Working from home

safe work australia

/ Worker information sheet

Working from home can have benefits for workers (e.g. less commuting, more flexibility) and businesses (e.g. downsizing office space). However, the WHS risks must still be managed. This information sheet provides practical information for workers who are doing computer-based work from home.

Work health and safety duties

Under work health and safety (WHS) laws a person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU), such as an employer, has a duty of care to their workers. They must ensure your health and safety, both physical and psychological, while you are at work, so far as is reasonably practicable.

The PCBU's WHS duties do not change when you are working from home even if you asked to work from home, the arrangement is temporary or part time, or it was put in place due to external factors (e.g. public health directions).

> **i** **Workers' compensation** is a form of insurance that supports you if you are injured at, or because of, work. Generally, workers will be covered for workers' compensation while working from home if this arrangement is supported by the employer.

Your WHS duties as a worker

As a worker you also have WHS duties when working from home. You must:

- take reasonable care for your own health and safety
- take reasonable care not to adversely affect others' health and safety
- comply with reasonable WHS instructions, as far as you are reasonably able, and
- cooperate with reasonable WHS policies or procedures that have been provided to you.

This may include:

- providing information as accurately as you can (e.g. when providing information on your home working environment or completing hazard identification checklists)
- following reasonable procedures or instructions about how work is done (e.g. using and maintaining equipment as directed)
- following appropriate workplace behaviour or other polices (e.g. not bullying or harassing others including online abuse)
- cooperating with reasonable conditions on your working from home arrangement (e.g. having a workstation assessment or working from an agreed location)
- taking reasonable care to maintain a safe work area (e.g. maintaining smoke alarms, safety switches and removing trip hazards), or
- reporting if your home workplace becomes unsafe or there are other changes that may affect your WHS (e.g. reporting faulty equipment or if your home is damaged by extreme weather).

> **i** **Working from home may not always be safe or practical**
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> Working from home may not suit all workers or types of work (e.g. if specialist equipment or face to face interaction is required). In some situations, managing WHS risks may mean not allowing, pausing, or ending a work from home arrangement. If working from home isn't safe, the PCBU must still provide somewhere safe for you while you are at work (e.g. providing access to the office or a safe alternative such a coworking facility).

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Managing WHS risks when working from home

The PCBU must eliminate or minimise WHS risks, to both your physical and psychological health, so far as is reasonably practicable. They must also consult with you, and any health and safety representatives (HSRs), about anything that may affect your health and safety.

Consultation is important because you may be the only person who is aware of the risks associated with your home working environment or personal circumstances. You may be able to help the PCBU identify hazards and suggest practical solutions. To help identify any hazards, you may be asked to complete a checklist or provide information about your home working environment. In some situations, the PCBU may engage the services of a WHS professional to assess the risks (e.g. to do a workstation or ergonomic assessment before you start working from home).

Because the workplace is in your home, this may change what practical things the PCBU does to manage WHS risks. The PCBU may need to work closely with you to control the risks. For example, providing instructions on setting up a safe workstation and asking you to follow them. This may include putting requirements or conditions on your working from home arrangement such as:

- requiring you to come into the office to do certain tasks (e.g. tasks that involve specialised equipment or are better done face to face)
- only allowing you to work from an approved location, or
- scheduling core working hours to ensure you're available to co-workers and have appropriate supervision and support.

Some common control measures the PCBU may use include:

- providing IT systems, tools and equipment that are fit for purpose so you can complete tasks safely and on time (e.g. headsets for workers who make frequent calls or adjustable chairs, ensuring workplace electrical equipment is safe)
- minimising fatigue by discouraging logging on afterhours and not scheduling meetings outside of standard work hours or over usual break times
- managing the risk of harmful behaviours online (e.g. minimise client aggression by putting out of office messages on phones and emails so clients know when to expect a response, including supervisors on potentially difficult calls, and encouraging workers to end and report calls that become abusive)
- minimising sedentary work (e.g. too much sitting) by ensuring you can take frequent breaks and change postures throughout the day
- managing job demands by assigning tasks that match your level of skills and experience, and giving you enough time to complete the tasks
- ensuring policies are unbiased, transparent and applied fairly (e.g. that training and opportunities are also available to workers who work from home and workers know who to report hazards and issues when working from home)
- ensuring tasks are fairly distributed (e.g. between workers in the office and those at home)
- providing information on how to set up and maintain a safe workstation
- redistributing and reprioritising tasks during peak times to manage high job demands
- providing regular communication, feedback, support (both from supervisors and co-workers) and direction (e.g. regular catch ups and team meetings), and
- ensuring you have access to first aid supplies, can call for help in an emergency and know who to contact for assistance.

Managing risks is an ongoing process. If you think a control measure is not working as planned (e.g. you begin to get sore at your desk or feel anxious) or you identify a new hazard or risk (e.g. increased noise and utility outages during home renovations) tell the PCBU so they can take further action.