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Loss prevention standards
Homeworking

Introduction

These are very challenging circumstances and businesses will be doing everything they can to keep operating to provide the services required and to keep their employees in employment. However, no one wants to see employees put at unnecessary risk or suffer long-term injuries as a result of a short-term situation.

Taking care of your employees' wellbeing is a key priority, as the situation around Coronavirus (COVID-19) and advice changes.

As we adjust to a different way of working, we need to be more mindful than ever about how we work with each other, and how we manage our employees.

Whether it's an emergency or in the course of day to day running of the operations, businesses should be undertaking assessments of the potential risks before implementing any change. Occasionally, circumstances mean that this may not be written down (a dynamic risk assessment) but in the majority of cases this assessment should be recorded – it may be required to provide a justification for your reasoning if anything goes wrong.

For some of your employees this will be a new experience. Finding themselves in a remote working situation for an extended period of time, at the same time as dealing with the uncertainty brought by Coronavirus may bring challenges.

There are key areas to consider during this period to enable safe and successful remote working:

- Working as a team
- Leading in uncertain times
- Wellbeing mental and physical
- Remote working
- Leading a virtual meeting
- Home insurance – working at home
- Cyber risk

Working as a Team

Managing employees remotely can seem daunting at first. See it as a new experience or a new skill learnt, there may be a few bumps in the road, yet remember this can happen in the work-place. The key is to embrace technology and new approaches as they will assist in allowing your business to work 'virtually' with success. Here are some examples for managers on manag-ing teams virtually:

- **Stay connected** with your teams through daily calls to discuss the days planned work, with weekly meetings to chat through on what is going well and where advice can be shared to overcome a challenge. Use video calls where possible, if everyone wants to, as it helps to see everyone rather than just hear a voice
- **Use collaborative online tools** to simplify communication. These systems will allow teams to engage in discussion, work jointly on documents and can also reduce emails
- **Don't always talk work,** have 'Anything but Work' (ABW) calls, the virtual coffee, water cooler chats

- **Communicate** with frequent and valuable conversations with the team and individuals. Schedule 1-1s and team meetings in advance to keep teams connected. Use this time to establish what work they are doing, how long it's taking them and if this is creating unrealistic demands
- **Trust each other,** working remotely gives everyone the opportunity to step up and take independent ownership over their tasks. It's a great time for everyone to embrace greater responsibility over their work and deadlines
- **Watch out for presenteeism,** don't fall into the trap of trying to always be available. Focus on delivering outcomes and outputs and take time throughout the day to have your lunch break and sign off from work when the day is done
- **Celebrate each other,** say thank you, acknowledge your teammates when they deliver exceptional performance. Recognise success individually and collectively

Keeping connected through social networking
Enable employees to connect with other colleagues using your organisation's social networking service. In addition to working as a team, employees can keep connected to colleagues in the business. Create a channel for a daily share where they can post a photo from their day on the company intranet; it might be of themselves, the view from their desk or the dog.

Below are some ways your organisation's social networking service can help:

Information:
- Ask questions when they don't know who they need to ask
- Find information and subject matter specialists who can help
- Share what's important, raise awareness, highlight issues, share their thinking

Conversations:
- Get involved in open discussions and projects they are passionate about, inside and outside of their day job
- Request or give feedback through polls or discussions

Community:
- Have fun and feel part of their workplace community
- Praise their colleagues for the great work they do
- Make connections with colleagues around the business

Measures to consider:
- Have you provided support and guidance to your employees?
- Have you provided support and guidance to your managers?
- Have you provided support and guidance to your managers on working virtually?
- Do you have an organisation's social networking service to help keep employees connected?

Leading in Uncertain Times

Adjusting to a different way of working, people need to be more thoughtful than ever about how they work with each other and how they lead their teams.

Research shows us that in times of uncertainty people need three key things from their leaders: stability, security, and social connection.

