

5109 REMOTE WORKER: Safety, Health and Security FACT SHEET

LENGTH: 19 MINUTES

PROGRAM SYNOPSIS:

In today's technology driven and ever-changing world, the ability and necessity of working from home or at a remote location is on the rise. Generally referred to as "remote work", this working arrangement commonly finds workers performing their job duties from a "home office" or a "home-based worksite." There are many benefits of remote work for both the employee and employer; however, it is important that all parties understand their responsibilities related to the safety and health of remote workers as well as the cyber security of their operations. This program explains those responsibilities as well as OSHA regulatory requirements regarding remote work and the policies that employers use to manage safety responsibilities for their employees. The program also discusses in detail the various hazards that can be found in the home work environment and the safe practices remote workers can follow to control them.

Topics include selecting a location for a home workspace, maintaining a "workplace mindset", fall prevention, fire safety, home office ergonomics, the ergonomics of cell phones and tablets and computer security for the remote worker.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES:

After watching the program, the participant should be able to explain the following:

- What the remote work responsibilities are for both the employee and the employer;
- Which OSHA regulations apply to home offices and home-based worksites;
- How to select a suitable location for a home workspace;
- How to maintain a "workplace mindset";
- What precautions to take to prevent slips, trips and falls in the home workspace;
- How to reduce the risk of fires in the home working environment;
- How to maintain good posture and avoid repetitive movements when working at home;
- What safeguards to take to keep computers secure.

INSTRUCTIONAL CONTENT:

EMPLOYEE & EMPLOYER RESPONSIBILITIES

- In today's technology driven and ever-changing world, the ability and necessity of working from home or at a remote location is on the rise. Generally referred to as "remote work", this working arrangement commonly finds workers performing their job duties from a "home office" or a "home-based worksite."
- There are many benefits of remote work for both the employee and employer; however, it is important that all parties understand their responsibilities related to the safety and health of remote workers as well as the cyber security of their operations.
- The employer is responsible for the safety and health of the remote worker while he or she is performing their job duties and is also responsible for any hazards caused by materials, equipment, or work processes which the employer provides or requires to be used in an employee's home office or home-based worksite.
- The employee is responsible to follow the specific safety and health rules and procedures established for remote workers by their organization as well as continuing to follow all other safety training he or she may have received on more general topics.
- For example, remote workers should follow safe work practices related to fire prevention, housekeeping, electrical safety, fall prevention and ergonomics.
- Employers often manage their employee oversight responsibilities through remote work agreements and various safety and health checklists assigned to the remote worker.
- In addition, it is critical that a remote worker understand and follow all computer security and cyber security protocols established by their employer.

- When all parties involved in remote work understand their responsibilities and establish clear lines of communication and expectations, the remote working relationship can be safe, healthy and productive for all concerned.

OSHA REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

- OSHA's general duty clause requires employers to provide all employees with safe and healthful working conditions that are free from recognized, serious hazards. This requirement extends to employees who work in home offices and home-based worksites.
- OSHA makes a distinction between a home office and a home-based worksite. A home office is the area of an employee's home where typical "office work activities" are performed, such as using a computer or telephone, filing, copying and similar activities.
- A home-based worksite is the area of an employee's personal residence where the employee performs the work of the employer, for example, sewing, wood working or product assembly and packaging.
- For home office workers, the employer must ensure that the home office area is free of recognized serious hazards such as fire hazards, slip and trip hazards and electrical hazards and that the employee's required work doesn't subject them to other hazards such as ergonomic hazards.
- However, the employee's house itself and the employee's furnishings are not regulated by OSHA.
- When it comes to a home-based worksite, OSHA recognizes that certain types of work can be hazardous and all OSHA regulations that apply to the materials, equipment and activities used by a worker to perform their employer required duties also apply to a home-based worksite.
- OSHA has a policy of respecting the privacy of private homes and typically will not conduct inspections of an employee's home office; however, OSHA will conduct inspections of home-based worksites if OSHA receives a complaint.
- The scope of any OSHA inspection in an employee's home will be limited to the employee's work activities.
- Employers who are required to keep records of work-related injuries and illnesses are also responsible to do so for injuries and illnesses that occur in a home office or home-based worksite. For this reason, remote workers should report all work-related injuries to their employer right away.

