



Homeworking Policy and Guidance

INTRODUCTION

Over one million people in the UK work at home and the numbers are on the increase. Whilst not commonplace throughout Torbay Council, the Council recognises that on some occasions home working may be both necessary and desirable. Home-workers are covered by health and safety regulations like any other employee.

Home-worker – has been defined as those people who are employed to work from home for an employer.

This includes the requirement under the Management Regulations to carry out suitable and sufficient risk assessments of the work activities and the working environment.

Completing a risk assessment involves identifying the hazards relating to home-workers 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 (see risk assessment policy)

1. Identify the hazards.
2. Decide who may be at risk.
3. Assess the risks and take appropriate action to remove them or reduce them as far as possible.
4. Record your findings using the Torbay Council risk assessment form.
5. Check and review the risks from time to time and take further steps if needed.

Identify the hazards

It is an employer's (the Council) duty to look at what may cause harm to their home-workers, or other people, as a result of the work being done in the home. It may be necessary for line managers to visit their home-workers to carry out a risk assessment, although home-workers 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.

Decide who might be harmed and how

A home workers line manager (or designated risk assessor) must look at who may be affected by the work done in the area work is to be carried out at home and how they may be affected. This may include the home-worker, and members of the household, including children or visitors.

Assess the risks and take appropriate action

If line managers come across a hazard that may be a risk to the home-worker 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. Line managers 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.

Line managers 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.

Record the findings

Any employer who has five or more employees, including home-workers, 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 home-workers, or anyone else affected by the work being done, about the findings. Within Torbay Council the results of a risk assessment are recorded on the Torbay Council Risk Assessment form.

Check and review the risks from time to time and take further steps if needed

It is important for line managers 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 home-workers, or other people affected by the change in working conditions. New methods of eliminating the risk reducing it to the lowest practicable level should then be devised and implemented.

Some common hazards

Handling loads

Handling of 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

The need for hazardous manual handling should be avoided. However, if home-workers must handle goods as part of their work, Line managers are responsible for assessing and reducing their 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.

When lifting is necessary, good techniques can help reduce the risks.

Using work equipment at home

Where the Council provides home-workers with equipment to carry out their work, line managers should 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 home-worker or others.
- Those people who are testing the equipment or training the home-worker 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 home-worker, 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 sharp instruments.

- 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.

Using electrical equipment for work at home

If home-workers use electrical equipment provided by the Council as part of their work, their line manager is responsible for its maintenance. Employers are only responsible for the equipment they supply. Electrical sockets and other parts of the home-worker's domestic electrical systems are their own responsibility.

Listed below are simple steps that can be taken to prevent harm or injury to home-workers, or other people, when home-workers 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 home-worker.
- 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.

Just looking for any damage to the electrical equipment can prevent most of the faults that can cause harm.

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 when the substances are in use?
- 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. Hazardous substances should be labelled with orange and black hazard symbols. But any substance that places home-worker 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 home-worker's health is at risk from exposure to any hazardous substance, the Council (line manager) must take appropriate action to eliminate or reduce the exposure. The Council is only responsible for substances and materials they provide to home-workers.

Working with VDUs

The Council has a duty to make sure that the display screen equipment used by home-workers is safe and does not affect the user's health.

When working with VDUs it is important for home-workers to adjust their workstation 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 home-workers to view the screen comfortably. They may need different spectacles for this. Home-worker's should consult their GP or an optician if in doubt. VDU users can request an eye examination and eye test from the Council.

Here is an additional checklist of points that need to be covered when assessing a home-workers VDU station:

- 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 home-worker 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 home-worker can move freely between the work on the desk and the VDU?

New and expectant mothers

When assessing risks to the home-worker, the Council must pay particular attention to homeworkers that are new and expectant mothers. Risks include those to the unborn child or to the child of a woman who are 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.

Whatever work is to be undertaken at home, it should not expose the pregnant worker to anything that can have a chemical, biological, or physically adverse affect on either her or the child. For example - work involving the use of hazardous chemicals, work involving biological agents or physically demanding work leading to undue stress.

First aid

The Council needs to ensure that they supply adequate first-aid provisions for home-workers. The exact provisions dependent on the nature of the work activity and risks involved which will be identified through the risk assessment process.

Safety representatives

Safety representatives appointed by a recognised Trade Union, can represent home-workers in consultations with employers about health and safety matters. Reporting of accidents dangerous occurrences and ill health, Accidents, injuries, dangerous occurrences or ill health which occurs whilst at work or because of the work process must be reported in the normal manner. (See Accident and incident reporting policy and guidance)

Serious or imminent danger

Employees including home-workers 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 home-workers have a duty to report all faults which may be a hazard to their own or another's health or safety.

Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Inspectors

HSE inspectors enforce the Health and Safety at Work Act and the regulations made under it, that apply to home-working. 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 home-workers.

Accidents, injuries, dangerous occurrences or ill health which occurs whilst at work or because of the work process must be reported in the normal manner. (See Accident and incident reporting policy and guidance)