



## Working from Home - Advice for Academic Staff

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### Introduction

This advice outlines information for academic staff who may undertake University work from a home-based worksite.

Occupational health and safety requirements extend beyond the employer's place of business and include any place where the employer requires or permits an employee to perform work, including the employee's own home. Academics working from home must ensure the area where they perform work at home does not put themselves or others at risk of injury.

The following conditions are well documented in resulting in death and/or serious injury in home work environments.

### Electrical

Electrical extension cords on floors can be trip hazards. They are also easily damaged by chair castors, and can then become an electrical hazard. The use of electric radiators in the confines of home office workstations can be hazardous and are well known as the cause of fires.

Overloading power boards and using double adaptors and modified plugs can lead to electrocution or fire. Frayed power cords also increase the risks of these hazards. Only leads in as-new condition should be used. It is prudent to provide additional outlets with appropriate circuit protection where power boards are frequently used or could be overloaded.

Residual Current Devices (RCDs) (commonly known as Safety Switches) should be installed in the power circuit of your home. These are mandatory in workplaces and new home construction. They significantly reduce the risk of electric shock or electrocution.

### Workstation arrangement

Notebook and laptop computers are commonly used by academics. Laptop computers were designed for short term or mobile use. The portable nature of the laptop and notebook results in their use in a wide variety of situations and settings that may not be ergonomically sound and result in a poor posture being adopted by the user. This can result in the user's arms being held too high or the neck bent to view the screen. If this position is adopted frequently or for prolonged periods, muscle soreness and soft tissue injury may result.

If the screen is tilted upwards to reduce the need to bend the neck to view the screen, reflections can be a problem for the user. Many users fall into the trap of spending a large proportion of their time looking down at the keys to control their keying accuracy. This, combined with the lack of capacity to place the screen at eye level, can contribute to neck discomfort and possibly longer term problems.

The adverse effects of working on a laptop may be prevented by:

- docking the laptop or notebook into a desktop computer at an adjustable workstation
- connecting into existing computing equipment, such as the screen and keyboard
- transferring information from the notebook to the desktop computer for more extensive periods of work
- utilising external keyboard and mouse if used for extended periods of time
- the installation of the WorkPace Ergonomic Software program



- being aware of the importance of posture when using the notebook and frequently rotating between the laptop and other activities.

### **WorkPace Ergonomic Software**

It is recommended that the WorkPace Ergonomic Software program is installed onto academic staff members' desktop and notebook computers. WorkPace is a software program designed to reduce the risk of musculo-skeletal injuries to staff when working at computer based workstations. Advice on how WorkPace can be installed onto desktop and notebook computers can be obtained from your local UniSA IT support person or by contacting OHSW&IM Services (8302 1635).

### **Lighting**

Good lighting in home workplaces is essential to enable people to see clearly and safely perform their work.

Key factors to consider when determining the adequacy of lighting are:

- the amount of light in an area
- the number, type and position of the light sources
- the tasks or activities performed, how often and for how long these are performed.

In general, good lighting enables people to easily view their work and environment without the need to strain their eyes.

### **Other potential hazards in the home office**

Consideration is to be given to the type of hazard present in your home office, eg:

- Mechanical hazards, such as filing cabinets can tend to tip when heavily laden top drawers are open.
- Physical hazards, such as glare or reflections from VDU screens; poorly designed chairs that do not provide the user with adequate back support; poorly designed jobs and tasks that demand prolonged work in a fixed posture.
- Hazards which cause slips, trips and falls. Keep your home work area tidy and clear of obstructions or objects lying around that may cause a person to trip.
- Clean spills immediately and provide appropriate storage cupboards/containers; arrange furniture in order to avoid trailing electrical cables; ensure mats are securely fixed and do not have curling edges; and try to avoid changes of floor level.

### **Identifying other potential hazards**

Working from home may present other hazards that are unique to your home office or work environment. Academics should take reasonable steps to identify other potential hazards with their particular home office or work environment.

Further information and advice can be sought from OHSW&IM Services

### **Documents/Forms**

[OHSW 29 - OHSW & Ergonomic Self-Assessment – Working From Home Environment Checklist](#)

### **References**

[University OHSW&IM Policy](#)

[University OHSW Strategic Plan 2009 - 2011 \(PDF 158kb\)](#)

[University Injury Management Strategic Plan 2009 - 2011 \(PDF 85kb\)](#)

[OHSW & Injury Management System \(PDF 128kb\)](#)

[Occupational Health, Safety & Welfare Regulations, 2010](#)

[Performance Management Policy and Guideline](#)