

Home Office Tips: Hazard Assessment

Your home is supposed to be a safe environment, but is yours as safe as you think? Your home may have hazards with the potential to cause significant injury or illness when you telework. Your organization may provide guidelines for teleworking, but no one is going to inspect your home for hazards—the safety of your remote work is in your hands. It is important you conduct periodic hazard assessments, identify possible hazards, and take action to address them. This one pager provides you information on assessing your home and ensuring it is safe.



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IDENTIFY HAZARDS

Keep in mind telework locations within the home vary—some people have designated offices, while others have makeshift work areas (e.g., dining room table, an outdoor patio, an area in the living room). Conduct a hazard assessment of all areas you work, use, or walk through during work hours (offices, hallways, staircases, bathrooms, kitchens, etc.). The following table shows some hazards and concerns you may identify during your assessment.

Examples of Home Office Hazards and Concerns		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-adjustable chair • Computer screen positioned too high/low • Monitor too close/far away • Static work for long periods of time • Poor posture • Glare on the monitor • Gas leaks (e.g., carbon monoxide, propane) • Mold • Excess dust • Asbestos • Lead (peeling from painted walls or floors) • Radon • Dangerous plants, animals, or insects • Sun exposure • Lack of, or inoperable, gas detectors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ungrounded outlets • Broken or frayed cords • Daisy chains • Bent prongs • Damaged outlets and covers • Loose outlets or plugs that easily fall from an outlet • Off-gassing from new carpet or flooring • Inappropriately stored cleaning products • Unlabeled cleaning products • Handling of heavy items • Unorganized storage under desks or in drawers • Unsecured bookcases • Pets (tripping over them) • Toys left on the floor • Limited access to fresh air • Extension cords on patios or near pools or sprinklers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slippery floors (kitchens and bathrooms) • Loose carpets • Large, unguarded windows • Uneven flooring and/or stairs • Wet walking surfaces • Lack of a stepstool or ladder when reaching items stored out of reach • Cluttered walkways and/or stairs • Inadequate lighting • Fluctuating temperatures • Poor air flow • Isolation (from working alone) • Disrupting noise from outdoors (e.g., dirt bikes, airplanes, neighbors) • Noise from children and pets in adjoining rooms

For additional information on setting up a proper workstation, view the SMCX-created “Home Office Tips – Setting Up Your Workstation” one pager.

CONSIDER FIRE HAZARDS

During your hazard assessment, you also need to consider fire hazards and other emergency-related items. The table below lists some items you may find during your assessment.

Fire Hazards and Emergency Considerations			
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Candles• Lack of, or unmaintained, fire extinguishers• Piles of paper materials• Use of cables and chargers from the wrong devices (could be different wattage or amperage rating than device requires)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Charging stations near combustible materials (e.g., wood, paper, cardboard)• Heat-emitting appliances (e.g., coffeepot, space heater) near flammable materials (e.g., papers)• Portable space heaters	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unattended cooking in the kitchen (usually during breaks)• Phones and computers left on flammable materials (e.g., beds, couches, curtains, pillows)• Lack of fireplace screen to catch flying sparks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Blocked egress routes• Blocked doors• Obstructed outdoor steps• Lack of, or unpracticed, fire exit strategy• Blocked woodstove pipes and chimneys• Lack of, or non-working, smoke detectors

CREATE EMERGENCY PLANS

Prepare a fire escape plan for evacuating your home in event of a fire. Assess your home, identifying at least two ways to get out of each room in case route is blocked by fire or smoke. Check to make sure windows aren't painted shut, screens and/or window guards can be removed quickly, and security bars can be opened. Evaluate the drop from windows to determine if you need emergency ladders. Additionally, identify a safe meeting location outside of the home.

Check out the American Red Cross [Fire Escape Plan Template](#) and the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) [Escape Grid](#) to help you pull your plan together. The NFPA suggests you practice your fire escape plan at least twice a year. [Ready.gov](#) and the [NFPA](#) provide tips on conducting home fire drills. Home fire drills help ensure your escape plans are adequate.



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TAKE ACTION

Establish at least one control to resolve every hazard you identify during your assessment, including any issues you run into when making your emergency plans. Be sure to eliminate as many hazards as feasibly possible. Remember, every home is different, so the controls vary per situation. Reach out to your supervisor or safety office if you are unsure how to control an identified hazard.

For additional information on the SMCX's services, please visit the SMCX-hosted website at: <https://www.smscx.org/>.



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