

WHMIS Training for Remote Workers – Ask The Expert

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Do remote workers still need to participate in health and safety training – and, if so, what should be covered?

All workers need to know the risks they are exposed to in the workplace, even if said workplace is their own home.

QUESTION

I am an employer who is wondering what the requirements are for having remote employees participate in WHMIS training. Do the requirements to have a health and safety representative or committee in an Ontario working environment still ring true if the worker is working remotely? How should I establish health and safety training for remote workers in Ontario?

ANSWER

While you do not need to perform on-site inspections in your employee's home, you do still need to establish specific forms of health and safety training for remote workers to ensure all of your employees are safe.

EXPLANATION

There are potential risks in any home office space, but your job as an employer is to provide materials (reading, eLearning, and meetings) that help your remote workers identify risks that can come from working at home (such as ergonomic safety and eye strain) and ensure your **job site** is safe. Since their home is not your job site, you do not have to perform assessments.

However, when dealing with remote employees, health and safety still needs to be appropriately managed for employees who are working from home. In certain circumstances, injuries sustained at the employee's home can be classified as workplace-related. In order to minimize the risk, your remote work policy should:

- Define where the workplace extends to and how the workplace extends into the employee's home;
- Indicate when the employee is considered to be in the work environment and when they are not;

- Make it clear that breaks are time away from work; and
- Establish that the employee is expected to maintain a safe work area in their home in a manner similar to the office environment and free of safety hazards.

One of the most important health and safety questions that should be answered when working at home is who will be responsible for health and safety issues and worker's compensation if the employee is injured. To avoid complications, there should be a written agreement between the employer and the employee clarifying these matters. Where possible, aim to maintain appropriate health and safety standards at home by checking in with your remote employees regularly.

Health and safety issues include:

- What parts of the house will be considered the 'workplace'? Is the bathroom and/or kitchen included? That employee must immediately report any incident or injury to their supervisor (just as they would at the office).
- How will incidents be investigated?

Of course, there will be significantly reduced health and safety supervision of employees that are working remotely. This further stresses the importance of regular communication between employers and employees to ensure that employees remain safe and healthy and that they continue to comply with the guidelines, practices and procedures implemented by the employer in respect of remote work.

As an HR Insider member, you now have access to eLearning and an LMS. One of the courses available to you is WHMIS, as well as AODA (both required training in Ontario).