



UNDERSTANDING SAFETY HOME WORKING AND DISPLAY SCREEN EQUIPMENT (DSE)

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Understanding Safety: Home working and Display Screen Equipment (DSE)

In these turbulent times, all of us have had to adjust to dealing with the COVID-19 virus and taking steps to try to avoid exposure to it to the extent possible. One of the most common approaches has been the move by businesses to require workers to work from home. Whilst working from home has been a relatively well-known approach to date most commonly seen with small office-home office (SOHO) arrangements, it has been in the context of a normal societal environment without the complications of a world-wide pandemic. Covid-19 has changed all of that, hopefully temporarily but the additional complications of not having proper facilities in one's home, having children who are not at school and not having the right ergonomic environment to comfortably work in for a normal working day have made life complicated for many. In this article we will look at current legal requirements and also for arrangements for display screen equipment as they apply in current the home environment.

The legal framework

The legal framework that requires an employer to have a safe place of work is the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005, General Duties of Employers in section 8, including "...managing and conducting work activities in such a way as to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable,

the safety, health and welfare at work of his or her employees;"¹

More specifically, the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007 as amended covers display screen equipment in Chapter 5 of Part 2 – Display Screen Equipment.² Schedule 4 of these regulations also provides the minimum requirements for all display screen equipment to be taken into consideration during a DSE assessment.

In addition, the Health and Safety Authority have also prepared a more accessible guidance document entitled Guide to the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007 - Chapter 5 of Part 2: Display Screen Equipment which is available as a free pdf download from the HSA website.³

To whom do these regulations apply to?

DSE regulations cover employees who are required to work with video display units (VDU's) for a significant part of their working day and more specifically: if the employee has no choice but to use the VDU to carry out her/his work, if the employee normally uses the VDU for continuous

1. Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005, General Duties of Employers, Section 8(2)(a)

2. Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007, Chapter 5 in Part 2 – Display Screen Equipment

3. https://www.hsa.ie/eng/Publications_and_Forms/Publications/General_Application_Regulations/Display_Screen.pdf





periods of more than one hour and if the VDU is generally used by the employee on a daily basis. Of course, the term VDU is deceptive; you cannot just work with a screen so the term workstation applies here and is defined as “...an assembly comprising display screen equipment, which may be provided with a keyboard or input device or software, ...and includes—

- (a) a work chair and work desk or work surface,
- (b) any optional accessories and peripherals, and
- (c) the immediate work environment of the display screen equipment.”⁴

Whilst the definition of DSE is quite broad, there are specific types of work equipment which do not come under the DSE regulations. These include: drivers’ cabs or control cabs for vehicles or machinery, computer systems on board a means of transport, computer systems mainly intended for public use, portable display screen equipment not in prolonged use....”

It is worth noting here that laptops are not covered under these regulations because “...the keyboard shall be tiltable and separate from the screen so as to allow the user to find a comfortable working position which avoids fatigue in the arms or hands”.⁵

4. Ibid.

5. Guide to the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007 - Chapter 5 of Part 2: Display Screen Equipment, p7

Employer considerations

Of course, for many people in these unsettling times, laptops may be the only available immediate alternative for home working as their computer workstations are in their offices. With locked offices, closed shops and travel restrictions in place, accessing a properly assessed workstation may be very difficult or even impossible. However, where it is feasible to do so and for those required to use a laptop as their principle workstation, employers providing a separate keyboard and monitor can make a significant difference in the short term.

Whether the work at home solution is temporary or permanent, other issues that employers need to consider include a review process to ensure that:

- Working from home does not create a stressful work environment such as lone working.
- Stay in touch with your employees and communicate with them on developments, latest advice and plans for working for the short and medium terms.
- Working hours are managed, breaks are taken and rest period are catered for and that any physical stresses such as aches and pains are reported and the issues resolved.

The requirements for DSE can be very difficult for an employer to meet in the Covid-19 environment,

so whatever can be achieved in the short term should be thought of as only temporary. Where workers have been reassigned from offices to home working on a permanent basis, the full breath of the regulations will apply; namely how to undertake a DSE assessment, provide suitable workstation equipment and information on controlling that environment.

Employee considerations

For employees, there are some points that should also be considered to gain some control over the home working environment and to try working in these Covid times more acceptable. Points to consider include:

- Communicate – Use Zoom, Skype and similar video-call apps to interact with friends, family and work colleagues to avoid a feeling of social and work isolation. This is especially important if you are struggling to cope with this radical change in your work-life – ask for help if you need it.
- Structure – Try to assign a dedicated workspace and organise your ‘workstation’ like it’s an office space, but clear it away at the end of the day too.
- Routine – Set regular working hours, breaks and time off for eating as you would in an office. If you can get away from the home office for a time such as out to the garden, so much the better. Once the working day is completed, disconnect from the office and resume your home routine.



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