According to a recent Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) poll, 68% of people said the biggest challenge when working remotely was loss of connection to their colleagues, but the biggest factor that made a difference to this was the example set by the leader.

1. **Security:** People on the whole do not like uncertainty and the unknown, but what matters to each individual in these circumstances will differ. Whilst it's impossible to allay everyone's fears, managers can help people trust that they are in a safe place and that their organisation has their backs. Managers need to be open, giving as much clarity as possible, be in this together as people, and treat each other like adults.

What can you do to communicate clarity and help build that sense of security for your people?

2. **Stability:** There is much we can do to help people to feel a sense of stability, even when things are turbulent. Our way of life and standard routines have been shaken. We're creatures of habit—and creatures of anxiety when our habits get disturbed.

What can you do to help create that sense of stability and what can you encourage your team to do for themselves?

3. **Social connection:** Although we need to be physically distanced from each other it is more important than ever that we all need to create a sense of belonging and purpose. Without the ability to have a casual conversation or banter in the workplace, we can become distant and disengaged. There is a different level of effort needed from managers to make sure there is continued engagement and new connections.

What can you do to ensure you stay connected and that you stay connected with your teams?

Wellbeing

The wellbeing of your employees is critical to the success of an organisation. It could be argued that the wellbeing of employees should precede everything else, in the sense that if employees are not thriving at work, it makes it very difficult to ensure the organisation is functioning as effectively as possible.

Mental Wellbeing
During this period, it is important to provide support and guidance to your employees on mental wellbeing.

One of the most important things employees can do at times like this is to talk to people and share how they are feeling. Connect with colleagues and/or their manager (and managers must not forget to do this too!) and explain how changes, effects on their personal life, work allocated, or the situation is making them feel.

They may find their mood and feelings are being affected making them feel low, worried or having problems sleeping and are missing being outside with other people. Understandably, employees may find that social distancing can be boring or frustrating.

At times like these, it can be easy to fall into unhealthy routines. Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, drink enough water and try to avoid smoking, alcohol and drugs and keep windows open to let in fresh air, get some natural sunlight if possible, or get outside into the garden. Also spend time doing things they enjoy – this might include reading, cooking, other indoor hobbies or listening to the radio, watching TV programmes or catching up on box sets.

It's an old adage, but 'a problem shared is a problem halved', so work together to find ways to address issues. These ideas could be as unique as they are, because people are impacted differently.

Employees may feel the need for further support and your Employee Wellbeing Programme or Employee Assistance Programme is there to help.

Many businesses provide 'Apps' to their employees. Wellbeing Apps are received well by employees, and these can include:

- Meditation and mindfulness by exploring guided exercises, videos and more to help people get healthier and happier. There are hundreds of articles for any mind, any mood and any goal
- Emotional recognition where people can understand their emotions, how to regulate them and learn to differentiate between helpful and unhelpful thoughts

A lack of sleep has been shown to be bad for your health. Encourage employees to maintain their sleep routine as during sleep our bodies repair themselves. The impact of sleepless nights is more than just bad moods and a lack of focus, it can also put people at risk of serious medical conditions. Further guidance can be found at the HSE website and through your occupational health provider. Click here.

Physical Wellbeing
While we may be social distancing ourselves from others, and/or in self-isolation, we still need to maintain our physical wellbeing. You could do this in a number of ways, such as:

- You might not be able to go to your usual classes, gym or exercise activity, but don't stop all kinds of exercise, look for ideas of exercises that they can do at home on the Staying Active Health Ireland
- Do something different to get the heart rate going – it could be a skipping rope session, football kick-about or star jumps in the garden/back yard
- Go for a walk around the block whilst maintaining social distancing, stay more than 2 metres from others. Fresh air is still important
- Why not use YouTube or those old exercise DVDs to do a workout
- Remember the Wii Fit or Dance Mat, is it gathering dust in the back of a wardrobe somewhere? Worth getting it out and having a laugh as well as raising the heart rate
- Chair Yoga – important to support your posture if you're not working in your usual place/location/set up.