POLICIES & GUIDELINES

- Many employers utilize remote work agreements and various safety and health checklists as a way to manage their safety and health responsibilities for employees who work remotely.
- These types of agreements typically outline the employer's expectations for productivity and accountability for remote workers as well as the expectations and requirements used to ensure the employee's safety while working remotely.
- Remote worker agreements often include a detailed home safety checklist that must be performed and submitted to the employer before the employee is allowed to begin their home-based operations.
- The safety checklist should ensure that the employee's work area is free of obvious hazards, does not contain fire or electrical hazards and can be configured to conform with appropriate ergonomic practices and principles.
- Periodic re-inspections are typically required as well as a means by which a home-based employee can report any safety related issues or concerns.
- If you are a remote worker, take these types of agreements, inspections and checklists seriously. You have a personal responsibility and an obligation to your employer to maintain a safe and healthy working environment.

SELECTING A LOCATION FOR A HOME WORKSPACE

- One of the most important considerations for a remote worker is selecting an appropriate location for the workspace. Comfort, productivity and safety are important considerations when locating a home office or home-based worksite.
- Select an area away from the main traffic flow of other people or activities in the home.
- Try to select a work area that is reasonably quiet and free of distractions.
- If possible, select an area that you can designate as your home office and keep it separate and apart from other home-based activities for the duration of your remote work.
- Consistently working in the same designated area improves your ability to concentrate on your tasks and control any safety hazards in the area.
- Repeatedly moving around the house, from the couch to the dining room table or to the bedroom, can keep a worker unsettled and unproductive.

- Make sure the temperature, ventilation and lighting in the area are adequate for the type of work you plan to perform.
- The selected work area should have enough electrical outlets to safely power your equipment and make sure there are at least two exit routes available in the event of a fire or other emergency.

MAINTAINING A 'WORKPLACE MINDSET'

- In order to be successful, productive and healthy, a remote worker must strive to maintain a "workplace mindset."
- Having a workplace mindset means a worker is well organized, keeps to a schedule, dresses appropriately and wears any required personal protective equipment, or PPE.
- Workers should establish a normal workplace routine with defined time slots for working hours and definitive time periods for lunch, stretch breaks or non-work activities.
- To avoid feeling isolated, remote workers should stay in touch with their supervisor and fellow workers through periodic video meetings, conference calls and group emails.
- It's important to dress professionally and appropriately for your job duties and position. Keep in mind that you represent the company or organization and you may be called on to appear on a video conference at any time.
- Dressing appropriately for work also includes following any work-related dress code and PPE requirements.
- At a minimum, remote workers should wear sturdy, closed toed shoes while working in their home office. Open toed footwear is a safety hazard, no matter where you are working.
- Employees performing work at a home-based worksite must wear the PPE required for the specific tasks they perform.

FALL PREVENTION

- Slips, trips and falls are one of the leading causes of injuries and fatalities both on the job and at home. This is why fall prevention must be a key component of any safety program for remote workers.
- The remote worker safety checklist must include key elements for fall prevention and the remote worker must verify that the workspace is free of slip and trip hazards.
- Every work area, include those in a worker's home, must remain free of slip, trip and fall hazards.
- Two common fall hazards in a home are cords and rugs.
- Keep all cords out of areas of traffic flow and position them where they not underfoot. If this can't be avoided, fasten them securely to the floor to reduce the tripping hazard.
- Keep in mind that extension cords are not intended to be permanent. You may need to have an electrician install additional outlets to eliminate the need for extension cords.
- Rugs must remain flat on the floor, be sure to work out any humps or lumps.
- Place some type of non-skid tape or no-slip underlayer between a rug and the floor to prevent the rug from sliding.
- Slips and trips can also be prevented through good housekeeping. Don't allow clutter such as toys, dirty clothes or excess supplies to accumulate in your home or work area.
- Be especially mindful not to store any items on stairs.
- All travel paths must remain clear of debris and illuminated adequately so they may always be navigated safely.
- Any stairs that must be climbed or descended must be in good condition and have a sturdy handrail.
- Home-based workers must also be responsible to keep their exterior walkways and stairs free of slip and trip hazards.

