

# Astute Safety Thinking

## Welcome

Welcome to this December edition of Astute Safety Thinking and a Merry Christmas to you all.

**I started the last edition by saying – ‘This has been a strange year and it does not look to be getting any easier’ and to be honest, it is not getting easier. Once again though, hopefully we can give you a few thoughts and ideas to stay safe in your workplace.**

We have the second part to ‘A guide to home working’ and we have an article on how long it takes for alcohol to leave the blood stream – I am always surprised when I see how long this takes. It might be a bit bah humbug mentioning it here just before Christmas, but it is better learning about it now rather than being told about it just after being breathalysed by the police. There is an article about a business owner who ignored notices from the council and finally a guide to bring workers back safely after being away from work after Covid-19.

I hope that you find this useful and informative. Remember, 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 - part 2

### Home worker or lone worker?

Employers need to be aware that their home workers are lone workers and should be treated as such, particularly when it comes to mental health and wellbeing.

The rise in home working has mirrored the rise in technology. Robust broadband means employees can now check-in with the office from the spare room, coffee shop or just about anywhere with an internet connection.

Benefits to employers are obvious; finances improve as overheads like office space and other facilities are offset as employers provide their own workspace. Workers often report increased motivation from the flexibility that remote working offers, increasing productivity and staff retention.



However, like the railway engineer and security guard the home worker is still classified as a lone worker; something often overlooked by employers. Employers have a duty to protect the health and safety of all employees, including home workers.

## Why are video chats so exhausting?

Video chat is helping us stay employed and connected. But what makes it so tiring – and how can we reduce ‘Zoom fatigue’?

- Is video chat harder? What’s different compared to face-to-face communication?
- How are the current circumstances contributing?
- When I’m Zooming my friends, shouldn’t that relax me?
- How can we alleviate Zoom fatigue?

The BBC has put together an article entitled, ‘The reason Zoom calls drain your energy’,

<https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20200421-why-zoom-video-chats-are-so-exhausting>



## Tips for working from home

There is no doubt that as well as the anxiety provoked by a potentially deadly virus and no toilet roll or pasta in the supermarket, we are also facing the very likely fact that many workers will be being plunged into home working for the first time, to speak nothing of the potential requirements for isolation. Some of those workers may already have experience of a day or so a week, but few of them will have worked full time from home for such a long period of time and few of their managers will have managed large teams in such a situation either.

A 2017 United Nations report found that 41% of remote workers reported high stress levels, compared to just 25% of office workers. It is believed that being ‘out of sight, out of mind’ and the tendency for managers to become increasingly task focused and actually attempt to micromanage more than before was partly to blame. Conversely, a similar report in 2018 found that remote working was associated with higher workplace wellbeing with the benefit of flexibility and autonomy.

What we do know though, according to ACAS guidance is that “only suitable people should be offered the choice of regular remote working” (with suitability not just about them as people but also about their home set up). And here we are with everyone, suitable or not, into that boat, in an environment which is already highly charged.

The research on how to be a good home worker is mostly focused around entrepreneurs who are accountable just to themselves. The research on how to be a good manager of remote teams is sparse.

Here are some considerations to take into account when managing the risk to home workers.

- Create good work spaces;
- Create routines;
- Keep in contact.

Here are some top tips for home working in imperfect circumstances...

## How Astute Safety Consulting can help

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>



## The Christmas gift you do not want!

Christmas parties seem a bit of a distant memory now – well the ones you could remember anyway.

Christmas socials are still happening online though, and these are quite fun as we pour our own measures and can leave whenever we like without worrying who is offended. The journey to bed is so much easier and we can sleep off the drink without it being shaken up in a taxi or on the night bus.

But do we really sleep it off? When is it okay to drive again or go into work and operate machinery?

Look at the table below to check how long you should leave before attempting to drive.

Don't forget to allow for your own measures – they are nothing like the measures you will get in the pub.



We are not trying to spoil your fun, but instead protect you from losing your driving license, job or even worse being involved in an accident that will be blamed on you.

