H&S when working from home (or on holiday)

If you work from home you already have to look after your own health and safety (H&S). But what will the law changes mean for you?

Changes to the Health and Safety at Work Act came into effect April 2016 — see the [WorkSafe website](http://www.worksafe.govt.nz/worksafe/hswa) for more detail.

If you're working from home, it's your responsibility to look after your own H&S. If you run a business which has staff working from home, you are responsible for talking through and developing policies with them on how they'll manage their health and safety when working at home.

In a home office, you might, for example, move electrical cords to avoid tripping, and set up your office chair and desk at the correct height to avoid occupational overuse syndrome (OOS).

Keep things in proportion. Identify the likely risks in your workspace, do something about them, and you're in good shape to meet the new laws.

Just as you have to look after your own H&S, you also have to look after your workers’ H&S no matter where they work, including at home, "so far as is reasonably practicable". This could range from providing safe equipment for their work, to providing information to help set up their workstations ergonomically to making sure the home worker keeps in touch with their boss and team members in cases of emergency.

Who'll do what in a business

Annabelle and Bernard own ABC cake business. After getting council approval to do so, Annabelle bakes the cakes at her house, and Bernard handles all the orders from an office in town. They employ Charlie to do book-keeping. They have received a lot of rush orders for Christmas parties so need to change how they work.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who and where</th>
<th>Must-dos under new law</th>
<th>H&amp;S steps</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annabelle always works from home.</td>
<td>As a director, Annabelle must make sure ABC complies with its obligations. As a worker, she’ll also have to take reasonable care for the H&amp;S of herself and others, and follow ABC’s policies and instructions.</td>
<td>Annabelle has been working from home for months, so she’s aware of the risks – high-temperature equipment and sharp utensils – and makes sure she sticks to ABC’s policies about eliminating or minimising these.</td>
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<td>Bernard is working from home during the holidays – orders are coming in, but he still wants to be near his family.</td>
<td>As a director and a worker, he’ll have the same responsibilities as Annabelle.</td>
<td>Bernard takes regular breaks so he doesn’t get fatigued, makes sure he’s not going to trip over his computer cord, and keeps in touch with Annabelle to make sure she’s handling the baking workload, and that Charlie is also set up well to work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charlie is working a day a week while on holiday at his remote bach to make sure there are no cash flow problems.</td>
<td>As a worker, Charlie has to take reasonable care to ensure the H&amp;S of himself and others, and follow ABC’s policies and instructions.</td>
<td>Charlie sets up his computer at a suitable spot in the bach. He phones Bernard at the start and end of each workday to check in. One day he notices the extension cord looks a bit worn, so buys a new one before he uses his computer again.</td>
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If risks can't be reasonably eliminated, the law says you must take “reasonably practicable steps” to minimise them.