FIRE SAFETY

- Fire safety must be included in any safety program aimed at remote workers. The remote worker safety checklist must include key fire safety elements and the remote worker must verify that the workspace is free of fire hazards.
- Every home should have a fire escape plan that includes multiple exit routes from the home and a meeting place safely away from the home.
- Be sure that any home workspace has two clear exit routes.
- Everyone in the home should understand and practice the escape plan.
- A fire safety plan must also ensure there are an adequate number of working smoke detectors in the home as well as in the designated workspace.
- All exit routes and doors must remain clear of obstructions.
- If one of the planned exits is a window, make sure it will open easily and that it is possible to exit the home through it.
- If the exit window is on an elevated floor, it will be necessary to have a fire safety ladder on hand and practice its use.

- Electricity is a common cause of house fires. It's a good idea to have an electrician verify that the home's electrical system is adequate to supply the home office area and there are enough nearby outlets to prevent the overuse of extension cords.
- Overloaded outlets, circuits or extension cords are a common source of electrical fires.
- Also, do not run power cords or extension cords under rugs and mats as they can be damaged and become a fire hazard.
- All plugs, cords, outlets and panels must be inspected and verified to be in good condition.

FIRE HAZARDS IN HOME SETTINGS

- There are some fire hazards faced in a home setting that are different than those faced in a traditional office setting.
- According to the National Fire Protection Association, fires related to cooking are the most common type of home fire.
- Cooking-related fires most often begin when a cooking appliance is left unattended and something flammable like oil or grease gets too hot. This is why it is essential to stay in the kitchen and keep an eye on what's cooking.
- Do not leave a lit stove burner or running microwave unattended while you work.
- Also, never leave any open flame such as a candle, or a heat source like a space heater unattended. Always unplug or extinguish these items when leaving the immediate area.
- Do not smoke anywhere in your home. If you must smoke, always do so outside and be sure to extinguish the butts in water before disposing of them.
- Finally, good housekeeping is critically important to fire safety. Keep all waste picked up and disposed of properly and store flammable materials away from any type of heat source.

THE ERGONOMICS OF CELL PHONES AND TABLETS

- Remote workers and workers "on the go" often find themselves keying or navigating the screen of a cell phone or tablet. Just like any other activity, maintaining good posture and avoiding continued repetitive movements are important safety considerations.
- Periodically change your grip and the device's orientation.
- Alternate between using your thumbs and fingers when doing a large amount of keying or navigating.
- Your grip and the size of your device will determine which areas of the screen you can reach easily.
- To prevent joint strain, keep the majority of your screen contact within these easy reach areas during heavy use.
- If this is not possible, change your grip, reorient your phone or use two hands to more easily reach all areas of the screen.
- Try to avoid excessively gripping the phone or tablet while holding it.
- Find a grip and keying style that allows you to keep your wrists in a neutral posture and always avoid holding the wrist, thumb or fingers at an awkward angle.
- You must also consider your head and neck posture. Avoid awkward postures such as looking down excessively or holding the cell phone between your ear and shoulder.
- While interacting with or viewing the device, keep your head up and in a neutral posture. Your elbows should also be relaxed and in a neutral position while keying or viewing.
- Avoid holding the same posture or repeating the same movements for extended periods of time. Take periodic stretch breaks and change positions frequently.

HOME OFFICE ERGONOMICS

- Ergonomics, posture and movement are primary considerations when it comes to the safety and health of remote workers.
- Ergonomics is the proper fitting of the workstation to accommodate the safe posture and movements of the worker, rather than forcing the worker to fit into a poorly arranged workstation.
- Some things to consider include chair height, the distance to the monitor and the location of commonly used items.
- The chair should support the lumbar, or lower, area of the spine. If the back rest alone doesn't accomplish this, consider using an additional lumbar support or cushion.
- The height of the chair should be adjusted to allow the thighs to be parallel to the floor. If the height of your chair is not adjustable, you will need to select a chair that is the correct height for you.
- If your feet are not flat on the floor in this position, then you should use a footrest.

