



ToThePOINT Telecommuter Safety

Key considerations for a telecommuting policy

More than 20 million people do some work at home as part of their primary job, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the U.S. Department of Labor.

Incorporating telecommuting programs into the workplace has helped companies attract and retain employees, increase productivity and reduce overhead costs. Employers who have successfully implemented these programs stress the importance of having a policy that effectively manages the telecommuting relationship. Employees' safety and health is an important management consideration that shouldn't be overlooked when forming or evaluating a telecommuting policy.

There are 10 key considerations for a successful telecommuting policy.

1 Not every job lends itself to telecommuting. The Department of Labor states that telecommuting is best suited to jobs that are information based, portable, and may demand a degree of privacy and concentration. Jobs conducive to telecommuting should be identified in the policy to alleviate the burden on employees and supervisors to determine which jobs fit a telecommuting model.

2 The alternate work site should be evaluated by the company. The employee needs a clean, safe area that is specifically designated for the work activity and equipped with:

- proper lighting and ventilation
- ergonomically-correct furniture and equipment
- working smoke detector and fire extinguisher

It is imperative that the area remain clear of obstructions, and trip and fall hazards.

3 The employee must be required to immediately report to their employer any job-related incident or accident that occurs during working hours.

4 Unless previously approved by the employer, the telecommuting employee should not meet with customers, professional colleagues or other employees at the alternate work site.

5 Employees should be advised to consult with their personal insurance agent regarding work areas in the home.



Homeowner's and automobile insurance are the responsibility of the employee.

6 The employee should be responsible for timely notification of equipment malfunction or needed repairs. Unless previously approved by the employer, vendors, or contractors should not be sent to the telecommuting location.

7 Human Resources and IT professionals should look for new technologies to make telecommuting easier and more efficient.

8 The employer should supply employees with resources and office supplies to work effectively at the alternate site. Telecommuting employees must be in compliance with all of the employer's guidelines for use of computer hardware and software including:

- software licensing provisions
- duplication of employee office-owned or licensed software
- installation of virus and surge protection
- maintenance of systems security
- access to files and passwords

9 Telecommuting is an adjustment for everyone in the work flow. Provide training to supervisors, telecommuters, and onsite employees to explain the telecommuting policy and discuss effective communication.

10 To be successful, telecommuting must become an integral part of the workplace that must be considered whenever business plans and human resource strategies are discussed.

Checklist for a Safe Working Area

Telecommuting employees can use the following guidelines to assist them in safely setting up their designated work area.

- Maintain proper lighting around the work area
- Locate the computer away from windows and lighting that cause glare
- Place monitor and keyboard at levels that will not produce neck, back or wrist strain
- Select an office chair that provides an adjustable, supportive backrest
- Place files, computers, and heavy office equipment on sturdy, level surfaces
- Avoid an accumulation of loose paper and files that can create a fire hazard
- Maintain space around file cabinets and desk to avoid slips and falls
- Replace or remove carpeting with frayed edges and avoid using throw rugs that can cause the employee to trip
- Contain computer and phone cords as well as other electrical equipment to avoid a tripping hazard
- Always use proper lifting techniques when moving or lifting heavy equipment and furniture
- Ensure that electrical equipment is connected to grounded outlets
- Do not overload electrical circuits
- Turn off all electrical equipment during thunderstorms
- Power down computers after the workday is over
- Check smoke detectors regularly and replace batteries annually
- Keep a working fire extinguisher in the area and check the charge regularly
- Develop and practice a fire evacuation plan
- Report all workplace accidents and injuries to the employer immediately

