



HS Broadcast – Homeworkers

In terms of Health & Safety there is a difference between an employee who is a “homeworker”, and an employee who “works from home”. So what is the difference and why is the difference so important?

A homeworker is an employee who regularly works from home and as a result they should be treated the same way as other employees. The homeworker would typically have their home as their permanent working base. Full risk assessments of all work activities must be undertaken, including appropriate Display Screen Equipment risk assessments by a competent person. Any hazards highlighted by the risk assessment process must be addressed so that the level of risk can be reduced as much as possible or “so far as is reasonably practicable”. Failure to follow this may lead to homeworkers being injured or suffering from ill-health.

An employee who “works from home” is someone who has their permanent place of work situated away from their home but, at times, just happens to undertake work at home. This is typical of the employee who takes a file home to read in the peace and quiet of their home, possibly in the evening after dinner.

To help identify the hazards associated with the “homeworker” it may be helpful to have a check list of all typically associated hazards and more importantly the appropriate ways of consistently controlling each activity and how to control or reduce risks to an acceptable

level. You should ensure that your document only addresses “significant” hazards, i.e. any hazard that could, and more importantly is likely to, cause an accident or injury.

You may require the assistance of a competent health & safety practitioner.

When assessing the hazards, as with all risk assessing, you do not need to include activities that simply do not need to be there. However, keep in mind that if there is any chance of your employee being unaware of the safe way of doing something, then you will need to make it clear what the safe way is. As with any risk assessment, any control measure can only be to the level of “so far as is reasonably practicable”.

Listing every single hazard will be impossible; however, you should be able to document all “significant” hazards that are likely to be identified with your employee working at home. Please remember that you may have a list of generic risks associated with homeworking but as with all risk assessments you need to examine whether any individual, peculiar risks are present. The risk assessment should take into consideration the actual tasks that your homeworkers carry out on your behalf. I would recommend that these risk assessments are carried out in conjunction with the individual homeworker so that the requirements are fully understood.