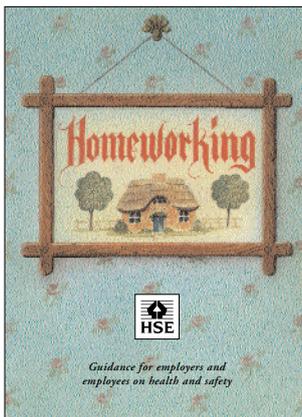


# Homeworking

## Guidance for employers and employees on health and safety



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### Introduction

This leaflet gives guidance to employers and homeworkers on the health and safety issues involved in homeworking. Homeworkers are those people employed to work at home for an employer.

### What the law requires

The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 (HSWA) places duties on employers, self-employed people and employees. Under HSWA, employers have a duty to protect the health, safety and welfare of their employees, including homeworkers.

Most of the Regulations made under the HSWA apply to homeworkers as well as to employees working at an employer's workplace. These include, for example, the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (MHSWR), the Display Screen Equipment Regulations 1992, the Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992, the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (PUWER) and the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (as amended) (COSHH).

Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, employers are required to do a risk assessment of the work activities carried out by homeworkers. Completing a risk assessment involves identifying 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. A risk is the chance, great or small, that someone will be harmed by a hazard. A hazard is anything that may cause harm.

### How to do a risk assessment

There are five steps that employers need to take to make sure that a proper risk assessment is done:

- 1 Identify any 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 needed

#### Step 1 – Identify any hazards

It is the employers' duty to look at what may cause harm to their homeworkers, or other people, as a result of the work being done in the home. It may be necessary for employers to visit their homeworkers to carry out a risk assessment, although

homeworkers can also help in identifying the hazards for their employers. Small hazards should not be ignored as they may result in harm, for example keeping potentially harmful substances out of children's reach.

### **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 homeworker, and members of the household, including children or visitors.

### **Step 3 – Assess the risks and take appropriate action**

If employers come across a hazard that may be a risk to the homeworker or anyone's health or safety in the home, they need to decide what steps have to be taken to eliminate, or reduce those risks as far as possible. What needs to be done depends on whether the hazard is low risk or high risk. Employers can determine this by looking at what type of harm or injury may arise and how often it may happen. For example, there is greater risk of an accident from loose trailing wires if there are children in the home.

Employers may be able to remove the hazard altogether or take steps to lower the risk to an acceptable level. For example, in the case of loose wires from work equipment, they could be tucked away under a desk or table, or secured neatly round the furniture out of the way.

If there is no risk present, then no action needs to be taken by the employer. To check if the risks are acceptable employers can get more information about legal standards from *Essentials of health and safety at work* (see page 11 for details).

### **Step 4 – Record the findings**

Employers who have five or more employees, including homeworkers, are required by law to record the significant findings from a risk assessment. They need to note down what steps have to be taken and tell the homeworkers, or anyone else affected by the work being done, about the findings.

### **Step 5 – Check the risks from time to time and take steps if needed**

It is important for employers to check the risk assessment from time to time, especially if there is a change in working procedures. The assessment needs to take into account any new hazards that may cause harm to the health or safety of homeworkers, or other people affected by the change in working conditions.

### **Some common hazards – Handling loads**

Handling loads can cause serious injury, particularly to the back. The checklist below highlights some activities that may increase the risk:

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

If possible, employers should avoid the need for hazardous manual handling. However, if homeworkers must handle goods as part of their work, employers are responsible for assessing and reducing the risks, for example by providing training and/or lifting aids to prevent injury. This could involve using a trolley to allow the

load to be moved easily. Guidelines for handling and moving goods are covered by the Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992.