Looking out for your Team's Wellbeing

1. Really know my people
In uncertain times like these getting to know your team is essential. What are their concerns and challenges and most importantly what is most important for them right now?

2. Address fears and concerns
Whilst everything feels unstable, encourage the team to focus on what they can influence, no matter how small. This will give team members a focus and will stimulate empowerment over the things they can change

3. Check in/be there
It makes it vital to check in with them more often. When you do check in you need to sharpen your listening skills to try and read between the lines. Make it clear how and where to get help if they need it

4. Ask twice
When asking 'how are you', the response is often 'fine', almost as a greeting rather than saying how you actually feel. So, ask again – try a 'no really, how are you feeling, is everything OK, anything you want to share'. If someone does open up to you, depending on their issues you may have a number of tools that you can recommend to them, such as: Employee Wellbeing Programme, Employee Assistance Programme or Wellbeing Apps

5. Role model behaviours
Make sure you're role modelling the behaviours you want to see from your team, e.g. taking a lunch break, taking time for your mental wellbeing and being open about how you feel. Be approachable and encourage your team to ask questions

6. Be open
Develop an open mindset; encourage feedback, look at things from everyone's point of view and help them learn how to respond to input from other

Measures to consider:
- Have you signposted employees to your Wellbeing policy and support documents?
- Are your managers having daily and/or weekly calls with their teams?
- Have you provided guidance on mental and physical wellbeing?
- Are you sending internal communications regularly to your employees to keep them up to date with and your business? COVID-19
- Have you advised employees about how to access your Employee Wellbeing Programme or Employee Assistance Programme?

Remote Working

If employees do not normally work from home encourage them to establish a new working routine to replace their existing work routine. There is no hard and fast rule, the employee will establish their own routine. They will soon identify when is their most productive working time and must be conscious when to stop working to prevent impacting their wellbeing.

Even those who normally work from home have found in these changing times they need to be flexible to accommodate continuous change and challenges.

Measures for employees to consider:

- Maintain regular hours
- Establish a morning and end of day routine. For example, in the morning have breakfast then go for a walk or sit in the garden with a coffee before going to your desk and repeat in reverse at the end of the day. Create a habit that signals the close of the workday
- Write daily 'To Do' lists on a notepad or use post-it notes on the laptop. To get motivated start the day with a quick and easy task and then move on to a more difficult task, maybe one you have put off. Keeping a note of the work completed will be satisfying and enables employees to advise their manager of the work completed
- Keep connected to colleagues and customers. In fact, overcommunicate as this will help reduce the feeling of isolation and withdrawal from colleagues and the business
- Schedule breaks such as a coffee break and lunch. A break is needed to detach from work and then commence again with clarity and energy
- Above all remember do what works for you. Stay positive and even take advantage of the perks, laundry completed, prepare dinner on a coffee break, sitting in the garden enjoying the sunshine on a coffee break, participate in chair yoga, etc. and don't be hard on yourself

Working on laptops
For most people working from home, the equipment they will be using will be limited to display screen equipment (DSE). This shouldn't pose a significantly increased risk as long as it remains only temporary. It's advisable to signpost employees to your DSE procedures and ask employees to complete a basic homeworking assessment. However, circumstances should be monitored and if it looks like continuing into the longer term more rigorous assessments might be required.

Some employees may already be using specialist DSE equipment at work, others may feel they require it in order to work from home and this must be considered as part of the working from home preparations. If equipment is not available or too bulky to transport to or use in the home, can they consider other options to increase their safety/comfort?

For example, if an ergonomic keyboard and mouse was provided in the office, allow employees to take them home or post them to employees' homes or arrange for equipment to be issued from your provider to their home address.

