

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; however, the Safety Office is not going to inspect your home for hazards. It is important you conduct periodic hazard assessments, identify possible hazards, and take action to address them. This one pager provides 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, outdoor patio, living room coffee table). Conduct a hazard assessment of all areas you work, use, or enter during work hours, including offices, hallways, staircases, bathrooms, kitchens, and outdoor spaces. The following table shows some possible 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• Poor posture• Glare on the monitor• Gas leaks (e.g., carbon monoxide, propane)• Lack of, or inoperable, gas detectors• Mold• Excess dust• Asbestos• Lead• Radon• Dangerous plants, animals, or insects• Sun exposure	<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 heavy items• Unsecured bookcases• Pets (tripping over them)• Objects or toys 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)• Noise from outdoors (e.g., lawn equipment, airplanes, neighbors)• Noise from adults, 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

Look for fire hazards and other emergency-related risks during your hazard assessment. 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• Using 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 one 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 height/drop from windows and 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 create your plan. The NFPA suggests practicing 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 encounter when making your emergency plans. Try 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/>.