

Home working inspections

FOR those working at home, probably the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations 1992 (as amended 2002) are most important.

These are comprehensive and cover an entire workstation, not just a screen itself, including all the equipment, furniture and the working environment.

The risk assessments (RAs) should also consider the work being done and any special needs of individual staff.

They should also include:

- Adequate lighting, without glare or distracting; reflections, including providing window coverings as a reasonable precaution;
- Minimising potentially distracting noise;
- Chairs should be stable and adjustable;
- Tables or desks should have sufficient leg room and space for movement;
- The height of desks, tables and chairs should also be considered in terms of posture and upper limb disorders. Risk assessments should consider whether providing foot rests is a necessary reasonable precaution;
- Screens themselves should be adjustable and be readable without eye strain and at an appropriate height to avoid tension on neck, shoulders, arms and legs;
- Each individual piece of software should also be assessed with respect to keystrokes and using a mouse.
- Keyboards should also be detachable, adjustable and meet upper limb disorder requirements.

RAs for home working *should* have included home visits by suitably qualified health and safety assessments.

Where social distancing and other regulations prevent this, alternatives should be considered. One practical way may be to ask for someone else sharing the space to take a photograph, or photographs, of the worker at their work station, in the normal working conditions and circumstances, so these potential risks can be assessed.

Where someone is alone, photographs should show the work station while questions are asked about posture and positioning. Digital images, including video, can be sent to managers or assessments can be carried out online.

RAs should be carried out by managers. They must be “suitable and sufficient”. If managers have not carried out RAs this way, then chapels and reps should challenge them to ensure that they do meet the “suitable and sufficient” requirement.

Reasonable precautions

The easiest precaution may be to ensure that a laptop screen is put on books or something like a biscuit tin so

that it is as the same height as the face and the user does not have to bend forward.

This is particularly important during video conferences when people need to look into a camera at the top of a screen while watching others below that.

If a laptop needs to be raised, then a separate keyboard will be essential. If necessary, wrist rests should be provided while other peripherals should also be assessed. Touch pads may not be suitable for all-day use so an alternative mouse should be provided.

Employers should cover the cost of annual eye tests. They may also have to pay for glasses if special lenses are needed for screen use. The cost of an annual eye test is tax deductible for self-employed freelancers.

Employers should provide each worker with appropriate (health and safety) information about how and where to use such equipment as safely and healthily as possible.

Separate risk assessments should be carried out for using all electronic equipment elsewhere. This includes phones and all portable devices.

Inspections

Where unions are recognised, reps are obliged to inform management when they want to carry out inspections. Inspections can include research, such as talking to colleagues. This should be carried out during work time.

Management have a right to be present during inspections but must not overhear private conversations.

The regulations were drafted before home working was required as a reasonable precaution in itself. They do not cover using technology to carry out inspections at a distance. However, RAs can use photographs or online video, inspections can be carried out the same way.

Other risks

TUC guidance¹ says risks such as work-related stress, eyesight problems, photosensitive epilepsy and migraines, skin problems (caused by inadequate ventilation), and menstrual problems should also be assessed. Women have reported become irregular, heavy and painful periods and more intense pre-menstrual syndrome symptoms which may be linked to stress-related hormone balance.

¹ *Hazards at work; Organising for Safe and Healthy Workplaces*, TUC, 2016, Chapter 19; Display Screen Equipment and Chapter 36, Work-related upper limb disorders.

Checklist (for members and reps)

The work station is probably suitable if *yes* is the answer to all these questions. Any *no* should be brought to the attention of the employer. (This list was originally drafted for NUJ guidance issued in 1993 and has been updated.)

1. Screen(s)

- Are screens tiltable in all directions?
- Is the height of each comfortable?
- Is the distance from the eyes for each comfortable?
- Is there any flicker?
- Are brightness and contrast adjustable?
- Are they free from glare and reflection?

2. Document holder/second screen

- Has a document holder/second screen been offered, requested or provided for those referring to other material while writing?
- Are the height and distance relative to the first screen comfortable?
- Can documents be read comfortably?

3. Keyboard

- Is it detachable?
- Are the keys easily legible?
- Has it a matt surface?
- Is the space between the keyboard and the edge of the desk comfortable?
- Is there hand or wrist support?

4. Other input devices

- Is there a separate/detachable mouse?
- Is it possible to use (all day) without strain?
- Is it comfortable to grip/use?
- Is it on a suitable surface (such as a mat)?
- Is it comfortable?
- Have you been offered or requested alternatives to a touchpad or a "conventional" mouse, such as a different size, a trackball or joystick mouse?

5. Desk or working surface

- Can equipment be adjusted and moved?
- Is the height /suitable comfortable?
- Is the height adjustable?
- Are there any obstacles under the desk?
- Has it a matt surface?

6. Chair

- Is the height adjustable?
- Is there back support?
- Is the back support adjustable in height and tilt?
- Is there lumbar support?
- Is there any pressure on the thighs or the back of the knees?

7. Footrest

- Is a footrest available?

8. Space

- Is the workstation cramped?

- Can the users change position and move around?

9. Position

- Is the workstation suitably positioned in relation to sources of natural light?
- Is the work station suitably positioned in relation to artificial light?

10. Lighting

- Is natural lighting adequate?
- Do windows have blinds or other protective covers?
- Is the user/screen shielded from natural light (ever) creating reflection or glare?
- Is artificial lighting adequate?
- Can the user control the brightness and intensity (and direction) of artificial light?
- Has a desk light been offered, requested or provided?
- Has an uplighter been offered, requested or provided?
- Is there an anti-glare screen?
- Has a "shadow surround" been offered, requested or provided for laptop/device use outdoors or in bright light?

11. Electrical

- Are all plugs, sockets and switches in a good state of repair and safe?
- Are all sockets/wires safe from potential overloading?
- Is all wiring adequately covered?
- Is all wiring (including from USB chargers) in conduits or not in any way trailing?
- Are there enough USB connections/charging points?

12. Ambience

- Is the temperature comfortable?
- Can the temperature be (easily) controlled?
- Is the humidity level comfortable?
- Is street/external noise muffled or controllable?
- Has an anti-static protection been offered, requested or provided?

13. Software

- Is all software suitable for the required task?
- Has each piece of software been individually risk assessed for repeated keystrokes in performing the required task?
- Do you have software suitable for each task?
- Is software easy to use?
- Has sufficient software training been provided?
- Has appropriate training in the use of keystrokes as an alternative to using a mouse (or vice versa) been offered, requested and provided?
- Is any software efficiency monitoring in place?

14. Overall

Can the equipment be used all day while sitting upright, shoulders "square", elbows and knees at right angles with wrists supported to use both keyboard and mouse?