We have provided **a sample Homeworking Assessment Checklist** below for you to use, but you should first check that it meets the likely circumstances of your homeworkers and amend it if it doesn't. A copy of the assessment should be kept for future reference.

Employee Homeworking checklist	Yes	No
My homeworking only involves typical office tasks?		
If my homeworking involves activities other than office tasks, these have been reviewed and assessed?		
I can put my laptop somewhere (Desk/table) that is comfortable to use?		
I have a chair that I can use with my laptop in comfort?		
My display screen equipment is new or has been PAT tested and is safe to use?		
I have a separate keyboard and mouse to use with my laptop?		
I have appropriate lighting that is free from glare?		
I have sufficient space around my work area to work comfortably?		
Leads and cables are placed so that they do not pose a trip hazard to me or others in the household?		
I know who to contact if I have problems with either with my computer software or hardware?		
I am able to take regular breaks away from my workstation (5 minutes in every hour is recommended)?		
I know how to report an accident at work if I have one, and to who I report it?		
The working area is comfortable? (Try to make sure you create a work area that is free from excessive noise and distraction, that has suitable lighting (free from glare) and where the heating / temperature and ventilation are reasonable)		
I take any pre-existing health issues into account and accommodate them in the way I work?		
I know who to speak to if I am experiencing any discomfort that I am not able to resolve myself?		
There are arrangements for me to maintain regular contact with my co-workers?		
Is there a smoke/fire alarm in the room where you work from?		
In the case of an emergency, Do you have a planned escape route?		
If there are any questions answered 'No' raise with your manager		
Additional comments/actions taken:		

Employee's name: **Signature:**

Date:

Manager's name: **Signature:**

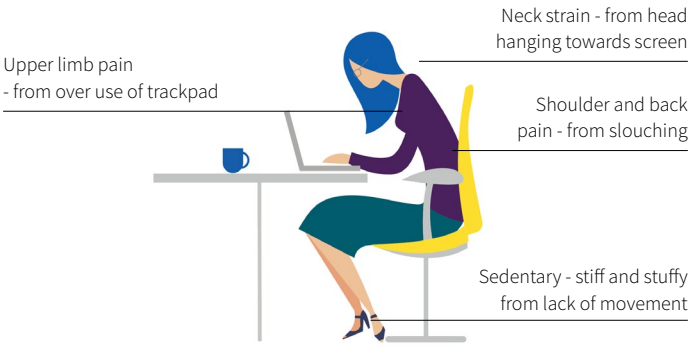
Date:

Good Posture



Do
Set yourself up at a desk, table and a docking station if available
Take regular breaks, whenever you choose to work
Use ergonomic equipment if you're inputting for long periods
Enjoy the portability of your laptop and explore different environments
When on a call use the opportunity to walk around

Bad Posture



Don't
Stay in one position for too long
Ignore what your body might be trying to tell you
Slouch, slump, or head-hang
Ensure you maintain normal working hours

Common posture mistakes and fixes; HSA YouTube click here and HSE guidance here

Whilst working from home there are opportunities to learn new skills:

- Improve communication skills – need to adopt different skills for talking to colleagues over digital media
- Improve technology skills – overcoming challenges with IT and learning about new applications
- Increased self-awareness and emotional intelligence – without non-verbal cues, need to look for alternative ways of working out if colleagues are stressed, excited, happy, etc.

Leading a Virtual Team

Establish virtual meeting principles with your team:

- Does every meeting need an agenda?
- How often do we meet and when?
- How do we hear the voices of everyone?

