

**At last a common sense health and safety approach to temporary working from home.
One hope's!**

Colin Ive July 2011

In late 2010 Lord Young produced for Prime Minister Cameron a report entitled 'Common Sense, Common Safety'. This report was a result of a study he had undertaken of the Health and Safety laws directly affecting British Industry. Many points were raised as a result of this and the following recommendation taken from the report should be of particular interest to those concerned with the resilience of both their own and their suppliers business.

Recommendation. Home workers and the self-employed

One of the desirable changes in work practices over recent years is the increase in the number of employees working from home. However, the current system is overly bureaucratic and makes no distinction between those working on an employer's premises and those working from home; this means that employers are required to conduct a written risk assessment even if an employee is working from their own home with low hazard equipment. To my mind this approach is unnecessary and intrusive. I therefore propose to exempt employers from risk assessments for all employees working in their own homes.

Lord Young 2010

This is a significant recommendation for those, and there are many, who have clearly built into their Business Continuity Plans that in the event of a loss of office, denial of access, or even a flu pandemic, staff home working will be an automatic part of the plan to keep the business running. Current advice is, as indicated in the recommendation, that should an organisation allow anyone to work from home, for no matter what reason, the bureaucracy of written risk assessments for their home is essential and the fear of being sued if, for example, an employee fell down the stairs of their home whilst performing work, was a real danger.

It was all well and good for Lord Young to propose to exempt employers from risk assessments but the British Government did not create these laws, this was done in Brussels as part of the European Union's Health and Safety legislature and as a result only the European Parliament can give such exemption.

Positively I understand that this European law change is being pursued, although likely to take several years to achieve. The good news however is, as I understand from my personal contacts within the Health & Safety Executive, that they have been actively working hard in recent months to provide much simplified guidance that will dispel the myths surrounding home working, particularly for people who were working at home on an occasional basis perhaps, for example, for business continuity reasons.

The HSE have been working with British Chamber of Commerce and Federation of Small Businesses, both of whom are very keen on straightforward guidance for low-risk home working and, including contributions from others like myself, are concerned with the need for clarification to enable a clear and less bureaucratic understanding of this aspect of the law. As a result I understand that a document with this simplified guidance will be published at the end of August.

This news should be particularly timely and to be welcomed by those organisations who, understanding the potential extended travel chaos during the 2012 Olympics and Paralympic Games are agreeing to staff working from home for their duration.