



Home based work

Work life balance fact sheet 8

What is home based work?

Home based work (also known as teleworking or telecommuting) is an employment arrangement in which employees work from home on a full time, part time, temporary or permanent basis.

Employees working at home usually rely on technology to enable them to perform their work, however this is not an essential element.

The provision of home based work is not a legislative requirement in Western Australia and the decision generally rests with the employer.

Benefits of home based work

Home based work can have significant benefits for organisations, employees and for the community. These include:

- improved attraction and retention of key staff;
- more flexibility and better work life balance for employees;
- reduced absenteeism;
- greater job satisfaction;
- increased trust between employers and employees;
- reduced office space and car parking costs;
- reduced travelling expenses (fuel, wear and tear on vehicle, fares) and environmental costs; and
- the organisation being recognized as a good corporate citizen.

A home based work example

Georgia is a human resource manager who works from home one day per week. An occupational safety and health assessment has been conducted on her home workstation and her computer is connected remotely to the organisation's network. Georgia uses her home based work day as time when she can concentrate on large or detailed projects without interruption, but remains contactable by mobile phone if necessary.

Suitability for home based work

Definable tasks which involve minimal face-to-face contact or are time specific are most suitable for being done at home. These may include:

- research;
- computer design and programming;
- projects; and
- policy writing, report writing and planning.

Employees who have the capacity to work autonomously and do not require close supervision or constant interaction with other staff are particularly suited to home based work.

A suitable working environment is essential for home based work. A home based work site must be free from risk and occupational hazards, clean, quiet, separated from home activities and secure.

Security

Work equipment and intellectual property can be safeguarded through the following security measures:

- authorisation and security clearance of home based employees;
- general physical security of employees homes;
- provision of secure containers;
- arrangements for the transportation and disposal of official documents and papers;
- directives for appropriate use of email and internet use;
- protection of home computers and their links;
- guidelines on access of family and friends to work materials;
- the appointment of an employer security supervisor; and
- employees' obligations to report security incidents.

Occupational safety and health

Under the *Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984*, all Western Australian employers must provide a place of work that is, as far as is practical, free from hazards. As the home based worksite is an extension of the workplace, the same employer obligations apply.

To minimize the risks associated with home based work, an employer could refer to OSH checklists on the WorkSafe web site at www.worksafe.wa.gov.au or arrange for an OSH consultant to visit the home worksite.

Further information on the management of safety and health issues relevant to the type of work being performed is available at www.worksafe.wa.gov.au or contact WorkSafe on 1300 307 877.

Workers compensation

Under the Workers' Compensation Acts, employees working from home under the direction of employers generally enjoy the same workers compensation benefits as employees working at the "head office".

Employers wishing to find out more about the workers' compensation implications of home based work should contact either WorkCover on 1300 794 744 or their workers compensation insurance provider.

Expenses and Insurance (non-OSH)

The home based worksite needs to be equipped with essential tools for the employee to perform the job effectively. Employers should consider the expenses and insurance liability for such equipment. Possible considerations might include:

- actual technology needed;
- insurance of work equipment;
- IT help for employees using their own equipment;
- taxation issues regarding deductibility and fringe benefits tax; and
- reimbursement of expenses.

Approval process

Requests for home based work need to be dealt with consistently, fairly and quickly. It is important to develop and communicate a clear and open approval process, including the criteria which will be used to determine the suitability and practicality of home based work proposals.

Managers should consider all requests and examine ways in which the home base work could be accommodated. Being creative and flexible is important.

Home based work agreements

A written agreement covering home based work will enable employers to effectively implement and manage this type of work arrangement. The agreement could include:

- duration of the arrangement;
 - location of home based work;
 - days and hours of work at both sites;
 - performance and training requirements;
 - existing and required equipment;
 - maintenance and insurance arrangements;
 - security and method of communicating information;
 - reasons and processes for terminating/ changing the home based work arrangement;
 - occupational safety and health requirements; and
 - review procedures.
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Communication

Open communication is essential for any home based work arrangement. Poor communication can result in home base employees feeling isolated and dissatisfied. It is the employer's responsibility to provide the employee with relevant work information. This can be conveyed in person or via newsletter, email, telephone or teleconferencing.

Supervision

Allowing employees to work away from the normal office without direct supervision complicates supervision and performance assessment. Control procedures may have to be built into the work arrangement to ensure that work performance and quality supervision do not suffer.

Review

Managers and employees should regularly review home based working arrangements at an agreed time. The review mechanism should be included in the home based work agreement.

Equity in training and career development

Employees undertaking home based work must be seen as part of the regular workforce and have access to training, development and promotional opportunities. Home based employees should be seen as valuable contributors and provided with work that is meaningful and satisfying.

Checklist for home based work

- Consider suitability for home based work arrangement (employees, duties, work site)
- Assess expenses and cost effectiveness
- Consider taxation requirements
- Establish security measures for equipment and documentation
- Consider insurance liability for home based equipment
- Consider occupational safety and health requirements
- Consider workers compensation regulations
- Develop performance control measures
- Develop a procedure for review
- Create written agreement or equivalent

Where to go for more information

Find out more about work life balance strategies from the Department of Commerce worklife website at www.worklife.wa.gov.au