Create a safe environment:

- By creating a few ground rules on how we interact with one another such as not interrupting each other, accepting all ideas equally and not being judged, out of the box suggestions are encouraged and listened to

Be a brilliant virtual meeting host:

- Try and get familiar with the technology you are using
- Bring energy and purpose to your gatherings, be ready to be flexible and adapt to the needs of the participants
- Try and be the first in the room so you can meet and greet your participants
- Consider adjusting start times to allow for things like comfort breaks and give the host space to be prepared and ready to go

Keeping my participants engaged:

- Avoid the temptation to dive straight into business, a few moments of friendly chat before a meeting lightens the mood and strengthens the bonds of the group
- Embrace check ins and check outs. Encourage everyone to contribute from the get-go
- Listen out for the silence. Some characters are naturally more vocal and confident in these conditions than others. Invite contributions so everyone gets a say
- Consider catching up 1-1 with anyone who appears to be struggling to contribute and establish a way that works for them and you to maintain a sense of belonging

Working from home with children

If your employees are directly impacted by school closures and now face juggling their job and childcare, here is some guidance:

- Be realistic about what you can achieve. Don't try and be all things to all people; try to create a balance between looking after your children and meeting the demands of your job
- Communicate with your manager and colleagues regularly about what you can and can't do – discuss expectations, deadlines and ways of working
- Create a structure or activity planner for you and your kids including break times and lunch time and stick to it! Try to get outside during breaks
- If your children are old enough, agree a set time with them when you will be able to focus on your work. Be clear about what the children will be doing during this time
- If you have the option to share childcare with a partner or other adult, then agree how this will happen to the maximum benefit of everyone

If your colleagues are impacted by school closures:

- Be patient and supportive; if you've never juggled childcare and work, just know that it can be tough
- Understand that you may not always have your colleagues' undivided attention – so if you think they are distracted during a meeting, offer to call back later or follow up in writing
- Think about whether you can step in to take on any of the responsibilities your colleague would normally have
- Discuss with your colleagues whether there is a good time for them to be contacted or a preferred communication method
- Try to maintain a sense of humour. Children will not understand the complexities of what their parents and carers are doing at work and could interrupt meetings with inappropriate comments/noises

Cyber Risk

With normal daily lives, and normal business practices under pressure due to measures to slow down the spread of the virus, it has meant changing how we do things. This unfortunately has given cyber criminals an opportunity to take advantage of the situation, and a dramatic rise in cyber crime has been noticed.

Organisations are in a position where they have to have more remote workers. Cyber security experts have seen that attackers move quickly to launch phishing attacks around other threats or humanitarian disaster events, and COVID-19 has given them an opportunity to attack work and personal computers as well as home networks.

The current situation has seen unprecedented moves by all types and sizes of business in a very short space of time, to have the vast majority of staff working from home. This has put a considerable stress on infrastructure and support systems. Remind all staff to be aware of the increase in the potential for online attacks and to report any concerns to their IT Services/ Support Teams.

Checklist

A generic Homeworking Checklist is presented in Appendix 1 which can be tailored to your own organisation.

Sources and Useful Links

Some useful links to resources that you might need while homeworking:

HSA Guidance on Working from Home for Employers & Employees

HSA Home working Risk assessment/checklist

Health & Safety Authority - Home working on a temporary basis Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)

Return to Work Safely Protocol for Employers & workers

HSA Display Screen Equipment FAQ's

HSA Covid-19 Templates & Checklists

Citizen Information Your Money & Covid-19

Samaritans – is a registered charity aimed at providing emotional support to anyone in emotional distress, struggling to cope, or at risk of suicide throughout Ireland and the UK, often through a telephone helpline

World Health Organization

Staying Active during Covid-19 (Health Ireland)

Sports Ireland return to sport

Managing Fatigue during Covid-19 HSE

Additional Information

Relevant Aviva Loss Prevention Standards include:

Cyber Security, Homeworking and Coronavirus

Aviva Covid-19 Cyber Security Homeworking Guidance PDF

Please Note

This document contains general information and guidance and is not and should not be relied on as specific advice. The document may not cover every risk, exposure or hazard that may arise, and Aviva recommend that you obtain specific advice relevant to the circumstances. AVIVA accepts no responsibility or liability towards any person who may rely upon this document.

