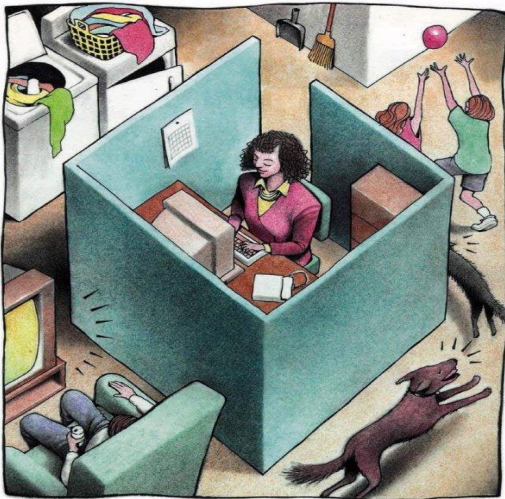




Safety & Health of a Remote Workforce



Even before the current coronavirus crisis, telecommuting had become a popular option for employees/employers across the US for various reasons, including real estate costs, space limitations, location or relocation of talent, and hours of operation. There are 2 types of working from home: short-term/occasional work from home; and less rare is the permanent/full-time work from home. Today telecommuting is becoming a way to safeguard and limit a contingent. With coronavirus, it's not clear how long people will be at home.

While work from home/remote workplaces have plenty of benefits to offer, this practice can also offer increased stress, isolation and loneliness. Employers, supervisors and managers should be aware of and consider the safety and health of a remote workforce and understand that the day-to-day ease of communication, team camaraderie, and encouragement can be lost in a remote setting. Further, employees sustaining injuries, including mental health, while working remotely/telecommuting are eligible for worker's compensation benefits as they would if working in a business office location. Under OSHA,

employers of a telecommuting workforce are to “furnish employees with a place of employment which is free from recognized hazards likely to cause death or serious physical harm.”

In 1997, 1 in 39 people in the United States were disabled 1 full day or more by unintentional injuries in the home [Accident Facts-NSC 1998]. Between 1997 and 2001, there were, an annual average of 12.4 million nonfatal home injuries [Gielan, et al. 2015]. With many of these injuries preventable through the use of controls, prevention and good practice. With the rise of COVID-19, many more employees are working remotely. Employers, supervisors and managers can provide guidance to employees who are working remotely to safeguard both the employee and the company [<https://injuryfacts.nsc.org/home-and-community>]. We have included a “At-Home Safety Checklist” for your use in when managing and directing a remote workforce either temporary or permanent.

Remote Workforce Health & Safety Checklist

- Establish a company policy for expectations and at-home safety of employees.
- Employers/managers/team leads need to increase communication with their remote employees. Loneliness can make people feel less motivated and less productive and prolonged isolation could also impact morale & productivity.
- Try setting up remote social settings like happy hours through web-based applications, continue to celebrate events – birthdays, births, milestones, goals.
- Have a clear set of daily/weekly expectations. Treat it like a real job, encourage employees to dress for work,



Safety & Health of a Remote Workforce

and have the employee work their typical or agreed upon hours.

- Create guidance for a designated work area within the remote location and expect the employee to designate the area, if possible, as an isolated workspace away from noise and distractions.
- Ensure the remote employee has the necessary equipment to complete their tasks.
- Through photos or web-based applications, employers could assess the remote employees designated work area for health and safety concerns and encourage employees to recognize things such as trip hazards, electrical safety, proper lighting, and chairs with adequate support.
- Employers should encourage remote workers to not neglect their physical and mental health. Encourage meditation, jumping jacks, stretching -- whatever works for the employee to care for their body and mind.

COVID-19 Health & Safety Checklist

- Wash hands frequently for at least 20 seconds, sing the happy birthday song to yourself at least once but twice is nice.
- Avoid touching hands to face.
- Disinfect keyboards, knobs, tables, phones, cellphones.
- Increase ventilation with air conditioning adjustments or opening windows.
- Practice Social Distancing (even with family members).
- If sick, stay isolated within the home and notify your employer, supervisor, manager or team lead.

At RHP Risk Management, we help our clients characterize the uncertainties associated with environmental and occupational hazards and risks to contextualize meaning that can be understood by their decision-making audiences be they the public, employees, consumers, regulators, or shareholders.

For more resources concerning COVID-19, visit www.rhprisk.com/coronavirus/