When lifting is necessary, good techniques can help reduce the risks. These could involve:

- keeping the feet apart, bending the knees and keeping the back as straight as possible
- keeping the load as close to the body as possible
- keeping twisting of the torso to a minimum if turning to one side
- lifting or carrying goods in small amounts
- wrapping the load or using gloves if it has sharp edges
- using a table or bench as a half-way resting point

### *Using work equipment at home*

Employers who provide homeworkers with equipment to carry out their work have a duty to ensure that:

- the equipment is correct for the job that is being done
- proper information and training is given on how to use the equipment, so that the job can be done properly and safely
- the equipment being used is checked regularly and kept in a condition that does not cause harm to the homeworker or others
- those people who are testing the equipment or training the homeworker are properly trained themselves, so that they provide the correct information and training
- the machine being used has protective equipment, for example a machine guard to prevent the homeworker, or anyone else, being injured when it is in use
- the necessary personal protective equipment is provided for using the work equipment safely; for example gloves are provided when working with needles
- the equipment has the right controls to allow the work to be done safely; for example the controls should be clearly marked and properly positioned
- checks on equipment are carried out safely; for example machines are switched off while being checked

The Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 cover the use of work equipment in the home. Guidelines for the use of protective equipment at home are covered by the Personal Protective Equipment at Work Regulations 1992.

### *Using electrical equipment for work at home*

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. Electrical sockets and other parts of the homeworkers' domestic electrical system are their own responsibility.

Listed below are simple steps that employers can take to prevent harm or injury to homeworkers, or other people, when homeworkers use electrical equipment in the home.

- ensure electrical equipment is turned off before it is checked
- check that plugs are not damaged
- check the domestic electrical systems are adequate for electrical equipment
- check plugs are correctly wired and maintained
- check that the outer covering of the cable or wire is gripped where it enters the plug or the equipment

- check that the outer cover of the equipment is not damaged, for example look for loose parts or screws
- check leads, wires or cables for damage to the outer covering
- check for burn marks or staining that suggests overheating
- repair electrical equipment that may cause harm or injury to the homeworker
- check that there are no trailing wires; if there are, tuck them out of the way, for example under a desk or table, to prevent accidents

Most of the faults that can cause harm can be prevented just by looking for any damage to the electrical equipment. The safe use of electricity at work is covered by the Electricity at Work Regulations 1989.

### ***Using substances and materials for work at home***

Here is a checklist of things to be aware of when using substances, materials or chemicals that may be hazardous to health and safety:

- are they flammable, toxic, or corrosive?
- do they give off fumes?
- are they stored safely, for example could any children reach them easily
- does anyone suffer from dizzy spells, feel sick or have headaches?
- does anyone suffer from skin rashes or irritation
- does anyone suffer from asthma?

An easy way of identifying hazardous substances is by looking for hazard warnings on the label. The Chemicals (Hazardous Information and Packaging for Supply) Regulations 2002 (CHIP 3), require hazardous substances to be labelled with orange and black hazard symbols. But any substance that places homeworkers' or other people's health or safety at risk, must be handled according to the instructions provided by the employer, the supplier of work or the manufacturer or supplier of the substance.

If the risk assessment shows that a homeworker's health is at risk from exposure to any hazardous substance, the employer must take appropriate action. Employers are only responsible for substances and materials **they** provide to their homeworkers. Under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (COSHH 2002), the employer is responsible for:

- ensuring that the homeworker's exposure to the substances is prevented or adequately controlled. If possible, the employer should replace the hazardous substance with a less hazardous one
- supplying the homeworker with personal protective equipment, for example gloves or a mask, in addition to providing other control measures - but only in cases where other measures are insufficient, on their own, to adequately control exposure; for example providing exhaust ventilation where opening the window may be inadequate to protect the health of the homeworker
- taking all reasonable steps to ensure that the homeworker uses control measures, such as personal protective equipment, properly
- carrying out any exposure monitoring, or health surveillance, that COSHH 2002 may require (and keeping records in both cases)
- informing, instructing and training homeworkers about the nature of the substances and materials they work with, and the risks created by exposure to those substances and materials and the precautions they should take; for example when using materials with sharp edges such as needles

Depending on what hazardous substances are involved, the Control of Lead at Work Regulations 2002, and the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations 2002, might also apply.

### **Working with VDUs**

The use of VDUs is covered by the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 as amended by the Health and Safety (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2002. Employers have a duty to make sure that the display screen equipment used by homeworkers is safe and does not affect the user's health.

When working with VDUs it is important for homeworkers to adjust their work station to a comfortable position and take breaks from work. This will help prevent undue tiredness. Remembering to stretch and change position regularly can help to reduce tiredness and prevent pains in the hands, wrists, arms, neck, shoulders or back. VDUs need to be placed in a position where lighting will not cause reflections or glare on the screen.

