

Lone Workers

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Who are lone workers?

Lone workers are those who work by themselves without close or direct supervision. Anybody who works alone, including contractors, self-employed people and employee, is classed as a lone worker.

Lone workers include:

- people in fixed establishments where only one person works on the premises, e.g. in small workshops, kiosks, petrol stations, shops and home-workers
- people work separately from others, e.g. in factories, warehouses, some research and training establishments, leisure centers or fairgrounds
- people who work outside normal hours, e.g. cleaners, security, special production, maintenance or repair staff, etc.
- people who work working away from their fixed base, e.g. on construction, plant installation, maintenance and cleaning work, electrical repairs, lift repairs, painting and decorating, vehicle recovery, etc.
- agricultural and forestry workers
- service workers, e.g. rent collectors, postal staff, social workers, home helps, district nurses, pest control workers, drivers, engineers, architects, estate agents, sales representatives and similar professionals visiting domestic and commercial premises.

Are people legally allowed to work alone?

Yes. There is nothing specific in general legislation that prohibits a person from working alone. Section 19 of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 requires the employer to undertake a risk assessment, and so this shall determine whether or not an employee may work alone. Therefore, in general, an employer must assess whether an employee is at significantly higher risk when working alone. However, employers must be aware of any specific legislation on lone working, which may be applicable to their specific industry, e.g. supervision in diving operations, vehicles carrying explosives.

What kind of hazards might lone workers be exposed to?

Hazards that lone workers may encounter include:

- accidents or emergencies arising out of the work, including inadequate provision of first aid
- sudden illnesses
- inadequate provision of rest, hygiene and welfare facilities

- physical violence from members of the public and/or intruders

What responsibilities do lone workers have?

The employer holds the main responsibility for protecting the safety and health of lone workers. Nonetheless, lone workers themselves have a responsibility to help their employer fulfil this duty, and so they must:

- Take reasonable care to look after their own safety and health
- Safeguard the safety and health of other people affected by their work
- Co-operate with their employer's safety and health procedures
- Use tools and other equipment properly, in accordance with any relevant safety instructions and training they have been given
- Not misuse equipment provided for their safety and health
- Report all accidents, injuries, near-misses and other dangerous occurrences

What happens if the risk assessment shows that it is not possible for the work to be carried out safely by a lone worker?

If the risk assessment shows that it is not possible for the work to be done safely by a lone worker, arrangements for providing help or backup should be put in place. Where a lone worker is working at another employer's workplace, that employer should inform the lone worker's employer of any risks and the control measures to be taken. This also helps the lone worker's employer to assess the risks.

What control measures could be implemented to minimize the risk to lone workers?

The risk assessment should prescribe control measures to be implemented in order to eliminate/minimize the identified risks. Such control measures may include:

- communication is very important: mobile phone, telephone or radio
- controlled periodic checks
- automatic warning devices, e.g. panic alarms, no movement alarms, automatic distress message systems, i.e. prerecorded message sent if not actively cancelled by operative, etc.
- instruction and training in proper procedures, e.g. code words for potentially violent situations when combined with mobile phone communication.
- use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
- health surveillance
- first-aid kits and training
- implementing Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's)
- locking and securing place of work
- implementing correct incident reporting procedures
- provision of counselling

What issues should the employer address when planning safe working arrangements for lone workers?

When establishing safe working arrangements for lone workers, employers need to know the law and standards that may apply to their specific work activity. They must then assess if the requirements of that work activity can be met by people working alone. Issues that need to be addressed when planning such safe working arrangements are:

1. Can the risks of the job be adequately controlled by one person?

Lone workers should not be at more risk than other employees. This may require extra risk control measures. Precautions should take account of normal work and foreseeable emergencies, e.g. fire, equipment failure, illness and accidents. Employers should identify situations where people work alone and ask questions such as:

- Does the workplace present a special risk to the lone worker?
- Is there a safe way in and a way out for one person? Can any temporary access equipment that is necessary, such as portable ladders or trestles, be safely handled by one person?
- Can all the plant, substances and goods involved in the work be safely handled by one person? Consider whether the work involves lifting objects too large for one person or whether more than one person is needed to operate essential controls for the safe running of equipment.
- Is there a risk of violence?
- Are women especially at risk if they work alone?
- Are young workers especially at risk if they work alone?

2. Is the person medically fit and suitable to work alone?

Check that lone workers have no medical conditions which may make them unsuitable for working alone. Seek medical advice if necessary. Consider both routine work and foreseeable emergencies, which may impose additional physical and mental burdens on the individual.

3. What training is required to ensure competency in safety matters?

Training is particularly important where there is limited supervision to control, guide and help in situations of uncertainty. Training may be critical to avoid panic reactions in unusual situations. Lone workers need to be sufficiently experienced and to understand the risks and precautions fully. Employers should set the limits to what can and cannot be done while working alone. They should ensure employees are competent to deal with circumstances that are new, unusual or beyond the scope of training, e.g. when to stop work and seek advice from a supervisor and how to handle aggression.

4. How will the person be supervised?

Although lone workers cannot be subject to constant supervision, it is still an employer's duty to ensure their safety and health at work. Supervision can help to ensure that employees understand the risks associated with their work and that the necessary safety precautions are carried out. Supervisors can also provide guidance in situations of uncertainty. Supervision of safety and health can often be carried out when checking the progress and quality of the work; it may take the form of periodic site visits combined with discussions in which health and safety issues are raised.

The extent of supervision required depends on the risks involved and the ability of the lone worker to identify and handle safety and health issues. Employees new to a job, undergoing training, doing a job which presents special risks, or dealing with new situations may need to be accompanied at first. The level of supervision required is a management decision, which should be based on the findings of risk assessment, i.e. the higher the risk, the greater the level of supervision required. It should not be left to individuals to decide whether they require assistance.

What provisions should be in place for lone workers in the case of an emergency?

- Lone workers should be capable of responding correctly to emergencies. Risk assessment should identify foreseeable events.
- Emergency procedures should be established and employees trained in them.
- Information about emergency procedures and danger areas should be given to lone workers who visit your premises.
- Lone workers should have access to adequate first-aid facilities and mobile workers should carry a first-aid kit suitable for treating minor injuries.

- Occasionally, the risk assessment may indicate that lone workers need training in first aid.

Are there special factors to be considered for lone workers working at a remote location or/and in isolation?

For a lone worker at a remote location, the following factors must be considered:

- how long should the work take and how frequently should the worker report in
- has the worker a safe means of travel to and from the location, especially out of normal hours
- is there access to adequate rest, hygiene, refreshment, welfare and first aid facilities
- can emergency services approach the location without hindrance? Procedures for responding to ‘worst-case scenario

What if I am a lone worker, working from home?

An employer has the same responsibility for the safety and health of employees who work from home as for any other employees. This covers the provision of supervision, education and training and the implementation of sufficient control measures to protect the homeworker. The employer should accept liability for accident or injury of a homeworker as for any other employee.

For additional information relating to lone workers, refer to HSE publication ‘*Working Alone in Safety; Controlling the risks of solitary work*’ available [here](#)