

## Astute Safety Thinking

### Welcome

Welcome to the November newsletter from Astute Safety Consulting.

This has been a strange year and it does not look to be getting any easier as we reach the last couple of months, but hopefully we can give you a few thoughts and ideas to stay safe in your workplace.

We have included some tips on fire safety – well it is November after all. We also have a couple of articles on working safely from home and mental health wellbeing. When managing Health and Safety, often the Health part gets ignored or put to one side as it is seen as more difficult or not as easy as managing Safety. Hopefully, the wellbeing strategies will help you and the people that you work with.

If you have any Health and Safety issues that you would like to discuss, or ideas on what to cover in future issues, please get in touch with [paul.sidney@astutesafetyconsulting.com](mailto:paul.sidney@astutesafetyconsulting.com)



### A guide to home working

Many businesses have begun to embrace the idea of working from home. Looking ahead in the current climate, more and more of us may find ourselves doing so for longer than the one to two days a week, which is easy to adapt to.

In an age where work and life need to integrate much more successfully, remote working can be a wonderful thing. But it is also full of pitfalls for both managers and employees.

### UK workers ‘more productive’ working from home

A survey of 1,481 UK workers carried out by Cartridge People between June 2nd and June 18th, 2020 has found that 40% of UK workers have been more productive when working at home, claiming it gives them a lot more flexibility with their time. Respondents said home working has helped to provide a much better work-life balance giving them more time to spend with family.

The survey also found that:

- a Pre-lockdown, 29% were already working from home;
- a Post-lockdown, 32% said they would now be working from home everyday;
- a 22% work outside of usual office hours when working from home;
- a 50% admit to getting more work done when using a home office;
- a 54% say they're happier working from home, compared to 18% who prefer to be in a traditional office environment;
- a When working from home, 42% feel they have a good work-life balance. 24% say it can help them work around friends and family with 40% admitting it gives them more flexibility with their time;
- a 58% say they never feel lonely when working from home, 14% say they often feel lonely when working from home and just 1% always feel lonely when they're working from home;
- a 60% enjoy working from home and just 1% dislike it;
- a Windows that can open is what UK workers (55%) look for most in an office environment.

## Half of UK employees worked from home in April

Almost half of employees did some of their work from home during April, with the vast majority stating this was because of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the Office for National Statistics.

The report highlighted that only 35.2% worked the same number of hours as usual. 34.4% of people said they worked fewer hours and 30.3% worked more hours than they would normally.

The data revealed how women were slightly more likely than men to do some work from home, while workers aged 16-24 were the least likely to be able to work from home (30.2%). This is compared with 54.3% of people aged 25-34 and 51.3% of people in the 35-49 age bracket.

London residents were more likely to do some work from home than people in other regions. Some 57.2% London residents worked from home during April, compared with 35.3% of people in the West Midlands, which had the lowest rate of home workers.

Now that the scene is set – this article will be continued in the December issue of Astute Safety Thinking.

If you are looking to provide Display Screen Equipment training to your staff working at home or in the office, please check the link below

<https://www.videotilehost.com/astutesafetyconsulting/purchaseCourse.php?nid=23>

## Fire Brigade warns restaurants to clean extractors

The London Fire Brigade issued a fresh warning of the dangers of restaurant extraction systems after the third fire in two days involving food premises.

Last month a restaurant in Green Lanes, Palmers Green was badly damaged by fire which involved the extraction system also known as ducting. The extraction system in the restaurant was used to carry fumes away from the counter where kebabs were cooked.



Firefighter outside a restaurant in Lisle Street  
Credit: ITN

This followed two similar blazes at restaurants in Lisle Street in the West End and St Johns Wood which also affected large sections of the

extraction system. A London Fire Brigade spokesperson said:

*"Businesses should make sure their extraction system is kept clean as a build-up of fat and grease within the filters can lead to a fire."*

In the latest incident four adults and two children in two flats above the restaurant left the building before the Brigade arrived and another eight people evacuated from neighbouring properties.

Four fire engines were called to the scene at 23.05 and twenty one firefighters and officers attended. The fire was under control at 0022.

