

## EDITOR'S COMMENT



There's been a major shift in workplace practices in Ireland since the outbreak of the Covid pandemic early last year, with remote working now the norm for thousands of employees across the country.

January saw the publication by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment of Ireland's first remote work strategy, entitled 'Making Remote Work – National Remote Working Strategy'.

This has set out a raft of plans to strengthen the rights and responsibilities of both employers and employees, to provide the infrastructure to work remotely, and provides guidance on how people can be empowered to work remotely from the office.

The new legislation on the cards this year is likely to have a major impact for both sides. And the right of employees to work remotely, which is proving to be a grey area on many levels, came to the fore in January in the first landmark ruling by the Workplace Relations Commission during this pandemic.

The WRC found in favour of an office-based employee, who had taken a case against her employer, having resigned in May 2020 during the first lockdown after the employer turned down her request to work from home.

The case has served as a reminder to employers of their obligations to adhere to health and safety legislation arising from the implications of Covid-19. However, one employment lawyer has noted in this issue of 'Health & Safety Times' "not every request for homeworking can or will be granted....and the employer may refuse the request if the business does not allow for it".

When all such issues on remote working have been settled by the new legislation, and when the dust finally settles, one thing is for sure - the fall-out in terms of people's mental health and wellbeing will certainly be felt long after we see an end to this pandemic. And only then will we be able to analyse and hopefully repair the damage that has been done. It is certainly going to be a long road ahead.

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- » H&S accreditation awarded to construction consultancy
- » Passport to employee health and resilience
- » First NISO/NISG 'Excellence in Safety' Award
- » PIAB fully backs insurance reform plan
- » Health Research Board strategy to make an impact

it looks like both employers and employees still have many issues to iron out before things go smoothly.

## 23 WORKPLACE BULLYING

The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) and the Workplace Relations Commission (WRC) have prepared a joint Code of Practice on the Prevention and Resolution of Bullying at Work, which came into operation on 23 December 2020, following a consultative process with the main stakeholders.



## 27 HEALTHY WORKPLACE FRAMEWORK



## 14 REMOTE WORKING LEGISLATION

The pandemic has certainly seen a seismic shift in work practices. And now that home working is the norm for thousands of employees across Ireland, with remote work hubs also set to become increasingly popular,



## 24 PERSONAL INJURY GUIDELINES

With new guidelines on damages for personal injuries by the Judicial Council scheduled to be adopted and published by 31 July, the Alliance for Insurance Reform is now calling for a major reduction on the level of minor injury awards by 80 per cent, to reflect international norms and norms already established by the Court of Appeal.

The Department of Health is currently in the process of updating content for the Healthy Workplace Framework, to take account of the new challenges of remote working in addition to the changes that have taken place in the workplace since the start of the pandemic.



## 29 DCU COVID RESEARCH

New research by Dublin City University on the experiences of pre-hospital first responders during the pandemic reveals that contracting the virus and passing it to loved ones has been a primary source of worry for them. The DCU research team now hopes the findings will help inform the current response to Covid-19, improve risk management in the medium-term, and help build longer-term national resilience.

## 32 NISO-NISG SAFETY AWARDS

The Supreme Safety Award winner for 2020 – PM Group – was announced during an online ceremony of the 29th NISO/NISG Annual Occupational Safety Awards in January, and made safety award history by becoming the first organisation to win the top prize two years in a row!

## 35 MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE



A free new mental health service to support people working at the frontline during Covid-19 is being provided by turn2me – the first organisation in Ireland to provide professional mental health support services entirely online, with funding from Sláintecare.

## 37 HSA PROGRAMME OF WORK

The Health and Safety Authority's Programme for Work 2021 has set out its range of strategic objectives, such as the pandemic response, provision of advice on the requirements of Brexit, and support of the Government's Remote Working Strategy, by promoting the HSA's range of advice, e-tools and supports available.



## 41 WORKPLACE VENTILATION

Proper air quality and ventilation in the workplace is crucial in helping to prevent serious health issues, including the transmission of Covid-19 and other respiratory viruses. However, over 50% of respondents to a nationwide survey by Eirdata, in conjunction with Engineers Ireland, rated indoor air quality and ventilation in their organisations as 'poor' or 'average'.



## 42 IOSH NEWS

A new research study, commissioned by the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) into workers' mental health problems, has called on employers to take a greater account of an individual's needs, and emphasises the need for more tailored approaches when planning a return to work by their employees.



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