

This Policy document sets out the requirements of the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 and the various matters related to home-working which are dealt with under various regulations made under the Act.

1 The Synod recognises that in order to help staff achieve a satisfactory work-life balance, it is necessary to consider the widest range of working practices possible. Home-working may not be suitable for every type of job, but it may be a viable alternative for some. The pace and change in communications technology indicates that in future these working practices may become more commonplace.

2 If home-working is to be effective and efficient it is necessary to set out in a Policy Statement specific guidance for line managers and staff which is clear, concise and leaves no room for ambiguity.

3 Responsibilities

Members of The North Western Synod have overall and final responsibility for health, safety and welfare including the setting of its policy. They will ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, that they are kept regularly apprised of all relevant matters by the Synod Executive Committee. See later in the report (paragraph 28) for the recommendations regarding how this may be achieved.

4 The Health and Safety at Work, etc Act 1974

The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 (HSWA) places **duties** on employers, self-employed people and employees. Under the HSWA, employers have a **DUTY** to protect the health, safety and welfare of their employees, including home-workers.

5 Although Home-workers and Tele-workers may not be specifically named in a piece of legislation, that does not mean they are specifically excluded and therefore, for the purposes of this policy, they should be included because they are employees.

6 Most of the Regulations made under the Act apply to home-workers as well as to employees working in the employer's workplace. These regulations include for example the following:

- The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (MHSWR);
- The Display Screen Equipment Regulations 1992;
- The Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992;
- The Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (PUWER);
- The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health regulations 2002 (as amended) (COSHH).

7 Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, which is a key piece of legislation, employers are required to complete a risk assessment of the work activities carried out by home-workers.

8 Completing a risk assessment involves identifying the hazards relating to the home-workers' work activities and deciding whether enough steps have been taken to prevent harm to them or to anyone else who may be affected by their work. A risk is the chance, great or small, that someone will be harmed by a hazard. A hazard is anything that may cause harm.

9 There are five steps that employers need to take to make sure a proper Risk Assessment is done. They must:

- identify any hazard;
- decide who might be harmed and how;
- assess the risks and take appropriate action to remove them or reduce them as far as possible;
- record the findings;

- check the risks from time to time and take further action if needed.

10 **Identify the hazard** – It is the employers' **duty** to look at what may cause harm to their home-workers, or other people, as a result of work being done in the home. **It may be necessary for employers to visit their home-workers to carry a risk assessment**, although home-workers can also help in identifying the hazards for their employer. Small hazards should not be ignored as they may result in harm; for example, keeping potentially harmful substances out of children's reach.

11 **Decide who might be harmed and how** – Employers must look at who may be affected by the work done at home and how they may be affected; this may include the home-workers, and members of the household, including children or visitors.

12 **Assess the risk and take appropriate action** – If employers come across a hazard that may be a risk to the home-worker or anyone's health or safety in the home, they need to decide what steps have to be taken to eliminate, or reduce, those risks as far as possible. What needs to be done depends on whether the hazard is low risk or high risk. Employers can determine this by looking at what type of harm or injury may arise and how often it may happen. For example, the greater the risk of an accident from loose trailing wires if children are in the home.

13 Employers may be able to remove the hazard altogether or take steps to lower the risk to an acceptable level. For example, in the case of loose wires from work equipment, they could be tucked away under a desk or table, or secured neatly round the furniture out of the way.

14 **Record the findings** – Employers who have five or more employees, including home-workers, are required by law to record the significant findings from a risk assessment. They need to record what steps have been taken to mitigate the hazard and tell the home-worker, or anyone else affected by the work being done, about the findings.

15 **Check the risks from time to time and take further action if necessary** – It is important for employers to check the risk assessment from time to time, especially if there is a change in working procedures. The assessment needs to take account of any new hazards that may cause harm to the health and safety of the home-worker, or other people affected by the change in the working conditions.

16 **Using work equipment at home** - Employers who provide home-workers with equipment to carry out their work have a **DUTY** to ensure that:

- the equipment is correct for the job that is being done;
- proper information and training is given on how to use the equipment, so that the job can be done properly and safely;
- the equipment being used is checked regularly and kept in a condition that does not cause harm to the home-worker or others;
- people who are testing the equipment or training the home-worker are properly trained themselves, so they provide the correct information and training.

17 **Using electrical equipment for work at home** - If home-workers use electrical equipment provided by the employer as part of their work, the employer is responsible for its maintenance. Employers are only responsible for the equipment they supply. Electrical sockets and other parts of the home-workers' domestic electrical system are their own responsibility.

18 It would be prudent for an employer to ensure certain checks are made, if necessary by an electrician. It is important that:

- the electrical equipment provided for use is safe;
- the plug sockets are not damaged;
- the plug sockets are correctly wired;

- the outer covering of the cable or wire is gripped where it enters the plug or the equipment;
- the outer covering of leads, plugs and sockets are not damaged
- there are no trailing wires.

19 **Working with VDUs** - The use of VDUs is covered by the Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulation 1992 as amended by the Health and Safety (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2002. Employers have a **DUTY** to make sure the display screen equipment used by home-workers is safe and does not affect the user's health.

20 When working with VDUs is it important for home-workers to adjust their work station to a comfortable position and take breaks from work. This will help to reduce tiredness, prevent pain in the back, hands, wrist, shoulders and neck. VDUs need to be placed in a position where lighting will not cause reflections or glare on the screen.

21 It is important that home-workers ensure they view the screen comfortably and avoid eye strain. Home-workers can request an eye examination and test from their employer. If they are in doubt about any eye condition they should consult an optician or consult their GP.

22 **Handling of Loads and Hazardous Material** - The Health and Safety Act also places a DUTY on employers in the handling of loads, lifting, pulling, pushing, twisting, stooping and repetitive handling. There is a requirement to be equally concerned about the use of hazardous material which must be handled by employees as part of their work. Employers must ensure the equipment is correct for the job that is being done, the equipment is checked regularly and that the employee has undergone the proper training. I have not elucidated on this aspect since it is unlikely any employee will deal with such items of equipment in their present roles.

23 **New and Expectant Mothers** - It is also necessary to be mindful of the requirements of the law in relation to New and Expectant Mothers. New legislation required to implement the European Directive on Pregnant Workers was introduced in 1994 and is covered by the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. Issues of safety, breast feeding which is applicable to pregnant women or those having given birth within the previous six months and are working at home, apply equally to anyone working in the Synod office.