### **Astute Safety Thinking –**

**It is important to clean extraction systems and ducting properly. Look for a company that cleans to TR19 standards and will issue a certificate to show that proper cleaning has been carried out. Insurance companies often have this stipulation on their business insurance, so look out for it and make sure that you are compliant.**

**Astute Safety Consulting carry out Fire Risk Assessments for business premises and communal areas of HMOs and flats.**

**Please get in contact if you would like us to visit your premises, ideally before a fire inspector calls, or worse a fire occurs.**

## Wellbeing strategies

2019 saw many organisations starting to engage in a far more meaningful way with employee wellbeing and good mental health. Much thinking was given to peer to peer support, mental health first aid and centrally accessible support functions. In these challenging times, more thought may need to be given to individual coping strategies with less face to face support to create long-term, sustainable coping mechanisms.

It is reported that many people are becoming increasingly worried about the growing response to coronavirus, triggering anxiety and acts of obsessive compulsive behaviours. Typical out of character behaviours include:

- 📌 Frenzied updates from the news and on social media;
- 📌 Worries about friends and family and those categorised as vulnerable;
- 📌 OCD and a change or lack of usual routines;
- 📌 Loneliness during self-isolation; and
- 📌 Schools, childcare and children's wellbeing fears.

### Managing COVID-19 anxiety

The fear of the pandemic is something that each of us has to manage – anxiety loves the words '*what if*' – so how can you manage your head and overcome your feelings when they are overwhelming and how can you help others who may be struggling too?

1. **Scale how you feel from 1-10** – with '1' being the worst you have ever felt, and '10' being the best you have ever felt. What number are you right now? It is a subjective measure, but it is a useful one. Whatever number you are, how can you increase it by 1? What do you need to do, and who can help you? We are all on an emotional 'rollercoaster' – re-set your head every day, with rational information – avoid going down the rabbit hole for long. It is ok to be uncertain and feel sad for a short time, but then you need to 'act' to improve your mood.
2. **Accept the advice** we are being given. Acceptance can be hard when we are frightened. Rebelling against it will prolong the time need to practice social distancing and isolation. Being separated is not our natural response and so the more accountable we can be, and the more responsible we are by making good choices, the better. Sometimes I find a way around the rules and look to rebel, but I also know what is good for me and my family in the long term. So, let's just do as we are told.



3. **Manage your self-talk** – how are you talking to yourself in your head? Would you talk to anyone else like that? If you wouldn't, then be kinder to yourself, even if you change how you are speaking to yourself just once a day (you don't have to believe it!) it will make a difference to how you feel. Change the negative words to positive, be nurturing, embrace your weird.
4. **Recognise what you can control and influence** – you have control over you and can influence the people around you in your physical household and any vulnerable persons who depend on you, the rest falls in to the 'circle of concern' which is a reactive and less positive place to be and causes anxiety and panic. It is important to recognise what you can choose to let go of.
5. **Access therapy** – the power of having a safe space to talk, cannot be underestimated to help you to be well. You might not be able to see someone face to face, but people who are using the different technologies on offer (phone, Skype, Zoom, WhatsApp, Facetime) have been really positive, saying that it is as good as sitting in a room with their therapist.
6. **Stay in touch** – keep in contact with each other. Writing letters, have virtual coffee breaks with family, friends and colleagues, anything that keeps you connected.
7. **Have a purpose** – if you are working from home, keep to your routines. Our heads like routine and being organised! If you are not working, decide what you would like to do, see the time as an opportunity, are there jobs or interests that you have not had time to do that you can use this time to explore? Look at online courses.
8. **Look at your finances** – Whilst there either is, or will be financial hardship, there is a lot of information out there that is free and can help to navigate through what is available. Ask for help, pick up the phone and negotiate what you need.
9. **Clear your space** – your environment can reflect how your head is! Clear the clutter, feel in control of your space. As the Scunthorpe United manager Nigel Adkins famously said 'we have to control the controllables' – in a time when there are things we can't control, taking control of what you can is important.





