Staying safe when you work remotely

Queensland **Council of Unions**

Working from home and legal obligations

Many people are working from home for the first time as a result of COVID-19. This might be a different experience for those workers, but it is important to understand that the normal rules concerning workplace health and safety and workers' compensation still apply.

The person conducting the business or undertaking (PCBU) or in most cases, the employer, must still provide a safe system of work. Workers still have their normal obligations to follow reasonable instructions, and to cooperate and take reasonable care for their own health and safety.

Mental Health

A simple way to maintain a healthy attitude is stay connected with your workplace. A feeling of connection with your workplace will also help maintain social factors that you would normally receive in a workplace and keep matters you are dealing with relevant and in perspective. Use phone; email; online video conferencing, if you have the ability to do that; and instant messaging platforms.

Supervisors should be available to provide support to the same extent as in normal working situations. If you feel that you or any member of your team are not coping, tell your supervisor. Regular meetings with your supervisor should continue.

As far as possible, it will also be important to ensure that you have a dedicated "office" at home and clear boundaries with your family or house mates to ensure that you are able to continue working at an acceptable level. Removing or minimising distractions will maintain the quality of your work and you will cope better.

Communication

An agreed means of communication between you, your supervisor and your work mates will assist with maintaining a good level of connectivity. Working from home will mean that you will be physically isolated from your workmates. The "water cooler" conversations will no longer take place, and this may deprive many of their usual social interaction. It is important to maintain continued and coordinated efforts to ensure normal organisational communication continues.

Your employer should be communicating what is happening at the

Legal Obligations

The person conducting the business or undertaking (PCBU) or in most cases, the employer, must still provide a safe system of work.

Staying healthy

A simple way to maintain a mentally healthy attitude is stay connected with your workplace.

Communication

Agree on a method of communication and checking in with your supervisor and. your workmates.

Work Practices

Develop a routine that incorporates exercise and usual breaks.

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organisational level. You should be able to have a way to find out about any changes that might affect you. You should also inform your supervisor if your personal circumstances have changed in a way relevant to your work.

Work Practices

Develop a routine that incorporates exercise and usual breaks. The Comcare checklist has some ergonomic suggestions including keeping your wrists upright while typing and ensuring sitting posture is upright or slightly reclined.

The link to Workplace Health and Safety Queensland (WHSQ) about health and safety for telecommuters below sets out a range of work health and safety considerations that might also be considered. It is still important to take work health and safety seriously even when working from home. Give consideration to matters such as trip hazards; appropriate lighting and noise levels; and electrical safety.

If you're used to having meetings, continue to do so through the technology that is available. As previously mentioned regarding mental health above, where possible setting up your workstation away from the rest of household and establishing boundaries around your work hours will be advantageous to ensure both your level of productivity and mental health.

Workers' Compensation

Workers' compensation will apply to work from home in a general sense. The same criteria for a claim to be recognised will also apply to work from home, such as employment needing to be a significant contributing factor to an injury before a claim is accepted. WorkCover Queensland advises that every claim will need to be assessed on its merits.

Recess breaks should also be covered by workers' compensation.

Checklist

The pace of the transition to work from home for many means that there may not have been time to properly assess your home for risks as a workplace. In order to ensure that your home as a workplace is as safe as possible it might be worthwhile to consider a checklist. There are a range of factors to consider such as, environmental issues, the set-up of equipment, how to communicate with your workplace, and your own mental health. The following checklist was developed by Comcare and may be useful to assist with improving safety while working from home:

https://www.comcare.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/276948/Working_from_home_checklist_20032020.pdf

Links to more info

The following link is to WHSQ about Health and safety for telecommuters (workers working from home):

https://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au/laws-and-compliance/workplace-health-and-safety-laws/specific-obligations/health-safety-telecommuters

The following link is to Safe Work Australia about Coronavirus (COVID-19): Advice for Employers and there is a heading for Working from home safely on that site.

https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-employers

The following link is an article from the Harvard Business Review that answers questions raised by managers in relation to working from home:

https://hbr.org/2020/03/15-questions-about-remote-work-answered

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