### SHOULD YOU DRIVE THE MORNING AFTER?

Number of hours per drink + 1 hr = minimum time to allow before driving, calculated from your LAST drink.

	 3.5 hrs	 2.5 hrs	 1.5 hrs	 2 hrs	 3 hrs	 2.5 hrs
	13% Large Glass Wine	4% Pint	40% Single Spirits	5% Alcopop	40% Double Spirits	5% Lager
1	3.5 hrs	2.5 hrs	1.5 hrs	2 hrs	3 hrs	2.5 hrs
2	7 hrs	5 hrs	3 hrs	4 hrs	6 hrs	5 hrs
3	10.5 hrs	7.5 hrs	4.5 hrs	6 hrs	9 hrs	7.5 hrs
4	14 hrs	10 hrs	6 hrs	8 hrs	12 hrs	10 hrs
5	17.5 hrs	12.5 hrs	7.5 hrs	10 hrs	15 hrs	12.5 hrs

\*This is only a guide.

## Business owner convicted after ignoring notices

A mechanic and landlord based in Kent has been sentenced after refusing to comply with enforcement notices issued by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and Kent Fire and Rescue Service to protect workers and tenants from injury.



The HSE received contact from people concerned that workers were accessing the dangerous unguarded flat roof of The Convent of Mercy in Swanley. The premises were being used to store car parts for a car repair and sales business owned by Mustafa Kemal Mustafa. Mr Mustafa was also the landlord of The Convent, a house of multiple occupancy (HMO).

The HSE visited with other agencies and issued seven enforcement notices, covering unsafe working at height, dangerous electrical installations, flammable risks and machinery guarding.

Croydon Crown Court heard that Mr Mustafa deliberately ignored prohibition and improvement notices served by the HSE and continued to put himself, workers and members of the public at risk. Mr Mustafa pleaded guilty to non-compliance of notices breaching:

- Section 21 and 22 of [Health and Safety at Work Act 1974](#);
- Section 4(2) of the Electricity at Work Regulations 1989;
- Section 6(3) of the [Work at Height Regulations 2005](#).

He has been disqualified as a director for six years, received two suspended custodial sentences, 300 hours unpaid work and ordered to pay £8,000 in costs.

Speaking after the hearing, HSE Inspector Joanne Williams, said: "HSE is dedicated to ensuring that business owners and landlords operate within the law and provide safe accommodation for tenants and a safe place to work for employees.

"We do not tolerate disregard for health and safety and consider the non-compliance of HSE enforcement notices as a serious offence. In this case Mr Mustafa chose to flagrantly ignore the support, guidance and warnings from HSE to assist his compliance with the law and continued placing people at serious risk of injury or even death."

Inspector Williams added: "Wherever possible we continue to work with companies to improve health and safety. However, we will not hesitate to take enforcement action where necessary and prosecute individuals and businesses who ignore warnings and the law."

## Return to Work after COVID-19: Safety managers urged to act now to prevent injuries

Workers returning to work after being furloughed are putting their bodies at risk due to no longer being at full working strength. It is thought that the world is about to see the biggest return to work programme ever faced.

If not managed, the manual workers body is at high risk of injury.

Managers are being urged to consider the impact that the time off due to coronavirus has had on returning workers bodies. Thought must be given to those that have been off work, perhaps very isolated at home, eating, drinking, and doing a lot of sedentary activities. Usual tasks have not been practiced and these workers could now be considered a high risk and 'unfit' for duty initiating one of the biggest return to work programmes ever faced by health and safety managers.

Early intervention programmes and processes need to be put in place immediately to stop problems escalating. All risks surrounding this imminent problem need mitigating and the consideration not just of the physiological impacts but of the psychosocial concerns arising from the pandemic that will be playing

a part in capacity, presentation and conduct of these employees.

### Physiological Impact

Adopting time to carve out a warming up procedure is now more important than ever, not just for the physiological reasons but to help workers check in with their bodies and bring awareness to how they are feeling. It is very easy to expect our bodies to act accordingly and not take into consideration the impact of time off from movement, or time off from any specific type of movement, like that done at work.