- If the chair has adjustable armrests, you should adjust them so your arms gently rest on the armrests while your shoulders are in relaxed position.
- With the chair properly adjusted, your knees, hips and elbows should be at approximately a 90-degree angle. This is the “neutral” position for these joints.
- Do not place the monitor off to the side. Instead, place the monitor directly in front of you, about arm's length away. The top of the screen should be at or slightly below eye level.
- People who wear bifocals may find that lowering the monitor an additional inch or two makes for more comfortable viewing.
- Position the keyboard and mouse so you do not have to stretch to reach them.
- Your wrists should be flat when typing, not tilted down and not tilted back. You may need to raise or lower the keyboard to maintain this neutral wrist position or use a wrist pad to raise the wrists to the proper level.
- Frequent users of laptops should find a way to use a full-sized keyboard and monitor in order to create an ergonomically appropriate workstation. Many companies will provide a docking station to their remote workers for this purpose.
- Keep your phone, reference materials and other frequently used items within reach to prevent overreaching, which can cause muscle strain and back pain.
- To alleviate neck and shoulder pain, avoid cradling the telephone receiver between your head and shoulder.
- If telephone use is a large part of your job, you should utilize a comfortable headset to reduce the ergonomic strain of holding a handset.
- It's important to avoid sitting in the same posture or repeating the same movements for extended periods of time. Avoid this by taking periodic stretch breaks, changing positions or switching between job tasks.

PERSONAL SECURITY FOR THE REMOTE WORKER

- Security considerations for remote workers includes both personal security and computer security.
- When dealing with work-related clients, do not give out your home address or other personal information.
- Always contact your work-related clients using your business email and dedicated business phone, if you have one.
- It's a good idea to keep your exterior doors locked while you are working so no one enters your home unexpectedly.
- If your work requires off-site meetings or travel, establish a method of communication with a supervisor or co-worker so someone knows your destination and when you expect to return.
- Also, establish a protocol for checking in as “safe” when you arrive and return from off-site travel.

CYBER & COMPUTER SECURITY

- Cyber and computer security are also key considerations for remote workers.
- Your organization may have specific hardware, software and networking requirements related to cyber security for remote workers.
- Make sure you understand and follow your organization's requirements.
- If a virtual VPN is provided by your company, be sure to use it.
- A home-based network should never be open to the public. The network should be encrypted and secured with a strong password.
- Your router and computer should be updated regularly with the most current software and virus protection and also secured with a long and unique password.
- When possible, it's best to use a completely separate computer, phone and email for work-related purposes.
- Only use the hardware, software and applications approved and vetted by your organization.
- Do not download or install any programs or applications onto your computer or devices without prior approval from your organization.
- Always be alert for scam emails that purport to need personal information or ask you to open or download a file or document.
- Many scammers try to fool you into thinking an email is from your bank, the IRS the police or similar entities. This type of nefarious cyber activity is called “phishing.”
- If in doubt, don't open any suspect email or follow any links to an unfamiliar website. Instead, call the sending organization by phone to confirm if they have sent you an important email or requested information.
- When it comes to security, remote workers must stay alert, be responsible and follow all applicable cyber safety procedures.

REMOTE WORKER:
Safety, Health and Security

ANSWERS TO THE REVIEW QUIZ

1. a

2. a

3. b

4. b

5. a

6. b

7. a

8. c

9. a

10. a

REMOTE WORKER: *Safety, Health and Security*
REVIEW QUIZ

The following questions are provided to determine how well you understand the information presented in this program.

Name _____ Date _____

1. The _____ is responsible for any hazards caused by materials, equipment, or work processes that the employer provides or requires to be used in an employee's home office or home-based worksite.
 - a. Employer
 - b. Employee

2. Remote workers have a personal responsibility and an obligation to their employers to maintain a safe and healthy working environment.
 - a. True
 - b. False

3. When selecting an appropriate area for a home workspace, you should make sure there are at least _____ exit routes available in the event of an emergency.
 - a. 1
 - b. 2
 - c. 3

4. Dressing professionally and appropriately for your job duties and position is NOT important in the home work environment.
 - a. True
 - b. False

5. Employees performing work at home-based worksites must wear the PPE required for the specific tasks they perform.
 - a. True
 - b. False

6. Extension cords should only be used permanently to power home office equipment when your home is not equipped with enough electrical outlets.
 - a. True
 - b. False

7. Any stairs that must be climbed or descended in your home must be in good condition and have a sturdy handrail.
 - a. True
 - b. False

8. When your work chair is properly adjusted, your knees, hips and elbows should be at approximately a _____ angle.
 - a. 45-degree
 - b. 60-degree
 - c. 90-degree

9. Your wrists should be _____ when typing.
 - a. Flat
 - b. Tilted down
 - c. Tilted back

10. A home-based computer network should never be open to the public.
 - a. True
 - b. False