

PLANNING FOR A SAFE, COMFORTABLE, FUNCTIONAL HOME OFFICE

- **A separate, dedicated (or restricted-access) work area**

(Telecommuters can't work on the kitchen table or on the sofa, and they should not have to take the time to set up and take down their work area every morning and evening.)

- **Away from the main traffic flow and temptations**

(The value of telecommuting depends on getting away from the interruptions and distractions in the office - don't replace them with interruptions and distractions in the home.)

- **Desk with enough space on it and storage space nearby**

(A desk filled with piles of papers, and with books or manuals strewn across the floor nearby, is not only an unsafe work area but is also very inefficient.)

- **Chair suitable and comfortable for work**

(With few exceptions, office workers will suffer more from an unsuitable chair than from any other aspect of the workplace. The chair should have five casters to lessen the chance of tipping over, and should be adjustable in all dimensions. And you can forget about working in your favorite recliner on a kitchen chair.)

- **Close enough to electrical outlets and phone**

(Stringing cables and wires across the floor to reach the outlets or phone jacks is an invitation to an accident. The desk should be placed as closely as possible to the outlets/jacks. If this is not possible, proper extension cords should be used around the perimeter of the room, not across the floor. Don't think that you'll never trip over a Day-glo orange extension cord across the floor - you will.)

- **Free from loose rugs or sources of slipping and tripping**

(A loose throw rug on a shiny floor is another invitation to an accident - as are kids' toys, sleeping cats, coffee mugs, slippers (bunny or otherwise) and so on. Keep the floor clear, and don't put something down that might look good but could cause you to end up flying through the air.)

- **Desk at comfortable (for you) work height**

(I have never believed in the so-called "ideal" measurements for things like desk, chair, and keyboard height. How can one number be correct for a person who is five feet tall and another who is over six feet? You can start with those dimensions but the best test is how you feel at the end of the day. Be sensitive to signs that the furniture isn't suitable - headache, eyestrain, muscular strains, numbness in arms or legs, stiff neck, etc. are signs of problems. If you experience these, try adjusting your furniture or ask for help from someone qualified to assist you.

- **Desk sturdy enough to safely support PC**

(If the employer doesn't provide furniture, don't drag that wobbly card table out of the garage - the one with the duct tape around the slightly-broken leg - and use it for your PC, phone, etc.)

- **No "spaghetti bowl" of extension cords**

(Don't plug the PC, printer, and so on all into the same outlet with the air conditioner, refrigerator, CD player, etc. It's not that the office equipment takes that much power - the problem is that all those things together can overload a circuit. Also, be sure your electrical outlets are grounded properly. If you have ANY doubt about the adequacy or safety of your wiring, call in a qualified electrician to check it.)

- **Position desk (relative to lighting and window) to avoid glare on screen or papers**

(The goal is to position your desk so that the sunlight is not shining directly onto the screen and reflecting into your eyes, and so the bright sun outside doesn't contrast with the dark screen. It depends on how your office is oriented to the source of sunlight, but in general, most people are better off positioning their desk at an angle to the light source.)

- **Task lighting vs. area lighting**

(Most home-office areas, especially if they are in spare bedrooms, have large ceiling lights that are designed to light the entire room. Those overhead lights will often cause a shadow to be cast on your desk, since your body is between the light source and the desk. You might be better off leaving the overhead light off, and replacing it with a floor light or desk light that appropriately lights up your work area.

- **Keep a fire extinguisher nearby**

(The odds of having your computer or other equipment catch on fire are small - but if it happens, you'll want to have a fire extinguisher at hand instead of having to run downstairs or wherever else in the house to find one. It also makes sense to install a smoke detector in your home office for the same reason.)