An increase in sedentary behaviour has many side effects that are not beneficial to the health and wellbeing of our musculoskeletal system. Weight gain, a decline in aerobic capacity, muscle wastage, decrease in proprioception are to name a few.

Muscle strength can fall after just two weeks of inactivity, and those with more muscle strength to begin with will lose more. Other activities such as cycling can help to regain muscle mass, but muscle strength on the other hand requires using weights like those lifted or handled before. It can also take more

than three times the amount of time to regain the strength lost through immobility. The other very significant aspect to be aware of is proprioception. Proprioception deteriorates with sedentary lifestyle. This is the body's way of understanding the position of itself in space, or body position awareness. This is important in manual handling tasks, as understanding whether your own body is following the positions outlined in training or taking positions that may cause harm is key in understanding workers own risk.

## Psychosocial Impact

Consideration of the psychosocial risk factors that will now be present as a by-product from the coronavirus need to be part of an overall approach to maintaining safety. The effects of physical exposures are increased when any psychosocial factors are also involved.



Anxiety is one of the largest and research shows that when above its normal level, the immune system is weakened. Supporting employees, acknowledging the current situation, and putting measures in place to help with stress levels is imperative.

Different workplace psychosocial factors resulting from being furloughed, changes due to the impact of the pandemic, along with fear of being infected can originate from many areas:

- Lower predictability in work caused by disturbances or unexpected changes – this represents a salient health hazard.
- Stress – especially those employees exposed to public areas and anxiety relating to social distancing.
- Job insecurity.
- Role or work conflicts due to changes of staffing, downsizing, restructuring.
- Time pressures – frustration in not being able to do the work at the same pace, especially if they are paid based on efficiency/picks.
- Concentration might need to be trained.
- Fatigue likely to be a greater and cause drop in safety critical attention span or alertness.
- Increase in likelihood of errors due to any of the factors above.
- Early intervention programmes for return to work.

Most injuries develop slowly, and supervisors do not have the tools to support workers who start to feel pain and often nothing is done.

Early intervention programmes can assist workers to take note and simply be aware of their moving bodies especially as they are returning from time off, it is imperative to make sure they focus on best movement practice, stretching and strengthening exercises. Workers should be trained to listen to their body, understand how to recognise the early signs and symptoms of possible injury and how to prevent it.

A standard early intervention programme specialising in building awareness, coaching around safe movement and easy correction that clearly outlines the implications of ignoring signs not only helps protect from injury but facilitates and encourages an early

reporting culture. Early interventions stops the hesitation and stigma around early reporting and empowers employees to take control of their own bodies.

Employees need to be coached and assisted with developing their physical awareness to determine if their discomfort is arising from muscles simply waking back up or if there is potential for injury. Have systems ready to go with immediate clear strategies that workers are aware of to assist those who are feeling discomfort due to returning to work. This not only supports them physically but psychologically has an impact on any possible feelings of anxiety or stress.

## Efficiency expectations

Expectations of efficiency also need to be assessed. Especially now if workers are struggling financially and want to make money if they're paid by shift length or even worse, their efficiency. There will be a tendency for workers to want to move faster but considering all the physiological or psychosocial impacts after time off from a pandemic, this is not the time. It's important for companies not to have workers hit the ground running as soon as things restart but review the conditioning of the workforce first.

Managers might want to reach out to support the fitness and wellbeing of their workers now to help with this, to build a foundation of strength rather than waiting until the first day of work. Work hardening and building employees back up to the stamina that they need to work and prevent problems.

## Conclusion

This current situation of many workers returning from time off, is a great opportunity for employers to assess their workforce, connect, recalibrate and monitor strength levels, fatigue, emotions, pain or any of the factors that influence movement behaviour. Work together to provide the best possible chance of minimising strain on these workers' bodies and reduce the occurrence of recordable injuries and related costs.

## 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.

