

## Health and Safety Executive review of rules on Home working – What a let down!

In June of last year a great fuss was made in the press following the Prime Minister's appointment of Lord Young of Graffham to overhaul Britain's health and safety laws. As a result of this Lord Young's report 'Common Sense Common Safety' was published the following October [http://www.number10.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/402906\\_CommonSense\\_acc.pdf](http://www.number10.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/402906_CommonSense_acc.pdf) This report, as can be seen from its Foreword, was strongly supported by the Prime Minister and one which contained a great deal of encouragement and hope for business that real progress could be made to cut through much of the bureaucracy which had so severely damaged the reputation of the Health and Safety Executive and Health and Safety Laws in general.

An area of significant interest to many organisations was with regard to the rules on Homeworkers. This was of particular interest to those who have home working as a corner stone of their Business Continuity plans. Such interest has been reinforced by the pressure on many businesses in London to continue with business as usual during the summer of 2012 and the impact, over a 6 week period, of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Great efforts have been made by the Olympic Development Authority, exemplified by its campaign entitled <http://www.london2012.com/news/2010/07/plans-to-keep-london-moving-during-the-2012-games-published.php> to encourage London businesses to reduce their reliance upon their staff commuting to work during this time and so greatly reduce the burden upon the London transport system and in particular the Underground, where it is anticipated that an additional 3 million journeys will be made in this time.

The report contained a great deal of encouragement in this specific area and special mention was made directly to this by Lord Young in his report as quoted below.

### *“Homeworkers 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”*

I have personally discussed this issue several times in recent months with the Health and Safety executive who have since early this year been working on a paper which would meet the hope and expectations set out in Lord Young's report. Unfortunately no drafts of the paper were made public and it was only when it was finally published, following approval by the relevant minister, was I able to see a copy.

It was then with total dismay and considerable disappointment that upon reading this document <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg226.pdf>, which I repeat had taken many months to create, to find that it contained just two short paragraphs which totally failed to meet the bold statement in the report of *“To my mind this approach is unnecessary and intrusive. I therefore propose to exempt employers from risk assessments”*

Business it seems has been severely let down by the government who it appears now were simply 'sabre rattling' and providing spin for media consumption whilst being completely impotent to actually change laws which are European laws.

If Mr Cameron's government really wish to improve the long term effectiveness, and reputation, of such health and safety regulations have upon the world of business here in the UK than a six week exemption of assessment for those temporarily working from home due to a disaster at their normal place of work, thus aiding the continued existence if their jobs, would be a common sense solution which would in turn greatly directly contribute to the easing of travel in London during the Olympic period.

Further information and opinions will be discussed at the Business Resilience in the Supply Chain conference [www.brisc2011.com](http://www.brisc2011.com) on September 14<sup>th</sup> at the Madejski Stadium, Reading.