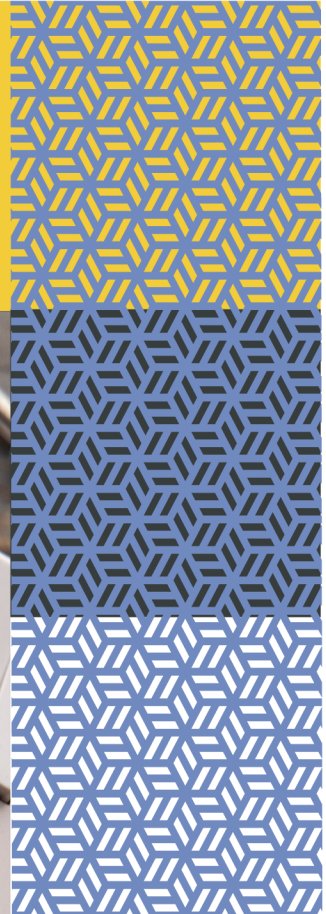
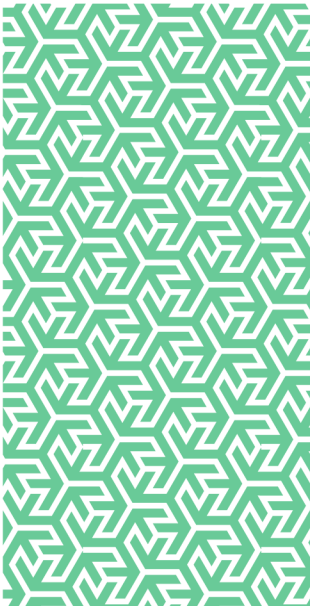


rmp

Risk control

WFH Series: Electrical Safety



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WFH Series: Electrical Safety

Introduction

Empty city streets and business hubs have received considerable media attention since the COVID-19 pandemic took hold in early 2020. As the picture of a post-COVID world slowly comes into focus, it seems we are unlikely to return to the office in the same numbers as before. Large companies such as Dropbox and Facebook have already committed to continuing remote working in the years to come¹.

Fifty of the biggest UK employers questioned by the BBC stated at the time that they had no plans to return all staff to the office full time in the near future. Twenty-four firms said that they did not have any plans in place to return workers to the office, however, 20 had opened their offices for staff unable to work from home².

For many employees who were relocated from an office location to their own homes, the transition involved the relocation of electrical office equipment such as laptops, computers, and tablets.

What's involved?

The charity Electrical Safety First³ has conducted research into the dangers to which remote workers may be unknowingly exposed to due to the increased use of electrical equipment in the home.

It found:

- More than two thirds of those currently working from home are using extension leads or adaptors with the electronic device they're using and almost half of them have more appliances plugged into one adaptor than they usually would.
- Almost a third are either unaware of the risks of overloading plug sockets or how to check whether they're doing so.
- More than half of those questioned who were using extension leads or adaptors admitted to 'daisy-chaining' them together. Daisy-chaining involves the unsafe practice of plugging one extension into another in order to reach further or facilitate more equipment.

Assess the risk

It is a legal requirement for employers to provide suitable and sufficient equipment for the role being undertaken and to ensure that the maintenance of the equipment is to the required standard. However, it is not a requirement for employers to ensure that the electrical infrastructure of the employees' property is in good working order. Neither is it a requirement for employers to maintain items such as adaptors and extensions unless they were provided by the employer for work-related purposes.

The employer must make sure there is a risk assessment of employees work activities and work equipment. During national lockdowns, the restrictions put in place to manage the risk of COVID-19 transmission meant that employers could rely on a process of self-assessment. Employees were encouraged to inspect their electrical equipment and notify their employer of any faults or defects.

However, as the coronavirus restrictions continue to ease and the reopening of workplaces gathers pace, employers will need to restore their pre-pandemic approach to the management of equipment and deal with any backlogs that have developed.

Implement the controls

Employers must ensure that the electrical equipment is:

- **suitable** for use, and for the purpose and conditions in which it is to be used;
- **maintained** in a safe condition for use so that people's health and safety is not at risk; and
- **inspected** to ensure that it is and continues to be safe for use. Any inspection should be carried out by a competent person (this could be an employee if they have the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to perform the task) and a record kept.
- Employers should provide adequate information, instruction and training about the specific equipment stating what the hazards are when using the equipment.
- A risk assessment should be conducted with the engagement of the employee
- Training for the employee in regards to the risk assessment and the visual checking of their equipment should be provided
- Home working policies should highlight processes for the reporting of defective equipment

- PAT testing is not a legal requirement, however, it is an effective way of identifying faults and maintenance requirements.

Although the employer is responsible for the maintenance of the equipment, they are not responsible for electrical sockets and other parts of a domestic electrical system, and so these are the employee's responsibility.

Employee's home insurance may be affected by working from home for prolonged periods – employees should check with their home insurance provider.

It is also recommended that homeworking employees are advised to carry out visual safety inspections on a regular basis to ensure:

- Plugs, cables and casings are not damaged
- There are no burn marks or odours that suggest overheating
- There are no trailing wires.(trip hazards)
- Plug sockets are not overloaded
- Cables are not routed under carpets or rugs
- Extension leads are not daisy chained

Employers should ensure that electrical faults are reported without delay, even on suspicion alone, and processes are in place to remove suspected faulty equipment from use until such times that they can be inspected, repaired, or replaced.

Summary

The effects of the pandemic and associated lockdowns has been quite profound on people in their personal and professional capacities.

For some, easing of restrictions may result in their return to a pre-pandemic full-time office existence. For others, they may be permanently working from home, or subject to a more dynamic approach which divides their time between off and home.

Where employers have decided in a continuation of the homeworking strategy post-pandemic, they must carefully consider how they are to manage the associated risks effectively.

Employees may be out of sight, but they must never be out of an employer's mind.

References

- 1 <https://theconversation.com/five-charts-that-reveal-how-remote-working-could-change-the-uk-154418>
- 2 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-53901310>
- 3 <https://www.juliemorgan.org.uk/news/working-home-tips-and-advice-electrical-safety-charity>
<https://www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/guidance/>
- 4 Safe use of work equipment. Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998. Approved Code of Practice and guidance L22 (Third edition) HSE Books 2008 ISBN 978 0 7176 6295 1 www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/l22.htm

Additional Legislation

The Electricity at Work Regulations 1989. Guidance available at: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/priced/hsr25.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.

Get in touch

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



Risk Management Partners

The Walbrook Building
25 Walbrook
London EC4N 8AW

020 7204 1800
rmpartners.co.uk

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