

Laptops & Other Portable Computing Devices Guidance

Working with a Laptop

The Health and Safety Executive advises that portable Display Screen Equipment (DSE) such as laptops and handheld devices are subject to the DSE Regulations if in prolonged use for work purposes.

This guidance is to provide advice to those members of staff who use Laptop PC's as part of their work. Where a member of staff is provided with a laptop, it is important to familiarise themselves with its user manual and this guidance.

Where a member of staff is provided with a laptop computer, it is intended that it is to be used stand-alone for mobile/community-based work only.

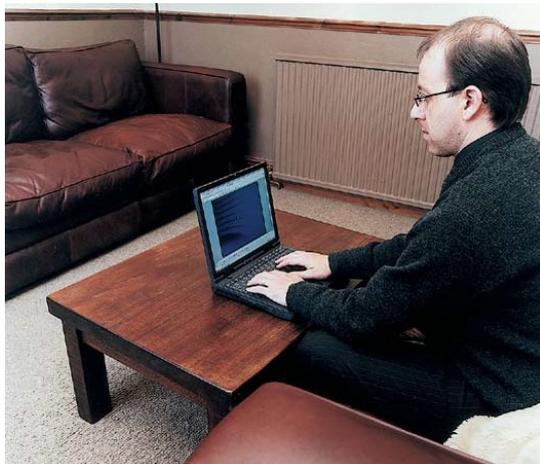
In any other situation e.g. prolonged office or home use, a docking station or separate monitor, or laptop riser blocks (see photograph (2)), separate keyboard and mouse will be provided for member of staff.



Problems associated with laptops and similar equipment.

New smaller and more portable devices such as laptops, tablets and smartphones are designed to make work easier, more accessible and therefore make us more productive. However, because it is harder to find a good posture to use these devices, the risk to the user of discomfort and fatigue is increased and needs to be managed.

Be aware that some design compromises inherent in portables can lead to postural or other problems (for example a bent neck, or headaches arising from the low, fixed position of the screen). See the photograph (1) below.

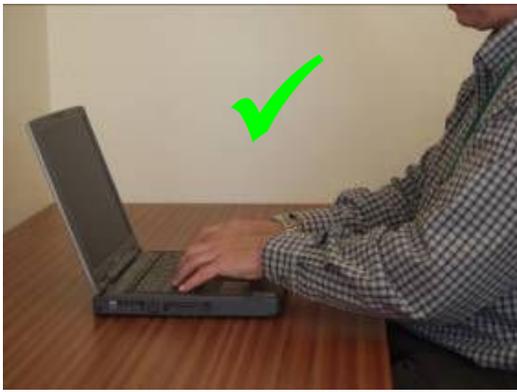


(1) The above picture shows a set up that would not be acceptable for extended use.



(2) A typical laptop docking station

- One way of tackling such risks is to avoid prolonged use and take more frequent breaks. Another way is to use the portable with a docking station or additional equipment. Another way is to use the portable device with a docking station or additional equipment. See photograph (2) above.
- Docking stations/additional equipment will be provided for appropriate staff where use is lengthy or repeated.
- When using the laptop keyboard, try not to drop your wrists onto the wrist rest. Instead, move your hands freely across the keyboard and keep your hands in line with your elbows.



- Set up the portable equipment on a suitable work surface wherever possible and avoid use for extended periods in other situations. For example, resting a portable on the user's lap is not only likely to induce a poor working posture but could result in discomfort due to the heat generated by the computer.
- Try to work on surfaces similar in height to normal office workstations.
- Ensure there is adequate lighting for the tasks. Where possible, minimise disability glare by careful positioning.
- Where possible choose chairs that provide sufficient support to the back and encourage good general posture.
- Remember to take regular breaks, bearing in mind that increased DSE use is linked to an increasing risk of discomfort.
- Should you experience any problems or discomfort whilst working with the portable DSE please report it promptly to your line manager or the Health & Safety Team who will be able to advise.

Palmtops, PCDs and tablet PCs

Flexible working is making increasing use of portable DSE other than laptops, such as smart phones and tablet PCs. These units are likely to present similar risks to those associated with laptops. The smaller size means that the ergonomic limitations of the equipment, their use in unsuitable environments and the risk of theft will all be increased, though manual handling problems will be reduced.

Data entry via a stylus, touch-sensitive screen and handwriting recognition software may be preferable to using an under-sized keyboard, but extended use of these is not recommended (even where battery life permits) as they may present the same opportunities for eyestrain and musculoskeletal problems as any other DSE. Employees must also be warned not to use handheld equipment while walking, to reduce the risks of slips, trips and falls.

Managers should ensure that no one habitually uses hand-held equipment for a significant part of their normal work. Such equipment has uses in the field or on the move, but the bulk of the daily DSE work should be carried out on a desktop computer, or using a laptop with suitable, additional equipment.

Other considerations:

- **Theft and Assault**
 - Take sensible precautions such as not carrying portables in luggage with a computer manufacturer's branding; not leaving or using a portable in a parked car; and taking extra care in public places, or in other situations (or at times) where the risk of theft may be greater.
- **Manual Handling**
 - Do not carry equipment or papers unless they are really likely to be needed.
 - Different types of carrying equipment are available, e.g. a backpack to cut down strain on arms and distribute loads evenly across the body (or wheeled luggage might be worth considering).



Other sources of information:

- Shropshire Council has produced two documents that give general information. Display Screen Equipment and Agile (Home) Working.
- Schools can access these documents on the Shropshire Learning Gateway\ Administration \Occupational Health and Safety\A-Z
- The HSE also provide useful advice on their website [here](#)

Action:

- All staff defined as DSE users, should have a current individual DSE risk assessment in place. This should take into account any use of laptops etc. If this is not the case, please contact the Health & Safety Team who will forward you a link to undertake the online assessment. If there are any actions arising from this assessment, these should be discussed with your line manager.
N.B. Each school is allowed 2 licences free of charge for the online assessment but will have to pay for any additional ones. For further details contact the Health and Safety Team 01743 252819 or email health.safety@shropshire.gov.uk. A hard copy is available on SLG\Administration \Occupational Health and Safety\Risk Assessments\DSE risk assessment.
- For those of you required to work from home, please complete the basic Health & Safety check list given in the Agile Working guidance available on the intranet and return to your line manager.