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Telecommuting: Are Your Employees Getting Work Done When They're Working From Home?

When confronted with an intensive, time-sensitive writing project, there's nothing I like more than taking a day out of the office to set up shop at my kitchen table and crank the thing out in my jammies. Apparently, I'm not alone. According to a [CareerBuilder survey](#), more American workers are working from home on a regular basis, and 30 percent like to do so in their pajamas (41 percent of females and 22 percent of males). The more startling statistic in CareerBuilders report is that nearly one in five Americans who work from home spends less than an hour per day doing actual work. This statistic has caused some [controversy](#), as reports like [this one](#) claim a spike in productivity when workers telecommute. I work from home occasionally to escape office distractions, but there is no question that working at home can present its share of distractions, too. These often include things like doing another load of laundry, watching the Today Show instead of getting work done, letting the dog out (and then in, and then out), running errands, surfing the internet, or keeping track of kids. [CareerBuilder](#) and [others](#) have offered ideas for the telecommuting worker to stay motivated and on-task, but what can an employer do to ensure that employees working from home are actually working?

Although it may be predictable advice from an employment law attorney, have a policy that covers telecommuting. A telecommuting policy should set forth general principles and guidelines for telecommuters, including that the telecommuter is expected to perform all duties and responsibilities assigned to him or her, and that the employers policies apply to all workers, no matter their work location. Set forth guidelines for requesting permission to telecommute, and make clear that telecommuting is not a substitute for child care. Other issues to address include timekeeping and workplace safety. If telecommuting workers are non-exempt, there should be a plan in place for recording and reporting hours so as not to run afoul of wage and hour laws. As for safety, an employer is legally obligated to provide a workplace free from hazards, and the employer may still be liable for workplace injuries even if they happen in the employees home. As explained in an earlier [post](#), employers must clearly communicate expectations for reporting injuries that take place on working time, and reserve the right to periodically inspect a home office for safety (with advance notice).

In addition to a policy, employers should have an agreement in place with each individual employee who regularly telecommutes to address these issues as they specifically apply to that person.

Different employers may come to different conclusions about whether telecommuting is a good idea for their workforce. Those who want to offer this flexibility should put expectations in writing and measure employees performance against those expectations, just like you would for any other employee. If workers are getting good work done in their jammies, its a win for everyone.