Employer & Employee Homeworking Checklists

Location:	
Date:	
Completed by (name and signature):	

	Homeworking	Yes	No	Comments
1	Have you provided employees with support and guidance on: • Working safely at home? • Adapting to home working arrangements? • Wellbeing? • Cyber risks? • Data protection? • Balancing work and childcare responsibilities? • Attending virtual meetings? • How to get support if needed?			
2	Have you provided laptop users with additional equipment such as a keyboard and mouse to assist in maintaining posture?			
3	Has the Wellbeing policy, guidance and tools been resent/signposted to employees?			
4	Has the Employee Wellbeing/Employee Assistance Programme contact details being issued to employees?			
5	Have managers been provided with guidance/information on: • Leading remotely? • Access to a manager's support network? • Signs of stress to look out for with their employees? • Guidance on coaching techniques and engaging their teams? • Leading virtual meetings? • Supporting flexibility to enable employees to balance work and home demands?			
6	Has an organisation social network platform been provided for employees?			
7	Are IT Support able to provide support and equipment to homeworkers?			
8	Have you confirmed the insurance cover for employees' homeworking provided under your Employers Liability and Public Liability insurance?			
9	Are regular communications being provided to employees about: • Changes in the organisation? • Homeworking tips? • Not working excessive hours? • Support available?			
10	Additional comments:			

Ref.	Hazards and risk factors	Response			Comments / Action to be taken by whom
		Yes	No	N/A	
1.0	**Working Environment**				
1.1	Is your work area quiet, undisturbed and suitable for the work to be undertaken?				
1.2	Is there sufficient space for your home working equipment?				
1.3	Do you have adequate heating & lighting in your work area?				
1.4	Are there any potential hazards, such as tripping hazards, trailing cables or hazardous furniture layouts?				
2.0	**Furniture**				
2.1	Do you have a desk with a sufficient work surface?				
2.2	Do you have a chair that allows you to achieve a comfortable seated posture?				
2.3	Are there adequate means of storing work equipment?				
3.0	**Electrical Safety**				
3.1	Have you visually inspected your home working equipment cables and chargers for damage?				
3.2	Do you agree to report any faulty electrical business equipment and not to use it until it has been repaired or replaced?				
4.0	**Safety and Security**				
4.1	Do you ensure sure that others (including family, children and pets) are not allowed unsupervised access to the area you work in? Failure to keep this area secure could result in a health and safety or security risk. Where this is not possible, for example using a dining area, ensure your equipment is secured each night.				
5.0	**Accident & Incident Reporting**				
5.1	Do you agree to report any accidents or incidents that occur to yourself, others, during the course of homeworking to your Manager without delay?				
6.0	**Fire Precautions**				
6.1	Is a working smoke alarm installed in your home and in your room?				
6.2	Do you have an emergency evacuation escape plan?				

Ref.	Hazards and risk factors	Response			Comments / Action to be taken by whom
		Yes	No	N/A	
7.0	**Health & Wellbeing**				
7.1	Do you have arrangements in place with your co-workers and or manager to ensure that you are in regular contact?				
7.2	Do you take regular breaks away from your work space? We would encourage staff to maintain regular coffee and lunch breaks as you would normally do if you were working in the office.				
8.0	**Health & Safety Information**				
8.1	If you require more information, please refer to the company safety statement or Health and Safety Authority website				

Manager's Agreement	
Following a discussion with the staff member, I am satisfied that the place of homework meets the required health and safety standards and thereby agree to the member of staff named below undertaking homeworking at the address stated.	
Manager's Name:	
Signature:	
Date:	

Homeworker's Agreement	
I have been advised of my responsibilities under the Company's Homeworking policy arrangement and declare that I will comply with these requirements at all times when homeworking. I am aware of my legal duty to care for the health and safety of myself, and any other persons who may come into contact with my workplace or work activities.	
Name of Homeworker:	
Signature:	
Date:	
Homeworking Address:	

Please Note

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B277.11.20