

# HOME WORKER ASSESSMENTS



## Why do you need to carry out homeworker assessments?

Home working is becoming increasingly popular both for employees and employers. Employers benefit from the cost savings of offices and facilities, employees benefit from flexible working and not having to commute to work everyday, saving them valuable time and money.

Although the 'home office' is within the employees home, they are still 'at work'. All employers have a duty of care to their employees wherever they may be working. Home working, by its very nature is remote meaning employers have difficulty ensuring the safety and wellbeing of their employees whilst they are at work. A happy and healthy employee is a productive employee.

There are a number of regulations that employers must comply with including;

- Health & Safety at Work Act 1974
- The Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999
- The Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992
- The Electricity at Work Regulations 1989
- The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992
- The Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998
- Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 (as amended)
- Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005

Failure to adequately comply with legislation may lead to a number of outcomes such as serving notices on duty holders, issuing simple cautions and ultimately prosecution and financial penalties. In addition, employees suffering injury or ill health may seek compensation from their employers. Homeworkers face a number of risks including;

- Upper limb disorders from incorrect work station equipment or set up
- Eye strain
- Slip/trip & falls
- Electric shocks
- Fire
- Stress
- Carbon Monoxide poisoning

Establishing a healthy and safe working environment for lone workers can be different from organising the health and safety of other employees. They should not be put at more risk than other people working for you. It will often be safe to work alone. However, the law requires employers to think about and deal with any health and safety risks before people are allowed to do so.

## Homeworker Safety Assessments

Peligro Risk Management Ltd have a team of trained and experienced Homeworker safety assessors. We currently carry out Homeworker assessments throughout the UK and Europe for clients that wish to fulfil their duties under the various regulations.

There are a number of basic checks that should be carried out within the Homeworkers working environment. During the course of our assessments our assessors will verify that these checks are taking place and advise the employee accordingly where further knowledge is required. These checks include;

- Monthly testing of smoke detection
- Annual smoke detector battery replacement
- Monthly checks on first aid kit contents
- Annual service of gas boiler
- Quarterly RCD functionality test
- Regular visual inspection of electrical equipment
- Visual inspection of fire extinguisher

## Fire Safety

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 requires employers to ensure that adequate and appropriate fire safety measures are in place to minimise the risk of injury or loss of life in the event of a fire. During the homeworker assessment our assessors will evaluate hazard present and advise where necessary to ensure compliance. Some of the issues that we look at include;

- Keeping sources of ignition and flammable substances apart
- Avoiding accidental fires, e.g. make sure heaters cannot be knocked over
- Ensuring good housekeeping at all times, e.g. avoid build-up of waste that could burn
- Considering how to detect fires and how to warn people quickly if they start, e.g. installing smoke alarms and fire alarms and the positioning of such devices
- Having the correct fire-fighting equipment for putting a fire out quickly
- Keeping fire exits and escape routes unobstructed at all times
- Ensuring homeworkers receive appropriate training on evacuation of the



property and how to use a fire extinguisher

In addition to the above our assessors will also replace or service the fire extinguisher to ensure that it is fully operational and ready to use should a situation arise.

## Electrical Safety

The Electricity at Work Regulations 1989 require all employees to take precautions when working with or near electricity and electrical equipment to significantly reduce the risk of injury to workers.

During the assessment our assessors will;



- Carry out a visual examination and test all portable appliances present within the home office and provide a register of findings within the report
- Where an inappropriate extension lead is identified this will be replaced with a suitable extension lead with built in surge protection at the time of the visit to ensure continuity of the working environment
- Identify and assess the provision of RCD and surge protection within the workstation environment
- Provide the homeworker with training on visual examination of equipment

## Work Station Safety

How should a workstation be setup?

Ultimately a workstation should be set up so that it is comfortable to work at. We are all different and therefore workstation set up will be specific to the user. However, there are some basic guidelines that should be noted to facilitate a comfortable workstation. The diagram to the right highlights a typical workstation that is set up correctly. If a user suffers from any medical condition then this may need adjustments to suit them. This is discussed during the homeworker assessment.



## The Desk

The previous office desk/table standard, BS EN 527 Part 1:2000, has now been revised with the new standard, BS EN 527-1 2011. The revised standard means that any desks bought or designed for an office environment will now have to comply with a new set of height, depth and legroom dimensions. The revision requires larger legroom and greater ranges of adjustability.

The standard provides dimensional requirements for four types of desk/tables; those which are fully adjustable; height selectable; fixed height, as well as a type where only very limited adjustability is required.

