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Risk control

WFH Series: Electrical Safety



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WFH Series: Electrical Safety

Introduction

Post-pandemic, it may be argued that companies offering a hybrid or fully remote working employment option may maintain a competitive advantage in attracting and retaining and talent.

For many employees who have relocated from an office location to their own homes, the transition is likely to have involved the relocation of electrical equipment such as laptops, computers, and display screens.

What is the Risk?

Although most households will maintain access to a wide array of electrical items, from toasters and kettles to TV's and radios, certain practices may unknowingly increase the risk of an electrical fault through the use of electrical equipment in the home.

Practices that may increase the risks include:

- Overloading extension leads, adaptors or plug sockets while powering the electronic device.
- Daisy-chaining. This involves the unsafe practice of plugging one extension cable 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' home 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 to the employee for work-related purposes.

The employer must make sure there is a risk assessment of employees work activities and work equipment.

Implement the Controls

Employers must ensure that the electrical equipment is¹:

- **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 for portable electrical appliances. If your offices routinely undertake programmes of PAT testing, then a prudent course of action may be to include equipment allocated to remote workers within these programmes.

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 remote workers 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

Employers maintain legal duties to protect their employees.

These duties extend to those employees working remotely.

Employers and employees may benefit from remote working strategies, however, employers need to adapt their approaches to the management of their employees' health and safety to ensure risks are not increased through such arrangements.

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

References

- 1 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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