WSH Bulletin

16 April 2021, Ref: 2122003

Risk Assessment for Working from Home

With 2020 behind us, it is now undeniable that Working From Home (WFH) has become the new norm for many in the Singapore workforce.

There is a need to look at how we can protect ourselves when WFH. The first step to ensuring safety and health is to identify home hazards that can put us at risk.

The below checklist can help workers identify the hazards that may be present in the home work environment. It also comes with suggested risk controls (non-exhaustive). You may wish to use the checklist as a step-by-step guide for conducting a basic home risk assessment.

Fall Hazards

Slips, trips and falls is a possible accident type for those WFH. To address this, you will need to practise good housekeeping and clear your home workspace (and all routes leading to it) of physical obstructions like boxes, electrical cords, general clutter or loose rugs.

My home workspace and all routes leading to it:
- are free of obstructions.
- are kept dry (free from spills).
- do not have loose carpets/rugs/tiles and uneven flooring.
- have been provided with adequate lighting so that I can see where I'm going.

Ergonomic Hazards

As WFH involves spending many hours in your home workspace, you should make sure your desk and chair are safe for use and comfortable for long hours of work in order to avoid onset of musculoskeletal pain. Ergonomic chairs and height-adjustable desks are great options to consider. However, simple improvisations (e.g. using cushions to raise seat height, using books to raise monitor height) may be used to improve sitting ergonomics.

My home workspace:
- is equipped with a comfortable chair and desk.
- has been provided with adequate lighting for working.

For better ergonomics, I carry out the following:
- Adjusted my workstation such that my eyeline is level with the top of my laptop/monitor screen.
- Take regular screen breaks to rest my eyes at least 2-3 times every hour.
- Avoid sitting for too long by getting up to stretch or walk at least once every 2-3 hours.

Electrical Hazards

While electrical office equipment (e.g. mobile phones, laptops, printers, extension sockets) allow us to be productive and bring much convenience to our lives, they do pose electrical hazards which increase the risk of electrocution and fire. To reduce this risk, it is important that we use quality equipment and check that we do not overload our home's electric circuits.

My home electrical office equipment:

- carries a quality mark that indicates it has been tested to a specified safety standard (e.g. SAFETY Mark).
- has been visually checked to be in good working condition prior to use.
- is used only in a cool and dry environment protected from rain.

For electrical safety, I have checked that:

- my office equipment does not use electrical cords that are damaged or with defects.
- electrical power points and extension sockets are not overloaded.

Mechanical Hazards

Common office equipment (e.g. paper cutter/shredder, laminating machine, staplers, hole punchers) also bring risk to the home work environment as they perform a mechanical operation involving moving parts. Hand or finger injuries are possible as result of cuts, crushing or entanglement.

The common office equipment that I use at home:

- is used safely according to manufacturer's recommendations.
- is either designed to be inherently safe or has physical safeguards in place to protect hands/fingers from injury.

Environmental Hazards

The work environment (e.g. excessive noise or dust, exposure to chemicals, exposure to pathogens) can significantly affect our health.

Excessive noise or dust (e.g. arising from home renovation works or construction sites in the vicinity) can make WFH impossible or difficult. If working in an area where there is excessive or annoying noise, try using noise-cancelling earphones as a temporary solution. If you are working in an area with excessive dust in the air, close the windows and consider using an air purifier.

If you have recently painted your home, purchased new furniture or installed a new carpet, note that harmful volatile organic compounds (VOCs) may be emitted and it is best to fully ventilate your workspace for at least a few days prior to use.

My home workspace is:

- set up in a relatively quiet location in my home.
- well-ventilated.
- located away from where household chemicals are stored (e.g. bleach, disinfectant, window polish, drain cleaner, detergent, insecticide, paint).
- cleaned regularly to minimise exposure to dust, mould and pathogens.

Physical Health

We can be productive while WFH only if we remain fit and healthy. Always be conscious of your body's health signals, at and off work, and take steps to address them – whether these signals are due to a momentary state of poor health, fatigue, or chronic illness. Set aside time to care for your health so that you can be both safe and productive at work.

I stay fit and healthy by:

- going for regular health screening.
- maintaining my personal hygiene.
- staying active/exercising regularly.
- eating healthy.
- drinking more water instead of sugary drinks.
- taking rest breaks as necessary.
- getting enough sleep each night.
- not working when I'm unwell.
- taking my prescribed medication as per doctor's advice.

Mental Well-being

Our health encompasses both physical and mental well-being. While physical health reflects the biological condition of our bodies, mental well-being reflects how we are thriving in our lives through relationships, work, school and home. A healthy state of mental well-being is key to a happier, productive and healthier you. In contrast, poor mental well-being may cause physical health problems such as high blood pressure and musculoskeletal pains, and may lower your ability to pay attention to vital cues that can prevent an injury, such as a misstep, a wet puddle or a tripping object on the floor. Mental well-being and physical health are therefore inter-related.

I take care of my mental well-being by:

- setting up my own work-rest schedule to meet both work and personal needs.
- stopping at midday for a regular lunch break.
- setting a "switch off" time at the end of each working day.
- participating in mental well-being programmes (e.g. stress management workshop)
- staying connected with colleagues.
- speaking to my supervisor or counsellor when I feel overwhelmed. I can do so by speaking with my company's Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) provider or providers listed in Annex A of the Tripartite Advisory on Mental Well-being at Workplaces*.

* The Ministry of Manpower (MOM), National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) and the Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF) have jointly released the Tripartite Advisory on Mental Well-being at Workplaces. Click here to find out more measures that employers can adopt to support their employees' mental well-being, and resources that employers, employees and self-employed persons can tap on.

Please note that the recommendations provided are not exhaustive and they are meant for enhancing worker safety and health. The information and recommendations provided are not to be construed as implying any liability on any party nor should it be taken to encapsulate all the responsibilities and obligations under the law.

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