The main dimension to be aware of are as follows;

- Fixed height desks should be 740mm ± 20 mm (increase of 20mm)
- Height adjustable or height selectable desks should adjust between 650mm and 850mm for sitting applications and between 650mm and 1250mm for sit/stand desks. The new heights are lower to suit short users and higher to suit tall users
- Legroom height at the front of the desk and at 500mm from the front edge has increased
- Desktops can not be thicker than 55mm at the front and 80mm at 500mm from the front edge
- Legroom depth on the floor and up to 120mm above the floor will now be 800mm (an increase of 200mm). This should allow tall people to be able to stretch their legs slightly without having to push themselves away from their desks and tap their keyboards with their arms at a stretch
- Legroom width has also increased to 850mm for fixed height desks and to 1200mm for height adjustable desks

## The Chair

The health and safety executive guidance document HSG57 provides guidance on how to ensure the safety and suitability of workplace seating. In summary the following should be considered;

### Seat

The seat needs to adjust in height to meet the needs of a range of users. The size of the seat needs to be wide enough to seat big people comfortably and deep enough to support the legs of tall people, but not so deep that shorter workers cannot use the backrest. The front edge of the seat needs to be rounded-over and well-padded to prevent it digging into the thighs.

### Backrest

The backrest needs to give firm support to the lower and the middle part of the back. Height adjustment is recommended unless the backrest is high and provides complete support for the back. Backrests which tilt with the worker, or whose angle can be adjusted, can improve comfort by providing support for the back in a range of working positions.

### Armrests

For most jobs armrests are not essential. They can restrict arm movement, although for many jobs they can provide comfort. They should be set back from the front edge of the seat, or be adjustable to allow the chair to be drawn up close to the work surface.

### Footrests

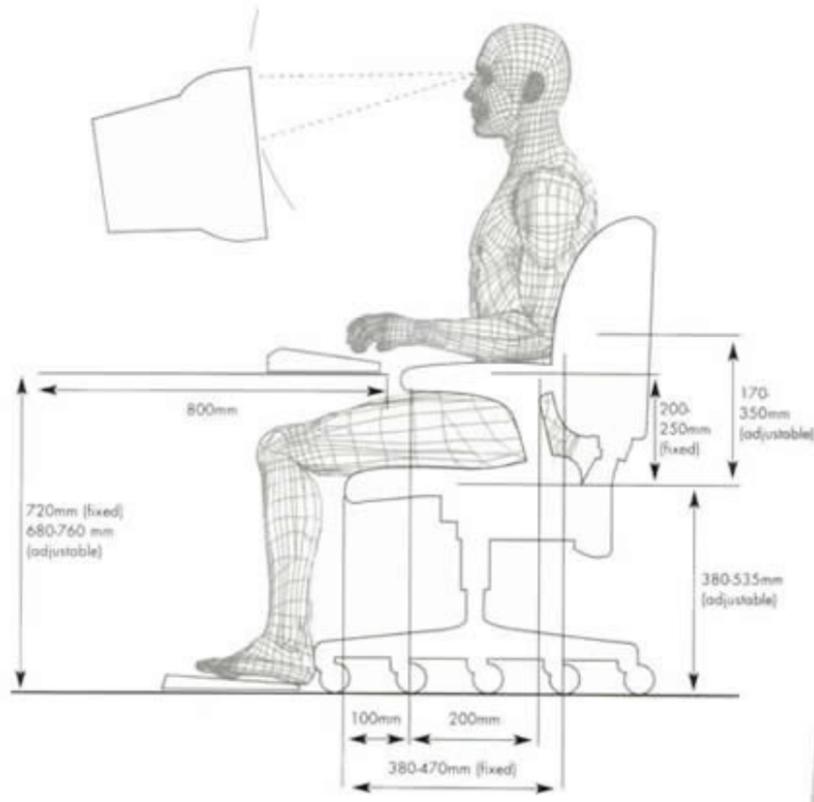
Any worker who cannot easily place their feet flat on the ground, when using the seat adjusted to the correct working height, needs a footrest. This should be large enough to allow for foot movement.

### Mobility

Swivel-action chairs provide flexibility when the worker needs to conduct a variety of tasks and move from one location to another. Ensure that chairs with castors do not slide away too easily when the user gets up or sits down. This is a common problem when they are used on hard floors, or with chairs with a high or tilting seat.

## Adjustability

The commonest adjustments included in seating design are seat height, backrest height and tilt. In some chairs the seat and backrest can tilt forward together; this feature can reduce neck discomfort and also improve the worker's reach over the work surface. Some backrests can be adjusted backwards and forwards to change the depth of the seat to meet individual needs.



