



# Mitigating OSH risks to distributed workers



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This document gives real-life examples of occupational safety and health leadership and management for distributed workers.

The purpose of this document is to provide employers and practitioners with real-world examples of what organisations have done to prevent, mitigate, manage and respond to occupational safety and health (OSH) risks and to provide health promotion for distributed workers. It aims to encourage and inspire others to take action to support and protect the safety and health of this group of workers.

## Recommendation

In some cases, the risks or OSH needs involved were identified as a result of an incident or accident; in others, they were flagged up by the distributed

workers themselves or emerged over time. In all cases, it is recommended that employers take a collective approach to decision-making and designing solutions, so that workers and other relevant stakeholders are involved in the solution development.

This document sets out six examples where an organisation has put in place measures directed at minimising the potential harm from unavoidable hazards.

Areas of activity	Examples included
Mitigating OSH risks to distributed workers – i.e. measures directed at minimising the potential harm from unavoidable hazards	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1 Police force mitigating risks presented by exposure to blood and body fluids</li><li>2 Construction company mitigating risks presented by high-voltage cables</li><li>3 Goods transportation company mitigating risks presented by a low bridge</li><li>4 Video to mitigate risks presented by overhead cables</li><li>5 Mitigating night shift-working risks</li><li>6 Mitigating risks of home working</li></ol>

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## 1 Police force mitigating risks presented by exposure to blood and body fluids

One of the risks to which police and security workers are exposed is dealing with people who may have a blood-borne virus (for instance Hepatitis C and HIV). The organisation worked with the Police Federation representatives to establish procedures for decontamination of uniform in respect of blood and body fluid splatter, and to give reassurance to the officers. It is not possible to remove the risk totally because police officers do have to deal with individuals who have the blood-borne virus; although the risk presented by such contamination is very low, the need to protect officers was fully recognised.

The organisation is taking the following steps to mitigate these risks:

- reviewing the guidance given to officers to make sure it is suitable and sufficient.
- where there is significant contamination, arranging for officers to exchange their uniforms straightaway and they are disposed of via incineration.
- working to achieve a common understanding of the actual level of risk, where the perceived level of risk was greater than the reality.

- exploring onsite chemical decontamination, through provision of a spray bottle used to spray-decontaminate the spots and then returning, followed by returning the garment for washing.

## 2 Construction company mitigating risks presented by high-voltage cables

The organisation recognised that it needed to prevent harm to employees working in the close vicinity of high-voltage (HV) cables. It recognised that some of the HV cables their workers were dealing with could be in a poor state and presented risks when exposed, including risk of electrocutional burning.

To mitigate these risks, the organisation:

- put in place a process to establish a hatched area around HV cables to indicate where they are positioned and to require hand-digging in that area.
- provided insulated handles on shovels.
- established a requirement to make sure that when an operative hits a cable, the area is quickly cordoned off, members of the public are moved out the way and nobody

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enters that area until the owner repairs it.

- Providing training on HV cable issues over and above the training already in place concerning safe digging practices.
- Aim to eliminate risks, so that when an HV cable is identified, the company asks the designers to put the gas pipe or other installation in a different place that is not near the HV cable.

## 3 Goods transportation company mitigating risks presented by a low bridge

The organisation makes regular deliveries to a delivery address for which the route recommended by satellite navigation systems goes under a 10ft 6in (3.2m) railway bridge. Their vans are in excess of 10 ft 6 in so they don't fit under this bridge. To avoid drivers going on this route, the organisation:

- puts up notices in the drivers' restroom and notices in the drivers' notes.
- when a new driver starts, this route is mentioned at their induction and the transport despatch team makes a point of verbally telling them.
- encourages drivers to talk to each other and pass on knowledge about customers and routes, including

drivers who are going on holiday giving briefing to those who are going to cover their work, by having a friendly ethos in the company in which people look after each other.

## 4 Utilities company mitigating risks presented by overhead cables

A utilities company had a serious accident where an engineer came into contact with some overhead power cables. The workers had not followed the procedure they should have followed. The reasons for this were not entirely clear but the general consensus view was the training that they had received had been insufficient or had not been assimilated, and there were conflicting priorities around getting the job done versus safety.

In response to the accident, the organisation is rolling out revised training including a video featuring the two men who were involved in the incident, who talk openly about what happened, what it meant to them, and what the consequences were. The company uses this to get across the message. They have also got the unions involved in endorsing the messaging and have taken a collective approach to finding channels that people are more likely to take notice of.

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Traditionally the company would have sacked workers for this kind of breach of safety procedure, but instead, on this occasion, it has encouraged them to be open, which has generated discussion within the business about how the business is taking the issue seriously.

*“So that’s a good example of how you can turn adversity to your advantage... And you’ve got to find hard-hitting ways of getting that message across to people. So you can send out all the bits of paper you like, and put all the bits of stuff on the intranet you like, but you have to use other channels as well.”*

## 5 Mitigating night shift-working risks

The organisation had a culture of under-reporting of accidents and incidents for night shift workers, so there was no focus on identifying root causes. It recognised that it needed to get night shift managers and supervisors to take issues more seriously. So it created a focus on night shifts, to emphasise that they are just as important as all the other shifts and implemented the following changes:

- directors and managers do tours at night and interact with the staff.
- safety reps have been established for the night shift.

- risk assessments have been reviewed and night shift workers involved in the risk assessments.
- safety conferences have been set up, directed at managers who are carrying out investigations of the incidents to ensure they understand the human factors involved and explore the incident to establish the facts and the root cause.
- safety behaviour training is being put in place.

## 6 Mitigating risks of home working in an advice and mediation organisation

An organisation that employs a number of home workers established the following procedures to mitigate the potential risks that home working might pose:

- before someone becomes a home worker, a risk assessment is conducted that considers the individual and the working arrangements. This happens before the final decision is taken or any equipment is ordered and involves a trained individual working through a specific checklist and a home assessment.
- these risk assessments are followed up annually, using the same checklist, to make sure that the

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situation hasn't changed, equipment is being used and maintained, and the individual is working safely.

- if the assessment indicates that the individual is not using an appropriate working arrangement, in terms of DSE requirements, trip hazards etc, they are given the opportunity to put it right and then reassessed.
- for home workers who have school-aged children and work at times when the children are not at school, in order to prevent risks arising from the worker having to juggle childcare and work, the organisation requires them to confirm that they have appropriate childcare set up and ensures expectations are made clear.
- the company reminds home workers regularly that they need to report any accidents because their home is their workplace.
- the company makes sure that home workers understand how to operate the equipment properly; and if there is an equipment fault or malfunction, home workers are asked to report this promptly. It has a team of technical support people who will go out and visit if a home worker doesn't know how or has problems with a piece of equipment. It conducts annual

electrical appliance testing so home workers bring their cables in once a year and those are swapped over.