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HEALTH & SAFETY GUIDE FOR WORKERS USING THEIR HOME AS A WORKPLACE

HOME WORKING HEALTH AND SAFETY RISK ASSESSMENT

If you use your home as your business workplace, you must carry out a health and safety risk assessment to identify any possible hazards to yourself, workers, visitors and other members of your household.

Possible hazards include:

- using work equipment at home, including electrical appliances
- your workstation set-up
- handling loads
- hazardous substances and materials
- psychological hazards, such as stress or loneliness
- fire
- slips, trips and falls
- excessive noise or vibration

You need to evaluate whether a hazard is significant and if it is, whether you have taken enough precautions to make the risk as low as you reasonably can. You need to consider:

- your home and those who live there - including vulnerable persons, eg children, the elderly, and new and expectant mothers
- the work done in your home
- the equipment in your home
- emergency procedures
- first aid provision



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5 STEPS TO A HEALTH AND SAFETY RISK ASSESSMENT

1. Identify any hazards. The Home Office Health & Safety Checklist should be used during this step
2. Decide who might be harmed and how.
3. Assess the risks and remove them or, otherwise, reduce them as far as is reasonably possible.
4. Record your findings.
5. Check the risks regularly and take further steps if needed.

SEGREGATION OF WORK AREA WHEN WORKING FROM HOME

The area of your home that you use for work should ideally be completely separate from the rest of your home. A spare room with a door that locks or an outbuilding such as a garage or shed is best, so that:

- your work equipment won't be a risk to members of your household
- the risk of accidental damage to your work or equipment will be reduced
- it will help you 'shut off' from home life, so that you can deal with your clients in a professional manner
- it will be easier to resist demands from other members of your household

If complete segregation of work from home is not possible then **partial segregation** is the next best option. You could:

- use your office equipment in a general area of the house such as a sitting or dining room
- lock away equipment and work when it is not in use
- consider housing your workstation in a cupboard with lockable shutters or doors

Remember to be very careful about safety and to consider the effects on other members of your household.

It is a good idea to have a separate telephone line and answering machine for your business calls.



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WORK EQUIPMENT AND WORKSTATION SETUP

Make sure that your work equipment is safe and that other members of your household, especially small children, can't be harmed by it.

Electrical safety is extremely important and you should beware of overloading socket points.

The equipment you use must be fit for the job and checked regularly.

You also need to protect your work from other occupants of your home.

If you have to share a computer make sure you back up your work regularly and that your work is password protected.

There are many things to consider when setting up your work area, such as:

- equipment must meet basic standards and be properly set up
- chairs should be adjustable to suit any user
- computer equipment should be safe and not affect the user's health
- computer screens should be free from glare and reflections
- workstations must be adjusted to a comfortable position, with the keyboard in the correct position
- you must take regular breaks from screen work

SECURITY

When working from home, you have to be careful about the security of work equipment and data, particularly if it is sensitive. You should consider the following carefully:

- Is your home generally secured against theft? It may be a good idea to ask a crime prevention officer to look around your home and give advice on how you can make it more secure.
- Do you have adequate insurance? Remember that your general household insurance is unlikely to cover expensive business equipment.



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- Do you have a lockable filing cabinet or safe? It may be wise to purchase a fireproof safe for irreplaceable items.
- Can you dispose of sensitive information in a secure way? eg sensitive papers should be carefully shredded (preferably using a cross-cut shredder), and not simply disposed of with the household rubbish.
- Do you ever transport your equipment or work in public places such as on a train? Equipment should never be left unattended or unsecured in a public place. Also, you should be careful about what is displayed on your screen when it can be seen by unauthorised people.

Hazardous Substances and Working from Home

The use of WHMIS controlled substances should not occur at home. Even some common substances used in office work can be hazardous in the wrong hands. If you do have to use a non-WHMIS controlled substance in your home, you should check whether they:

- are flammable, toxic or corrosive
- give off fumes
- are safely stored, well away from children
- are being used strictly according to manufacturers' instructions
- are affecting anyone in the household, by causing headaches, sickness or skin rashes
- will affect anyone with respiratory illnesses - if anyone suffers from asthma, special care should be taken

You can check the safety data sheets or product labelling provided with the materials or substances to find out what specific threats they pose.



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EMERGENCIES

Working from home is not generally considered a high-risk area for emergencies. However, you should take precautions in case there is a **fire** in the home. You should have:

- an adequate warning system - put up a domestic **smoke alarm** in your work area and check it regularly
- a way of escape - work this out in advance

You could also consider buying a domestic fire extinguisher and keeping a small first-aid kit in your home office.

Revision History

1.0: September 2011 – Initial Release