## The Keyboard

- A space in front of the keyboard can help the user rest hands and wrists when not keying
- Should be positioned to keep wrists straight when keying
- Good keyboard technique is important – this can be achieved by keeping a soft touch on the keys and not over stretching the fingers

## The Mouse

- Position the mouse within easy reach, so it can be used with a straight wrist
- Sit upright and close to the desk to reduce working with the mouse arm stretched
- Move the keyboard out of the way if it is not being used
- Support the forearm on the desk, and don't grip the mouse too tightly
- Rest fingers lightly on the buttons and do not press them hard

## The Monitor

- Make sure individual characters on the screen are sharp, in focus and don't flicker or move. If they do, the DSE may need servicing or adjustment.
- Adjust the brightness and contrast controls on the screen to suit lighting conditions in the room.
- Make sure the screen surface is clean.

## Portable computers

These same controls will also reduce the DSE risks associated with portable computers. However, the following may also help reduce manual handling, fatigue and postural problems:

- Consider potential risks from manual handling if users have to carry heavy equipment and papers.
- Whenever possible, users should be encouraged to use a docking station or firm surface and a full-sized keyboard and mouse
- The height and position of the portable's screen should be angled so that the user is sitting comfortably and reflection is minimised (raiser blocks are commonly used to help with screen height)
- More changes in activity may be needed if the user cannot minimise the risks of prolonged use and awkward postures to suitable levels

## General Safety

The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 require employers to provide a suitable working environment. Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 employers are required to control risks to protect your employees.

Lighting must be provided to allow home workers to work comfortably at their workstation. Natural light should be provided where possible but glare on computer screens is to be avoided. A good level of local lighting at workstations may be required where necessary.

The work environment must allow for safe passage for people with level, even floors and surfaces without holes or broken boards. Hand-rails on stairs and ramps should be provided where necessary.

There should also be good ventilation – a sufficient supply of fresh, clean air drawn from outside or a ventilation system.

Gas Safety - Our assessors request copies of gas safety certificates for boilers, gas fires etc to ensure the risk from Carbon Monoxide is minimised.

This is not an exhaustive list of condition that are assessed during our homeworker assessments but outlines some of the key areas we look at.

## New & Expectant Mothers

The Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999 place additional duties on employers with regard to new and expectant mothers. All employers must carry out a documented risk assessment for new and expectant mothers once they have been notified, to ensure work carried out by the new or expectant mother is not detrimental to her or her baby's health. Where you have identified a homeworker as a new or expectant mother, our assessors can carry out suitable risk assessments and associated report to comply with the legislative requirements.

Our assessors will consider the risks that may arise from any process, working condition, or physical, biological or chemical agents. Some of the more common risks are;

- lifting or carrying heavy loads
- standing or sitting for long periods
- work-related stress
- workstations and posture
- long working hours
- poor posture exacerbating discomfort

If you are unable to avoid or control any risks that go beyond the level of risk found outside the workplace, then you must take appropriate action. This might include altering working conditions and/or hours of work or finding suitable alternative work.

If the risks can't be avoided or alternative work found, you should suspend the employee on paid leave for as long as necessary to avoid the risks to them.

## **Employee Training**

As an employer, you have a duty to provide specific training to your employees. At the time of the assessment, our assessor will provide training onsite in the following areas as appropriate;

- Basic manual handling training
- Fire evacuation training
- Basic fire extinguisher training
- Visual examination of electrical equipment training
- Smoke detector testing and maintenance training

## **Reporting**

A detailed written report is produced for each homeworker assessment. This report is distributed to both the homeworker and their line manager. The report details all aspects of the assessment (for due diligence purposes), all the findings highlighted above and also provides a summary of the findings for easy reference, thus allowing each line manager to identify any pertinent issues that require immediate action. The summary report prioritises all required actions to enable employees and staff to carry out remedial actions in a timely manner. The final page of the report details the findings of the portable appliance testing.

In addition to the general report our assessors will report all high risk issues directly to the appropriate line manager on the day of the assessment. This will be in the form of an e-mail containing details of the issue identified and where applicable photographic evidence of the highlighted problem to assist in appropriate action being taken.

Monthly overview reports are also produced to allow monitoring of trends and to show improvement on a year by year basis.

## **Contact us for more information**

If you have home based workers and would like more information on your duties as an employer or would like to discuss how Peligro can help you manage the risks to homeworkers and ensure they are happy and healthy, please get in touch;

Email: [enquiries@peligro.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@peligro.co.uk)

Telephone : 0114 2270055

[www.peligro.co.uk](http://www.peligro.co.uk)