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Guidance - Working with display screen equipment (DSE) and Remote Working Self-Assessment

What is DSE and remote working?

DSE are devices or equipment that have an alphanumeric or graphic display screen and includes display screens, laptops, touch screens and other similar devices. Remote working is a way of working 'at a distance', using information technology (IT and DSE) to allow employees to undertake work away from the employers' premises. Remote workers can be based at home, occasionally work from home, or be mobile and connected from anywhere in the world.

What are the health and safety risks with DSE and remote working?

Some workers may experience fatigue, eye strain, upper limb problems and backache from overuse or improper use of DSE. These problems can also be experienced from poorly designed workstations or work environments. The causes may not always be obvious and can be due to a combination of factors. In these unprecedented times where working from home has become the norm rather than an exception it is more important now than ever to ensure that our workstations are suitable and have been adequately risk assessed.

Remote working offers many advantages to the employer and employee, by reducing costs of accommodation and travel, allowing flexible working and improving work efficiency. But it also brings its own health and safety hazards, from working in isolation to a lack of control over the work environment. This might be fire, electrical, manual handling or other hazards that will arise through working at home or remotely.

How to control the risks – Using DSE and remote working Self-Assessment Form

As an employer, we need to assess the risks associated with remote working and using DSE equipment and any special needs of individual staff. Due to the ongoing restrictions, a workplace assessment is impracticable therefore it is down to the remote worker to carry out a "self-assessment" of their workspace.

DSE and remote working Self-Assessment form gives practical guidance on workstation assessment and supporting a safe environment for remote working and is a way of helping to manage the potential health and safety problems in a practical way by:

- helping spot the risks;
- making sure health and safety controls are practical;
- increasing the level of commitment to working in a healthy way.
- support mental wellbeing when remote or lone working

We will use your assessment to decide what needs to be done, check that action is taken and will keep a record of your significant findings.

Any record produced should be simple and focused on controls and we are required by law to keep them.

The risks from DSE and remote working can be controlled using the following straightforward, low-cost controls.

Getting comfortable

The following may help users:
- Forearms should be approximately horizontal and the user's eyes should be the same height as the top of the screen.
- Make sure there is enough workspace to accommodate all documents or other equipment. A document holder may help avoid awkward neck and eye movements.

- Arrange the desk and screen to avoid glare, or bright reflections. This is often easiest if the screen is not directly facing windows or bright lights.
- Adjust curtains or blinds to prevent intrusive light.
- Make sure there is space under the desk to move legs.
- Avoid excess pressure from the edge of seats on the backs of legs and knees. A footrest may be helpful, particularly for smaller users.

Well-designed workstations

Keyboards and keying in (typing)
- A space in front of the keyboard can help you rest your hands and wrists when not keying.
- Try to keep wrists straight when keying.
- Good keyboard technique is important – you can do this by keeping a soft touch on the keys and not overstretching the fingers.

Using a mouse
- Position the mouse within easy reach, so it can be used with a straight wrist.
- Sit upright and close to the desk to reduce working with the mouse arm stretched.
- Move the keyboard out of the way if it is not being used.
- Support the forearm on the desk, and don't grip the mouse too tightly.
- Rest fingers lightly on the buttons and do not press them hard.

Reading the screen
- Make sure individual characters on the screen are sharp, in focus and don't flicker or move. If they do, the DSE may need servicing or adjustment.
- Adjust the brightness and contrast controls on the screen to suit lighting conditions in the room.
- Make sure the screen surface is clean.
- When setting up software, choose text that is large enough to read easily on screen when sitting in a normal comfortable working position.
- Select colours that are easy on the eye (avoid red text on a blue background, or vice versa).

Changes in activity
Breaking up long spells of DSE work helps prevent fatigue, eye strain, upper limb problems and backache. As the employer you need to plan, so users can interrupt prolonged use of DSE with changes of activity. Organised or scheduled rest breaks may sometimes be a solution.

The following may help users:

- Stretch and change position.
- Look into the distance from time to time, and blink often.
- Change activity before users get tired, rather than to recover.
- Short, frequent breaks are better than longer, infrequent ones.

Timing and length of changes in activity or breaks for DSE use is not set down in law and arrangements will vary depending on a particular situation.

Portable computers
These same controls will also reduce the DSE risks associated with portable computers. However, the following may also help reduce manual handling, fatigue and postural problems:
- Consider potential risks from manual handling if users have to carry heavy equipment and papers.
- Whenever possible, users should be encouraged to use a docking station or firm surface and a full-sized keyboard and mouse.
- The height and position of the portable's screen should be angled so that the user is sitting comfortably and reflection is minimised (raiser blocks are commonly used to help with screen height).
- More changes in activity may be needed if the user cannot minimise the risks of prolonged use and awkward postures to suitable levels.

Working Environment and Communication
General health and safety hazards need to be considered by both the employer and the worker because employers have little direct control over the home workplace. There should be suitable access to the work room and the employee needs to ensure good standards of housekeeping, including adequate lighting, removing trailing leads and not using the floor or high shelves for storage. They must make sure they use

equipment correctly and take reasonable care of their own health and safety and be aware of the risks their work poses to other people, such as family members (including children).

Remote working hazards extend beyond the physical work environment. Working arrangements are also important. For example, some employees may find it difficult to adapt to working in an environment with limited social contact, while others may find it harder to manage their time or to separate work from home life.

Below are some practical tips on how to separate work and home lives:
- Line managers or even work colleagues could check during one-to-one or team meetings that each are managing their work–life balance effectively.
- Using voicemail for your dedicated telephone line for work, which is switched to an answer phone at the end of the working day.
- Formally agreeing ground rules relating to childcare, hours of work, access to the office
- Establishing lone working procedures according to their role or work risk assessment

It's important to maintain good communication systems and formal means of contact with home or remote workers to minimise feelings of isolation.
Consider:
- regular meetings between remote workers and their co-workers – these give employees the opportunity to network and get to know each other. They can also be used to deliver training or reinforce the organisation's standards
- requiring remote workers to come into the office periodically to make sure they stay up to date with corporate systems and with staff at the office
- good access to the intranet The Hub, information, such as policy documents, internal contact directories and essential files through connecting online to the organisation's server
- access to helplines for support in dealing with software problems and equipment failures
- procedures if information technology systems fail
- online meetings or virtual discussion forums, tele- or video-conferencing
- identifying people as key contacts who have specific responsibility for routinely contacting remote workers and acting as their first port of call
- providing contact details of key people such as trade union representatives, health and safety advisers and HR.

Providing eye tests and any necessary spectacles for DSE work

There is no evidence to suggest that DSE work will cause permanent damage to eyes or eyesight. Eye tests are provided to ensure users can comfortably see the screen and work effectively without visual fatigue. The arrangements to facilitate an eye and eyesight tests should be requested through your line manager. You can get your eyes examined free of charge by any optometrist in Scotland who provide NHS services.

Review and Feedback

DSE and remote working assessments need to be reviewed when:

major changes are made to the equipment, furniture, work environment or software;
- users change workstations;
- the nature of work tasks change considerably;
- it is thought that the controls in place may be causing other problems.
- When requested by employee or employer, through feedback process.