



## Chief Executive Office – Risk Management Branch

# ERGONOMIC BEST PRACTICES FOR TELEWORKERS

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### **Overview of Program**

Employers should have an ergonomics program in place for their office-based workforce that details how they will lead, manage, and support the workplace ergonomics program, provide employee training, conduct risk or hazard assessments, and mitigate potential risk. The basic tenets of this ergonomics program can be applied to remote workers with a few key distinctions. County departments with an effectively established and implemented office ergonomics program are strong candidates for a successful telework program while departments that have not implemented an effective office ergonomics program will face additional challenges.

### **Program Elements**

#### **Written Program**

A written department-specific telework program is necessary to provide instructions on the qualification process and training requirements, and list responsibilities of management and employees. The program will assist departments with the verification of proper workspace setup and equipment use and help to identify ergonomic risk factors which can be eliminated or minimized to prevent discomfort which may lead to musculoskeletal injuries. The telework program should include procedures to allow employees to report concerns or discomfort to their supervisors early to mitigate potential musculoskeletal injuries.

#### **Training Requirement**

Training on ergonomics should be provided and successfully completed by employees before they are permitted to telework. Training can be made available electronically or in-person and should ensure that employees understand the requirements of the program. Requiring employees to complete periodic refresher trainings is also recommended. The training should consist of two parts: 1) office ergonomics training and 2) telework policy training, which explains how the program is implemented, who is qualified, and the requirements of the program.

#### **Forms – Agreement and Telework Checklist**

In addition to training, a telework agreement should also be signed by the employees and their supervisors and managers indicating the employees are able to designate a safe and comfortable workspace at their remote work locations. After the telework agreement is approved by management, provide an ergonomic checklist for the employees to reference and assist them with setting up a remote workspace.

## **Forms – Agreement and Telework Checklist (Continued)**

The ergonomic checklist should be quick and easy for employees to complete and for supervisors and safety offices to review. Additional information like photographs of the remote workspace may be needed in addition to the checklist.

### **Identification of Workspace by Employee**

Teleworkers must designate a dedicated area as a remote workspace. The designated area should be clean and free of distractions, obstructions and safety hazards. The environmental conditions at the designated workspace (light, ventilation, temperature, etc.) should be safe and conducive for performing productive work throughout the employees' assigned shift.

### **Remote Workspace Evaluation**

Employees must conduct a self-assessment of their remote workspace to ensure it is safe, comfortable, and compliant with the department's requirements. Employees should be encouraged to review the webinars and videos available on the County Office Ergonomics website. The website address can be found in this document under Resource Materials.

An online self-evaluation system may also be used to assist teleworkers in evaluating their remote workspaces. This system combines training and safety checklists in one place and provides immediate feedback to employees to help them adjust their workspaces. An online self-evaluation system is available through the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries which can. The website is listed in this document under Resource Materials.

Employees should contact the safety office if they require additional assistance. A method for requesting ergonomic assistance should be in place by the department.

### **Providing Ergonomic Assistance to Employees**

Department staff are strongly discouraged from conducting in-person evaluations at employees' home workspaces to prevent potential exposure to unknown risks. However, if employees request assistance from the safety office, the following methods can be used by the department to evaluate employees' remote workspaces:

- **Digital Photographs:** Digital photographs can be useful when conducting remote ergonomic assessments. They allow ergonomic evaluators to see the equipment that employees are using and where they are working. Photographs are especially helpful if they depict employees working at their workspaces.
- **Phone/Web Cameras:** Using phone/web cameras allow ergonomic evaluators to see live footage of employees working at their workspaces, and allow evaluators to demonstrate for employees what posture is appropriate and how equipment should be positioned.

## **Providing Ergonomic Assistance to Employees (Continued)**

- **Telephone Call:** Like web cameras, the advantage of using telephones is that they provide direct interaction with employees. Ergonomic evaluators can ask questions to gain better insight into employees' work habits, positions and challenges, and then direct employees on how to set up their workspaces.

If ergonomic or safety issues have not been resolved after assisting the employee, the telework agreement should be terminated by the department.

### **Equipment Selection**

Risk management and department safety offices need to be involved in the selection of equipment and guidelines that will be provided to teleworkers, and in establishing criteria on how the designated remote workspace should be set up.

Remote workspaces may need to be furnished differently based on the needs of the department and the employee. Departments should assess the nature of employees' jobs, hazards associated with their jobs, volume of work, and employees' abilities to work safely and comfortably when selecting equipment for the telework workspace.

For example, if employees are to utilize a notebook PC ("laptop"), it should be docked with a separate full-sized keyboard, mouse, and a riser to elevate the laptop. Guidance should be provided to the employees on how to properly set up their workspace to work in a safe manner.

### **Follow-Up**

The department's written telework program should include follow-up procedures to ensure employees are adhering to the telework policy and that their remote workspaces remain compliant with the department's requirements.

### **Resource Materials**

Joint Labor-Management Committee on Office Ergonomics

<https://my.lacounty.gov/health-and-wellness/office-ergonomics/>

CEO – Risk Management, Loss Control and Prevention Section, Safety: Ergonomics Videos/Webinars

<https://vimeo.com/showcase/5590425>

Los Angeles County Department of Human Resources – Telework Program

<https://employee.hr.lacounty.gov/telework-2/>

I:/RMB Secs/Loss Control and Prevention-Ergonomic Best Practices for Teleworkers.docx