

Health and Safety of Remote Workers

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The prevalence of distributed workforces presents a challenge to managers who are responsible for promoting healthy and safe practices among their employees. Management needs to make sure their remote workers have access to the same resources as employees who work onsite.

Even if employees work from home, they need to abide by the same policies and procedures as in-house workers. A remote workforce offers a number of benefits, including lower overhead and the ability to hire for particular projects, but companies still have to ensure that the workers are healthy and safe.

“Employing remote workers also comes with its own set of legal implications that remote leaders need to consider. Each of these legal issues could be a potential liability for your company,” Natasha Bowman JD, SPHR, said in “Remote Work and the Law: Legal Issues that Remote Leaders Must Know.”

She suggested making sure that companies address any issues concerning the health and safety for remote workers using several channels, including:

- HR policies
- Employee handbook
- Hiring process
- Onboarding process
- Organizational structure
- Procedures
- Additional organizational policies

Employers are responsible for identifying potential hazards and implementing procedures to mitigate and control risk that remote employees might face. The remote worker is responsible for complying with company policies and reporting any hazards or issues they notice.

Bowman suggested going over potential hazards with employees and establishing a system for how companies will report and investigate any injuries, illnesses, and other incidents that might happen.

Managers can raise their awareness of potential work-related safety issues by educating themselves. Online occupational safety degree programs can help management protect their workers while adhering to regulations, policies, and enforcement.

Posting Requirements for Remote Workers

Workplace compliance posters about rights under federal, state, and local laws are often made available in a company's public areas. Managers need to understand occupational health and safety terminology and ensure that remote workers have access to those same posters.

"By law, you're required to provide these mandatory notices to ALL employees. That includes remote workers such as employees who work from home, offsite, on the road, at mall kiosks, in mobile service units, out in the field, and at construction checkpoints," Ashley Kaplan, senior employment law attorney for HRdirect said in "Workplace Posting Requirements for Remote Workers."

Required federal posters can include:

- Equal Employment Opportunity (EEOC)
- Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)
- Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA)
- Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA)
- Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA)

States and municipalities may require other posters as well. Regulations do not specify a format for posters for remote workers, only that they receive them.

"For employees who work on computers as part of their jobs, we recommend electronic delivery of postings, where workers can download, view and acknowledge receipt of all required postings. This satisfies your obligation to communicate their rights, as covered in the mandatory federal and state notices," Kaplan said.

No list specifies all mandatory posters, so companies should check with each governmental agency for requirements. There is also some ambiguity about what happens when a remote employee works in a state different from the company headquarters.

"Unfortunately, it's not always clear which state laws apply in this instance. Most basic employment rights — such as minimum wage, overtime and safety issues — are governed by the laws where the employee performs the work. However, depending on how your company is structured, your out-of-state employees may be covered by both states' laws. Because it depends on so many factors, we recommend you provide both sets of state-specific postings to remote workers in this situation," Kaplan advised.

If an employee reports to a physical office several times a month, physical postings there might be adequate. If in doubt, however, deliver all posters electronically to remote employees.

Possible Hazards of Remote Working

Technology makes working remotely easier and employers need to ensure that their remote workers eliminate potential risks.

Data security is very important. Employers need to make sure their employees have secure connections and require anyone who must use public Wi-Fi to use a virtual private network or VPN. Remote workers must comply with the same data security, encryption, and privacy issues as onsite workers.

Other health and safety issues to consider include:

- Bad lighting
- Dirty or unsanitary surfaces
- Overloaded electrical sockets
- Good ergonomics

Mental health is also a potential health hazard. Remote workers might feel isolated from their coworkers and risk burning out if they do not adequately separate their work life from other responsibilities.

An online bachelor's degree in occupational health and safety can prepare graduates to identify these risks and other health and safety hazards for remote workers in their company.

About Eastern Kentucky University's Bachelor of Science in Occupational Safety Program

Eastern Kentucky University's online bachelor's degree in occupational health and safety program is designed to show students how to identify safety risks and potential areas of improvement in construction and manufacturing operations. This degree can be a stepping stone to a position as a safety coordinator or many other occupational health and safety careers.

Industry-experienced safety professionals guide students through occupational safety courses, covering modern trends in employee engagement and the establishment of a safety culture in the workplace. For more information, contact EKU today.

Recommended Reading:

Top 6 Hurdles to Implementing a Successful Safety Program

Working as a Safety Consultant

Occupational Safety and Sustainability

Sources:

Remote Work and the Law: Legal Issues that Remote Leaders Must Know: Workplaceless

Workplace Posting Requirements for Remote Workers: HR Bartender

What Remote Workers Need to Know About Safety: OHS Online

New Research Reveals Ways to Overcome Safety Challenges for Remote Workers: EHS Today