

Homeworking

Women workers are the majority of homeworkers, particularly where manual work is concerned. Homeworking is often the only option for women who cannot afford the costs of childcare and/or care for elderly or frail relatives.

A recent report produced by the National Group on Homeworking said *...homeworkers in the UK experience serious health and safety problems as a result of their work.**

Homeworkers carry out a variety of jobs. These include sewing, knitting, electrical/electronic assembly, rubber trimming, wire bending, card packing, cracker assembly, knitting, food preparation and admin/clerical work. So working at home isn't necessarily office work, but can mean working with toxic chemicals, fumes, sharp tools and potential fire hazards, in cramped conditions with your young child playing in the same room.

With the huge advances in communications technology such as email – and the financial advantage to the employer who does not have to provide office space - there has been the growth of *teleworking* in recent years. Office work at home, and VDUs, have their own hazards, coupled with the isolation of these workers.

Employers of home workers have duties under the various health and safety regulations but often homework is contracted out through a long chain and it is difficult to pinpoint responsibility for health and safety.

Safety representatives who work for organisations employing homeworkers can play an important role in ensuring that safety standards are met in the home environment and homeworkers have the same protection as other workers.

See next page for **Hazards of Homeworking** and **Action Checklist**

Some Relevant law

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999

The Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992

The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002

The Health and Safety (Display Screen) Regulations 1992

Some Further information

The National Group on Homeworking - Office 26, 30-38 Dock Street, Leeds LS10 1JF Tel 0113 2454273 Helpline 0800 174095. They produce a Health and Safety Fact Pack - free to their members.

HSE leaflet Homeworking INDG(G)226L - free

HSE leaflet Controlling health risks from rosin (colophony) based solder fluxes INDG249L - free

HSE leaflet Manual Handling in the textile industry IACL103 – free

HSE leaflet Working Safely with Solvents INDG273 - free

Hazards of Homework

Homeworkers can be exposed to a variety of hazards – here are some of the main ones:

- Lack of training in health and safety awareness
- Equipment not suitable for the job and/or for use at home.
- Faulty electrical equipment increasing the risk of electric shocks and fires.
- Solvents used in paints and glues can cause health problems- headaches, dermatitis, nausea, lung damage and, in some instances, brain damage. Some solvents can cause damage to unborn children.
- Colophony fumes - given off when homeworkers solder at home - can cause occupational asthma.
- Fine detailed work such as sewing can cause eyestrain.
- Cutting vegetables and food preparation can lead to cuts and burns.
- Isolation can be a problem for many homeworkers which can lead to stress and depression
- VDUs can cause RSI, eyestrain, back, shoulder and neckache and headaches

Action checklist

1. Does your employer employ homeworkers?
2. If so, ask to see risk assessments, including those for pregnant workers. Make sure these are acted upon.
3. Has the employer provided training in health and safety and use of equipment?
4. Has the worker been provided with suitable work equipment with guards if necessary?
5. Is electrical equipment inspected & maintained regularly?
6. Has suitable protective equipment eg eye protection, masks been provided?
7. Have COSHH assessments been done on chemicals sent to workers? If possible have chemicals been substituted with safer alternatives?
8. Are workers given instructions on the hazards of chemicals and their safe use?
9. Is extra lighting provided, eg angle poise lamps, to help reduce the risks of eyestrain?
10. Are workers given training in the safe use of knives and ovens?
11. Does the employer keep in regular contact with the worker?
12. Has the workstation been assessed?

Pregnancy Hazards

Chlorinated Hydrocarbons (Solvents), VDUs, stress and heavy repetitive work

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