It is also important for homeworkers to view the screen comfortably. They may need different spectacles for this. Homeworkers should consult their GP or an optician if in doubt. VDU users can request an eye examination and eye test from their employer.

Here is a checklist of points that employers need to be aware of when their homeworkers use VDUs:

- is the screen clear and readable, and without flicker?
- is the screen free from glare and reflections?
- are the 'brightness' and 'contrast' controls properly adjusted to prevent eyestrain?
- is there suitable lighting so that the fine detail on the screen can be seen and read?
- is the keyboard placed in the right position to allow the homeworker to work comfortably
- is the screen and computer clean; is it free from dust and dirt?
- can the chair be adjusted to the right height so that work can be done comfortably?
- is the VDU placed at the right angle on the desk to allow work to be done comfortably, for example without having to make any awkward movements?
- is there enough space under the desk to allow free movement?
- is there enough space in general so that the homeworker can move freely between the work on the desk and the VDU?

### **New and expectant mothers**

New legislation required to implement the European Directive on Pregnant Workers was introduced in 1994 and is covered by the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

When assessing risks to the homeworker, the new legislation requires the employer to 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. A new or expectant mother means a worker who is pregnant, who has given birth within the previous six months, or who is breast feeding. 'Given birth' is defined in the new Regulations as 'delivered a living child or, after 24 weeks of pregnancy, a stillborn child'.

*A guide for new and expectant mothers who work* sets out the known risks to new and expectant mothers and gives advice on what the employer is required to do to comply with health and safety law.

## **First aid**

Employers should consider any first-aid needs for homeworkers. This is likely to depend on the nature of the work activity and the risks involved. Further information on first aid is available in *First aid at work: Your questions answered*.

## **Safety representatives**

Under Section 2(4) of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, safety representatives appointed by a recognised Trade Union can represent homeworkers in consultations with employers about health and safety matters.

## **Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993**

Under the Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act 1993, employees including homeworkers can stop work in the event of serious or imminent danger arising from the work that they are doing, without it affecting their employment rights. However, employees including homeworkers have a duty to report all faults which may be a hazard to their own or others' health or safety.

## **Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995 (RIDDOR 95)**

The revised RIDDOR Regulations came into force on 1 April 1996. These Regulations place a duty on the employer to report and keep a record of certain work-related accidents, injuries, diseases and dangerous occurrences. Employers have a duty to ensure that they find out about accidents, injuries, diseases or dangerous occurrences arising from work-related activities. This may involve ensuring that homeworkers report any incidents to their employer. *RIDDOR explained* gives advice on what employers need to do to comply.

## **Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Inspectors**

HSE Inspectors enforce the HSWA and the Regulations made under the HSWA, that apply to homeworking. Inspectors visit employers and also have the right to visit homeworkers, to ensure that risks from work and working at home are properly managed. They also investigate and help settle complaints about working conditions that could affect the health, safety or welfare of employees, including homeworkers.

## **Useful addresses**

If you have a problem with health and safety, further advice and help is available from:

- your local HSE Office (see under Health and Safety Executive in your local telephone directory)
- trade unions
- regional homeworking projects (for contacts see below):

Blackburn Borough Council, Women's Resource Centre, Regent House, Regent Street, Blackburn BB1 6BH Tel: 01254 260736

Coventry City Council, Homeworking and Womens Employment Officer,  
Regeneration Services, Coventry Canal Basin, John Sinclair House, St Nicholas  
Street, Coventry CV1 4LY Tel: 024 7683 1285 e-mail: vera.hyare.coventry.gov.uk  
Homeworkers' Campaign for Change, 116 St Peter's Road, Leicester LE2 1DE  
Tel: 0116 2470940

Homeworkers' Helpline Tel: 0800 174095

Rochdale Borough Council, Homeworking Development Project, PO Box 39, 39  
Municipal Offices, Smith Street, Rochdale OL16 1LQ Tel: 01706 864377  
e-mail: homeworking@rochdale.gov.uk

National Group on Homeworking, Office 26, 30-38 Dock Street, Leeds LS10 1JF  
Tel: 0800 174 095

