

rmp

Risk control

WFH Series: Display Screen Equipment (DSE)



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Introduction

There has been a significant shift in where Display Screen Equipment (DSE) is used due to the adoption of dynamic models of working, whether permanently at home or through hybrid models where employee time is divided between office and home.

Employers should recognise that their responsibility to protect the health and safety of their employees extends to employees who are working from home.

Employees who work from home may spend many hours every day interacting with computers and other forms of information technology in order to perform their work-related duties. Therefore, consideration must be given to the risks associated with these interactions.

Ergonomics is a science concerned with the 'fit' between people and their work. It puts people first, taking account of their capabilities and limitations. Ergonomics aims to make sure that tasks, equipment, and the environment fit each worker.

How can ergonomics and human factors improve health and safety? Applying safe ergonomic principles can:

- Reduce the potential for accidents
- Reduce the potential for injury and ill health
- Improve performance and productivity¹.

Effective Communications

Homeworking can potentially make it more difficult for managers to understand what issues employees may be facing. Managers should consider how to create effective communications between themselves and their employees. Strategies for managing any risks to health and safety, including from poor ergonomics, may also need adjustment.

If the homeworking arrangement is temporary in nature, then a Display Screen Equipment (DSE) assessment is not legally required. However, during any period of temporary home working, employers need to regularly discuss the arrangements with their employees. If the arrangements are adversely affecting the health and safety of the employee, the manager should take appropriate steps to remedy the situation. Employers should provide workers with advice and guidance on completing their own basic self-assessment at home.

Where employers decide to make working from home a permanent arrangement for an employee, they should provide advice, guidance, and training on how to carry out full workstation self-assessment and provide workers with appropriate equipment and advice on control measures.

Risk Assessment

If the equipment an employee is using is not set up correctly or the area they are working within is not suitable for the work they are undertaking then they could be at risk of developing health problems.

Musculoskeletal disorders such as back pain or upper limb disorders can arise due to incorrect arrangements. While the risk to users is generally low, they can become significant over time if good practice is not followed. Therefore, following ergonomic principles is essential to maintaining the health of an employee. Homeworkers could develop health issues from a workstation being too low or too high which could manifest as tension and then develop into neck or shoulder pain.

Unsuitable chairs are another cause for concern. If a chair is unsupportive, this may cause issues such as joint pain in knees, hips and back. It may also present as an issue with poor blood circulation.

Hand, wrist and arm problems are fairly common in office workers. Without a wrist rest, mouse or correctly adjusted workstation, employees are at risk of carpal tunnel syndrome, tendonitis, sprains, and strains.

Some employees may have a medical condition that requires specialist equipment or arrangements to be made.

The way employees set up their workstation may also present issues for themselves, which places significant importance on the need for employers to provide appropriate advice, guidance, and training.

It is not always practicable for the employer to send someone to conduct a risk assessment for a homeworker. A practical solution is for the employer to train such workers to undertake their own self-assessments. This can be done by training homeworkers to use a checklist based upon best practice principles and provide appropriate evidence (e.g. photographs) of their workstation. Employers should ensure workers have received the necessary training before being asked to complete a self-assessment.

This practical [workstation checklist \(PDF\)](#) may help.

Controls

The employer should evaluate the results of the risk assessment and address any problems that prevent the employee from creating a safe and effective workstation setup at home.

Homeworkers will need to receive training and information on health and safety relating to DSE use (for example good posture, taking breaks etc.). This is important for all users but is especially important for homeworkers who are not under direct supervision.

To contribute to the maintenance of their own wellbeing, homeworkers should be encouraged to employ the following the basic principles:

- Manage the time spent continually undertaking DSE work by taking frequent task breaks (5-10 mins every hour)
- Use an adjustable chair and adjust it according to specific needs
- Position the computer screen about an arm's length away, with the top of the screen at eye-level
- Make sure the screen image is clear and flicker free and adjust the font size so it can be read easily
- Avoid glare on the screen or keyboard keys
- Use a separate mouse and keyboard where possible, ensuring forearm space is available
- If a homeworkers legs are dangling and not supported, then this can lead to strains to the back muscles. A footrest may be a cost-effective solution
- Ensure legs are unrestricted by ensuring the area under the workstation is free from clutter
- Visually check computer / laptop power cables for signs of damage before use
- Change position regularly, and stretch frequently
- Reduce eyestrain by incorporating the 20:20:20 rule – for every 20 minutes spent looking at a computer screen, spend 20 seconds looking at an object 20 feet away

Summary

The axis of how we work seems to have shifted and with that the risk that the workforce now presents has moved accordingly. Although the risk from DSE is relatively low, if not considered it could become a more significant issue as time progresses. A clear framework for managing health and safety risk is required, underscored by effective communication. Advice, guidance and training is vital if the issues that may present themselves from DSE use are to be avoided².

References

1. HSE, Ergonomics and human factors at work. Available at: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg90.pdf>
2. HSE, Work with display screen equipment. Available at: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/priced/l26.pdf>

Further information

For access to further RMP Resources you may find helpful in reducing your organisation's cost of risk, please access the RMP Resources or RMP Articles pages on our website. To join the debate follow us on our LinkedIn page.

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For more information, please contact your broker, RMP risk control consultant or account director.



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