as a fire or medical emergency.

For example, if the home-based worker is located in a remote region, do they have sufficient first aid facilities at home to be able to treat themselves before paramedics arrive?

Ensure the worker has the following items in their home in case of emergency:

* smoke detector;
* fire extinguisher;
* an easily accessible, fully-stocked first aid kit; and
* clear and unobstructed exits from the work area.

Consider the following factors when assessing whether the worker has access to suitable emergency support:

* Length of time the worker will be working from home without contact from other workers.
* Forms of communication the worker has access to and the procedures for regular contact.
* Level of experience the worker needs to safely work on their own. For example, a senior worker who has been trained in first aid and emergency procedures may need less emergency support than a less experienced worker.
* Whether there are risks specific to the work required to be performed, e.g. the escape of hazardous chemicals such as paints or solvents. If so, do these require particular steps to be put in place in case of emergency, such as installing breathing apparatus?
* Whether external medical support is available at the time the worker will be working from home.
* The proximity of emergency services, such as a hospital.
* Whether the home is in a remote location, making immediate rescue difficult.

**Policies and procedures**

You must provide all workers, including home-based workers, with the information, training and instruction necessary to minimise work-related health and safety risks.

This includes training in:

* fatigue management, e.g. ensure workers do not work excessive hours without breaks;
* manual handling;
* stress management; and
* safe use, handling and storage of equipment and substances, e.g. chemicals used for printing or cleaning that may pose a risk to children if not appropriately secured.

Communicate and consult with your workers about any safety-related issues or concerns they may have.

Ensure your home-based workers are aware that your company policies and procedures also apply to them.

**Safety of workers who work in the homes of others**

If your organisation requires workers to undertake work in the homes of others, then you are required to ensure that the home environment is safe for your workers. This might apply to workers in the community services sector, especially those who provide home care to the elderly or disabled. Such workers include agency staff and subcontractors.

The work may be performed in a variety of home locations including:

* private homes;
* residential care homes; and
* other community home locations.

All those at the workplace must work together to ensure a safe work environment. This includes:

* your organisation;
* your worker;
* the person receiving the care in their home; and
* the primary carer, i.e. being the person who otherwise provides care.

**Placement of workers in the homes of others**

If your organisation places workers in home environments, you should:

* have a clear understanding of the scope and nature of the services to be provided so you can ensure safe systems of work are implemented;
* if additional services are requested, undertake a risk assessment of those services before requiring work to be commenced;
* periodically assess the work being performed, either through inspection or feedback from the worker, or both, to see if the work activities have changed – this is necessary to determine whether control measures are still effective or need to be modified; and
* ensure there is a proper system of handover between workers (if a number will be working in the same home environment) so that all workers remain informed of changed work conditions or new risks.

**Responding to changes in the home work environment**

It is common for the home work environment to change in between visits by your staff. These changes can include changes to the physical layout of the premises, including new furniture or equipment, damaged or inoperable electrical equipment required to perform the services, and obstructed access.

Your organisation needs to ensure that its workers are trained and instructed to undertake a visual assessment of the home for changed conditions before commencing work.

It is necessary to report any injuries to workers or individuals being cared for as well as near misses. You should also emphasise to your workers the importance of notifying changed work conditions so that steps can be put in place if a new hazard has been created.

**Use the working from home workplace assessment and working from home agreement to set up working from home arrangements**