10. **Exercise** – whatever that means to you. Walking (whilst distancing), a training session, weights (if you have them), cycling.....whatever – expand your lung capacity and increase your heart rate. It is possible that you could be healthier and more fit at the end of this time, than at the beginning!
11. **Avoid self-medicating** – using alcohol, substances, smoking, food, etc. as a coping mechanism, is counter-productive for your mental and physical health. Do something more positive!
12. **Ask for help** – are you good at asking for help or do you avoid it? Think about who can help you, and who you can help. We are in this together, and if we don't help one another, the tougher this will be. Reciprocity is something that we use in business – help others for the right reasons, and that good stuff comes back to you (at some point!). There are many local groups (rotary, church groups, citizens groups) who may be able to help.



13. **Take time out** – Manage social media and news access – our brains are not meant to function 24 hours a day. Decide on your trusted news provider and check in with that source only. Social media is NOT reliable – for instance, just before the prime minister's briefing on 23 March, speculation ranged from 'they are going to send helicopters to drop a disinfectant to kill the virus at midnight' to 'the army is going to shoot people who move around' – both wildly off the mark. Follow the official briefings, they are in charge of the decisions that are being made, then switch it off because the rest is supposition, for the most part.
14. **Avoid your head catastrophising** – when we catastrophise, we look to the worst-case scenario. At the moment, the worst case is being ill and dying, or losing someone we love. The balance of evidence to this, is that if we follow the advice, we are minimising the chances greatly. There are also more people who are recovering from the virus than are dying from it, however that is not

reported on in the press. The immediate threat is minimal if we all take responsibility for our actions and follow the advice.

15. **Manage your time** – plan together, with the household – can you have a shared timetable? Take breaks together even if home-schooling. We are all in the same storm and there needs to be boundaries in place, but be mindful of your energy levels and work/be active when they are high so you are effective (don't be too hard on yourself if energy levels dip!).



16. **Be creative** – being creative can be really therapeutic. If your first response to this is *'I'm not creative at all'*, think again! Creativity can take many different guises. This could be anything from drawing, colouring, writing, gardening, cooking, doing a jigsaw, playing with Lego, starting an online community group – again, whatever works for you.
17. **Humour** – we are British! Humour is our birth right – so use it. I know I use humour (I have to!) – it's a great way of lifting our mood and feeling more perspective.

18. **Buffer children** – children and young people have access to all sorts of information now. Be mindful of the conversations you have with them and in front of them. They need us to make sense of what is happening in an age appropriate way. They will remember how we dealt with this and it will inform their learned responses in the future.
19. **Rest well, eat well** – this has been the basic advice for many years for a reason. It is imperative that we fuel ourselves in the right way and give ourselves a chance for recovery. If you are a key worker and work feels relentless at the moment, as a minimum, rest when you can and ask for help when you need it.



20. **Be grateful** – Being grateful for what and who we have in our lives, and our current health situation, grounds us and helps us to focus less on what we feel we don't have – it's a great antidote to fear and anxiety.

**Feel free to share this article with your staff or use the information within it as a springboard for conversations with your team on what they can do to stay well.**

## Brigade issues heater warning ahead of work from home winter

The London Fire Brigade is urging people to take extra care when heating homes as many prepare for a work from home winter. In the last five years, portable heaters have caused over 700 fires and injured more than 140 people.



The Brigade is warning of a possible spike in fires as people turn to cheaper ways to heat their homes, without properly considering the fire risks.

With more than half of employed Londoners working from home earlier this year, and many continuing to do so into the New Year, it is likely to mean that the heating will be on for longer.

According to a study by Energy Helpline, the average household energy bill could climb by £107 this winter for those working from home five days a week.

To heat up one room, portable heaters are one of the most common alternatives to turning on the main household heating, but if they are not used properly, could cause a devastating fire.

Fires starting between the hours of 12pm and 5pm in London, that have involved heaters have almost doubled this year. As the weather gets colder, there is a concern that fires involving heaters could spike as more people bring portable heaters into their work from home set-ups.

## Thank you for reading

Thank you for taking time to read this edition of Astute Safety Thinking. Please send any feedback on what you enjoyed to [paul.sidney@astutesafetyconsulting.com](mailto:paul.sidney@astutesafetyconsulting.com) and let us know if there is a subject you would like us to cover in future issues.

Astute Safety Consulting carry out free safety health checks on Businesses in Bristol and the South West. If you would like us to visit your business, please get in touch now.