Pay and Employment Rights Service, Field House, 15 Wellington Road, Dewsbury  
WF13 1HF Tel: 01924 439587

### **Useful publications**

The following publications from HSE Books give guidance on the sets of  
Regulations mentioned in this leaflet:

*Management of health and safety at work. Management of Health and Safety at  
Work Regulations 1999. Approved Code of Practice and guidance L21 2000*  
ISBN 0 7176 2488 9

*Essentials of health and safety at work* ISBN 0 7176 6179 2

*Safe use of work equipment. Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations  
1998. Approved Code of Practice and guidance L22* ISBN 0 7176 1626 6

*Manual handling. Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992. Guidance on  
Regulations L23* ISBN 0 7176 2823 X

*Getting to grips with manual handling: A short guide* INDG143(rev2) (single copy  
free or priced packs of 15 ISBN 0 7176 2828 0)

*Work with display screen equipment. Health and Safety (Display Screen  
Equipment) Regulations 1992 as amended by the Health and Safety (Miscellaneous  
Amendments) Regulations 2002. Guidance on Regulations L26*  
ISBN 0 7176 2582 6

*The law on VDUs: An easy guide* HSG90 ISBN 0 7176 2602 4

*Working with VDUs* INDG36(rev2) (single copy free or priced packs of 10  
ISBN 0 7176 2222 3)

*Personal protective equipment at work. Personal Protective Equipment at Work  
Regulations 1992. Guidance on Regulations L25* ISBN 0 7176 6139 3

*Electricity at work: Safe working practices* HSG85 (Second edition)  
ISBN 0 7176 2164 2

*Memorandum of guidance on the Electricity at Work Regulations 1989. Guidance  
on Regulations* HSR25 ISBN 0 7176 1602 9

*Control of substances hazardous to health. The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (as amended). Approved Code of Practice and guidance L5* ISBN 0 7176 2981 3

*COSHH: A brief guide to the Regulations. What you need to know about the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 (COSHH) INDG136 (rev3)* (single copy free or priced packs of 10 ISBN 0 7176 2982 1)

*The idiot's guide to CHIP 3* INDG350 (single copy free or priced packs of 5 ISBN 0 7176 2333 5)

*Five steps to risk assessment* INDG163(rev1) (single copy free or priced packs of 10 ISBN 0 7176 1565 0)

*A guide for new and expectant mothers who work* INDG373 (single copy free or priced packs of 10 ISBN 0 7176 2614 8)

*First aid at work: Your questions answered* INDG214 (single copy free or priced packs of 15 ISBN 0 7176 1074 8)

*First aid at work. Health and Safety (First Aid) Regulations 1981. Approved Code of Practice and guidance L74* ISBN 0 7176 1050 0

*Safety representatives and safety committees* L87 (Third edition) ISBN 0 7176 1220 1

*RIDDOR explained* HSE31(rev1) (single copy free or priced packs of 10 ISBN 0 7176 2441 2)

*A Guide to the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995* L73 (Second edition) ISBN 0 7176 2431 5

*Health and safety of homeworkers: Good practice case studies* Research Report RR262 ISBN 0 7176 2888 4 (also available at [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk))

The future availability and accuracy of the references and web addresses listed in this publication cannot be guaranteed.

### **Further information**

HSE priced and free publications can be viewed online or ordered from [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk) or contact HSE Books, PO Box 1999, Sudbury, Suffolk CO10 2WA Tel: 01787 881165 Fax: 01787 313995. HSE priced publications are also available from bookshops.

For information about health and safety, or to report inconsistencies or inaccuracies in this guidance, ring HSE's Infoline Tel: 0845 345 0055 Fax: 0845 408 9566 Textphone: 0845 408 9577 e-mail: [hse.infoline@connaught.plc.uk](mailto:hse.infoline@connaught.plc.uk) or write to HSE Information Services, Caerphilly Business Park, Caerphilly CF83 3GG.

**This leaflet contains notes on good practice which are not compulsory but which you may find helpful in considering what you need to do.**

This leaflet is available in priced packs of 15 from HSE Books, ISBN 0 7176 1204 X. Single copies are free and a web version can be found at [www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg226.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg226.pdf).

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