

OPERATIONAL INSTRUCTION

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The Telecommuting Guideline has been developed in response to the HDWA policy, Flexible Work Practices (OP 0830/96). These Guidelines should be utilised in conjunction with the policy statement.

It must be stressed, that when considering telecommuting, consideration of many aspects is required. Close liaison with the Occupational and Environmental Health Unit is of paramount importance.

The enclosed Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Checklist is that only. This checklist is not the final or only OSH requirement for telecommuting.

Further information concerning management and employees responsibility towards Occupational Safety and Health needs to be sought.

John Kirwan
GENERAL MANAGER
HEALTH WORKFORCE REFORM

NO LONGER APPLICABLE



FLEXIBLE WORK PRACTICES
TELECOMMUTING (WORKING FROM HOME)

To be utilised in conjunction with the HDWA Policy Statement - Flexible Work Practices (OP 0830/96)



HEALTH WORKFORCE REFORM DIVISION
HEALTH DEPARTMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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This document can be made available in alternative formats.

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FLEXIBLE WORK PRACTICES

The Health Department of Western Australia (HDWA) has issued a Policy Statement, titled "Flexible Work Practices" (Refer to Operational Instruction OP 0830/96).

Please refer to the above-mentioned Policy document when considering flexible work practices or when utilising these guidelines.

FLEXIBLE WORK PRACTICES AVAILABLE

Part-time work, telecommuting, flexible shift work, variable year employment, extended shifts, varying flexible working hours and career break schemes are options open to organisations to achieve labour flexibility, and at the same time, to respond positively to the needs of their workers.

Fundamental to their success has been a preparedness to change the corporate culture and adopt new and progressive management styles which focus not on process but on outcome.

TELECOMMUTING

Telecommuting or 'working from home' is a relatively new concept on the Australian scene, and it is receiving growing interest. It may be defined as a work arrangement in which employees regularly work from home or from a remote site for part of their usual week in lieu of working in the office.

It should be noted, 'Telecommuting' is working *from* home, not working *at* home, as it is commonly confused with. The distinction needs to be recognised.

'Ad hoc' arrangements when employees take work home, is not telecommuting.

BENEFITS OF TELECOMMUTING

Flexible work practices which are introduced equitably and in response to the needs of both employer and employees have the potential to offer a number of benefits.

Studies have demonstrated these benefits:

EMPLOYER

Retained skilled, experienced and valued staff

Productivity and quality of work has improved

Telecommuting offers reduced office expenses and accommodation costs

Sick leave is reduced

EMPLOYEE

Freedom and flexibility offered through the arrangement - increased job satisfaction

Lower (or no) transport costs

More in control of work environment

Less distractions

CHARACTERISTICS OF TELECOMMUTING

Available to all employees where the following occurs:

- Tasks are discrete and require minimal contact with other officers within the organisation
- The work can be done with minimal supervision
- Equipment is readily available for an employee to safely undertake work at home
- Work to be outcome based with clear achievable objectives and performance indicators
- Child care arrangements are made for work hours
- Ideally, the employee will share part of the time at the home office and the balance of hours at the base office

CONSULTATION PROCESS

WORKING FROM HOME AGREEMENT

Consultation and drafting of an agreement between the interested employee and the employer, should cover these specified areas:

- The effect or possible contravention of the Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA), Work Place Agreement (WPA) or industrial award provision
- Advice to the employer's insurer
- Establish what/whether duties are suitable for work from home
- Establish what, if any, office equipment is required
- The requirement for the workplace to have a First Aid kit
- Establish that the employee has the information and training necessary to do the work (ie reduced supervision)
- Establish agreed hours of work, recess breaks and communication procedures
- Establish the way in which performance will be monitored
- Recognition of the isolation of the home office (to limit disruption/interruptions)
- Discussion on other Occupational Safety and Health related aspects (refer to Checklist overleaf)

OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH (OSH) CHECKLIST

(FOR MANAGERS AND EMPLOYEES CONTEMPLATING OR CURRENTLY UNDERTAKING WORK FROM HOME)

The employer has a 'duty of care' under the Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984, to provide and maintain a safe working environment in which all employees are, as far as practicable, not exposed to hazards.

Compliance with this requirement necessitates attention to a wide range of safety and health matters as outlined below:

- Which tasks can be undertaken safely from home? Approved work tasks should be documented and safe working procedures should be defined (ie rest breaks, alternative duties to prevent occupational overuse injuries).
- Who is to provide and maintain office equipment (ie desk, chair, computer) and does the proposed equipment comply with safety standards?
- Is the home working environment appropriate with respect to lighting provision, number and location of power points (prevent overloading and trip hazards), working surfaces, adequate storage space, suitable ventilation? Is a smoke detector and/or earth leakage circuit breaker installed?
- Are access and egress routes to and from the home office in a safe condition and can they be appropriately maintained?
- Is the home office area (as near as practicable) clearly defined? If applicable, can it be kept separate from the general home environment?
- Have procedures been established for:

⇒ routine safety inspections and accident investigations to be conducted (on arrangement),

⇒ promptly reporting hazards which may arise in the home workplace. **(Employees have a duty to report hazards under State safety and health legislation).**

⇒ promptly reporting work related accidents, injuries and diseases, and completing the necessary Workers' Compensation documents,

⇒ determining who (clients and colleagues) should have access to the home office?

⇒ emergency communications and maintaining regular contact with the main office (Occupational Safety & Health Regulations - October 1996)

- Does the employee have appropriate OS & H information and training to undertake the work tasks safely?
- Is public liability insurance available to cover accidents involving non-workers at the home office, and will domestic insurance provisions be affected if the employee commences working from home?

The employer/manager should discuss all of these points with the employee prior to the commencement of telecommuting. Occupational Safety & Health need to be clearly defined. Ensure that such matters are documented, agreed to and signed by both parties prior to the commencement of any working from home arrangement.

If you have any OS & H 'Telecommuting' concerns, contact the HDWA Occupational and Environmental Health Unit.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Ms Penny Brown, Workforce Planning & Development, HDWA
- Ms Carolyn Smith, Workforce Planning & Development, HDWA
- Ms Sylvia Griffiths, HDWA Occupational & Environmental Health Unit

REFERENCE MATERIAL USED

- FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS IN THE WA PUBLIC SECTOR - OUTSIDE THE SQUARE, Ms Helen Maddocks, The Office of Equal Employment Opportunity, November 1994
- IMPLEMENTING FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS - A Resource Kit, The Office of Equal Employment Opportunity, November 1995
- FLEXIBLE WORK PRACTICES - Memorandum No. 95 - 40, Premier of New South Wales, Australia, Public Employment Office, 17 October 1995

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