

SPOTLIGHT ON REMOTE ERGONOMIC ASSESSMENTS

Many organisations may not be fully aware of what they need to do to ensure employees have suitable remote or home working set-ups, writes Andy Mackin, CEO of Mackin. He says that more Irish employers need to undertake remote ergonomic assessments with each employee to critically assess work stations, and to act before any preventable issues arise.



According to a study from the Royal Society for Public Health in February 2021, one in four employees still work from home from either a sofa or a bedroom; 39% had developed musculoskeletal problems while 60% found that their physical activity decreased.

In March 2020, many professionals across Ireland found themselves sitting at kitchen tables, in their bedrooms or using desks squeezed into whatever space they would fit.

There was an initial perception that this was a short-term change under lockdown and we would be returning to the office in a matter of weeks or, at worst, months.

Since then, Ireland still has one of the highest proportion of remote workers

in Europe. According to a March 2021 survey conducted by Eurofound, over 40% of Irish workers work remotely, at least part of the time.

With the Government's National Remote Work Strategy giving workers the right to request to work remotely, it's clear remote and blended working practices are here to stay and Irish

employers need to plan accordingly.

The home office is an extension of the workplace. It is essential that employers understand employees' physical work set-ups and provide the right guidance and assistance to maintain their health and productivity.

Remote ergonomic assessments are a vital step in achieving this.



Remote assessments can help prevent both short-term and long-term injuries that can increase company liability to employees working from home.

EMPLOYER'S DUTY OF CARE

At Mackin, we have found that many organisations are still not fully aware of what they should be doing to ensure their employees have suitable work set-ups at home. There has been a sharp increase in incidences of injuries associated with the working from home environment.

A February 2021 study from the Royal Society for Public Health found that over one in four are still working from home from either a sofa or a bedroom; 39% had developed musculoskeletal problems while 60% found that their physical activity decreased.

Ergonomic assessments are a legal obligation and are critical to keeping employees safe and well. However,



A review of an employee's equipment should include the correct chair, desk and monitor set-up.

while organisations no longer have the same access to many employees' work stations, these need to be carried out virtually and documented appropriately.

Worryingly, it has been our experience that the majority of businesses have not carried out an assessment of any type, which leaves them hugely exposed. Remote assessments can help prevent both short-term and long-term injuries that

can increase company liability to employees working from home.

APPROPRIATE ACTIONS TO TAKE

Remote Ergonomic Assessments are the only way that you can be certain that your remote employees have the information and equipment they need. If they don't, you can then advise them on the correct and appropriate actions required to remedy any potential issues.

These assessments should be carried out with each employee over a video call so that their set-up can be analysed in real-time and questions asked.

Depending on the organisation and the employee, items to be covered include:

- Review of employee's equipment including:
 - o Correct chair and correct set-up
 - o Desk and monitor set-up
 - o Keyboard and mouse set-up
 - o Cables and electronics
- Assessment of overall work environment from lighting to proper use of space.
- Questions on behaviours and habits including posture, rest breaks, physical activity etc.

Issues raised during an assessment should be referred to the appropriate team members to make sure that the correct assistance or help is made available. All health and safety policies should also be updated to include a dedicated policy on remote working.

From what we have seen, many companies have not put the plans in place to deal long-term with a hybrid and remote workforce. Now is the time to critically assess and act before preventable issues arise.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

As CEO of Mackin, Andy has responsibility for the day-to-day operations of the organisation, and also works with many clients across all sectors in Ireland, the UK, Europe and the US.

He holds a Diploma in Health and Safety from UCC, a Certificate in Training and Education from NUI Galway, and has over 20 years' experience in Environmental Health and Safety (EHS). In 2020, Andy Mackin was a finalist in the EY Entrepreneur of the Year Awards.

Originally from Dundalk, he has been living in Cork since 1985. He served for 21 years as a member of the Irish Naval Service and, during this time, qualified as an electrician. It was here that he gained his initial experience with risk management and developed his appreciation of EHS.

His company offers two business service offerings through Mackin Talent and Mackin EHS. Mackin Talent provides custom talent management solutions for companies across IT, financial and healthcare sectors; while Mackin EHS offers a range of environmental health and safety consultancy and training services. In May 2021, the company was announced as one of the finalists of the Cork Chamber's Company of the Year awards in the Large Business category.

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