



## A3C Management

SAFETY | QUALITY | ENGINEERING

The predictable should never be a surprise

# LONE WORKING





## CURRENT POSITION

The Health and Safety Executive, (HSE), defines lone workers as 'those who work by themselves without close or direct supervision.' Such people tend to be those who are:

- **working alone on site: for all or just some of the time, both regularly and/or permanently**
- **working remote from their normal workplace: e.g. contractors, district nurses**
- **homeworkers: persons working from home for an employer (unless in low-risk, office-type work).**

Another definition which applies to many workers is *people who spend a large part of their working time in situations where there are no other workers or supervisors for them to interact with.*

There is no set period of time which establishes someone as a lone worker. A person can be a lone worker for any period of time and working alone does not mean that the person is the only employee on the premises, for example, it may include a situation where an individual works at an isolated worksite within a large, well-populated office building. However, this would not usually apply when some-one was working alone in a room, but colleagues were in a room nearby.

Increased process automation continues to reduce the number of labour-intensive tasks with the result that the number of people working alone is increasing. Additionally, increased mobility and the development of interactive communication, encourages the development of single person operations. Increasingly flexible working also means that homeworking becomes an option for many more people. How vulnerable someone is as a lone worker depends on the situation and the nature of the work being carried out.

It is the duty of employers to maintain safe working arrangements under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and an obligation to conduct a risk assessment

before introducing a policy of working alone. This risk assessment identifies which tasks should not be carried out by a loner worker and what steps need to be taken to mitigate any risks the lone worker may face. There are some circumstances in which it is too dangerous for a person to work alone and the Government has recognised and legislated for these activities eg, diving, vehicles carrying explosives, fumigation operations and some types of work in confined spaces. Employers must also accept that their own risk assessments may identify an unacceptable level of risk associated with persons working alone on particular tasks, in which case working alone should not be introduced.

### Legal Requirements

There are only very limited specific legal duties on employers in relation to lone working, however, the general duty of employers to maintain safe working arrangements under the Health and Safety at work etc. Act 1974 applies.

### Employers' Duties

If lone workers are employed, the employer has the same responsibilities for their health and safety as the number of people working alone is increasing for any other

**People who spend a large part of their working time in situations where there are no other workers or supervisors for them to interact with.**



employees. There may, however, be a need to take extra precautions to ensure that lone workers are at no greater risk than other employees.

Under Section 2(2) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, employers must supply adequate information, instruction, training and supervision to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of all employees. Employers are also responsible for the health and safety of others affected by work, such as visitors and members of the public.

Employers are under an obligation to provide:

- **Facilities for first aid under the Health and Safety (First Aid) Regulations 1981. In practice, those working alone are likely to be given their own first aid materials e.g. for mobile workers a first aid box for their vehicle.**
- **Welfare under the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992. The provision of adequate breaks and rest facilities can be an area of difficulty where staff are working alone.**
- **Suitable equipment and training in its use under the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998 (PUWER) and the Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998 (LOLER).**
- **Regular checks on portable electrical equipment to comply with the duties under the Electricity at Work Regulations 1989. Where equipment is issued, records of issue and subsequent maintenance must be kept.**

Employers also have duties under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR) to report and record certain accidents, injuries and violent incidents should they occur. Reports made by the lone worker to their employer of accidents, damage or near-misses might indicate that the activities risk assessment may need to be looked at and maybe the work is no longer suitable for a lone worker.

## Prosecutions

The failure to manage lone workers has an impact on the penalties in a health and safety prosecution. In 2016, a manufacturing company was fined £1 million after a lone worker was crushed to death by falling machinery. The CNC milling machine had been lifted using jacks and placed on skates; the employee, working alone, was using an angle grinder to cut and remove fixings when the milling machine overturned, crushing him. The employer had not ensured that employees had proper training, had not assessed the risks and the work was not properly planned. This resulted in an unsafe system of work being used, with fatal consequences.

The employer pleaded guilty to breaching Section 2(1) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and Regulation 3(1) of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. The company was fined £1 million with costs.

Trustees of Borders Country Estate were fined £3k following the death of game keeper who sustained serious injuries when his quad bike overturned. His absence was not detected until 52 hours later when a search was initiated. He had no means of raising an alarm although there was a mobile phone this had been issued to the usual gamekeeper, who was on sick leave. The trustees admitted failing to provide a means of communication or carrying out a risk assessment for a lone worker to report in at the end of a shift.

A building company was fined £30k when a worker carrying out drainage work was asphyxiated when a trench collapsed. The company admitted failing to ensure a safe system of work for the drainage excavations, failing to ensure that soils from the excavation were battered back and failing to ensure there was a clear communication policy with the employee in place while he was lone working.

South West Water was fined £1.8m for failing to ensure the safety of a lone worker who fell into a sand filtration tank at a facility in Falmouth docks.



The worker carrying out a routine task whilst working alone had slipped and fell into a narrow opening and was left with no means of escape or ways to call for help. He was in the tank for four and a half hours before a colleague was sent to find him. The lone-worker call-in system which had automatically called after a period of inactivity sent an alarm message to a control centre in Exeter and registered a potential problem at just before 5 o'clock. There had been an earlier incident some years before when an employee lost their footing and fell into a tank and remained there for an hour before being rescued.

## Restrictions on Working Alone

Working alone is not against the law. However, employers are required to carefully consider how to deal with any health and safety risks for people that work alone. By carrying out a risk assessment, employers can decide the right level of supervision. There are some high risk activities where at least one other person may need to be present. For example:

In general, there are only very limited specific prohibitions regarding working alone, but there is a legal requirement to have more than one worker for certain activities that are judged too dangerous for one person e.g.:

- **Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) 2002 regulations.** Certain fumigation work and other work with substances hazardous to health.
- **Diving at Work Regulations 1997.** Supervision of diving operations.
- **Electricity at Work Regulations 1989.** Work at, or near, a live electrical conductor plus certain activities may require accompaniment, if this can contribute significantly to the risk being reduced.
- **Confined Spaces Regulations 1997.** Entry into a confined space, for example, sewers or tanks.
- **Road Traffic (Carriage of Explosives) Regulations 1989.** Supervision of vehicles conveying certain explosives.

## Consulting with Employees

The Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977 (as amended) and the Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations 1996 (as amended) require employers to consult with employees and their representatives on health and safety matters. Plans to introduce or modify a policy on working alone should be discussed with employees and their representatives before being introduced.

## Employees' Duties

Employees are responsible for taking reasonable care of themselves and must also co-operate with their employers regarding health and safety issues. Where specific legal requirements apply, employers must ensure that adequate equipment, information, instruction, training and supervision are provided.

Employees should use the equipment provided for their health and safety and comply with any information and instruction given to them.

## Self-Employed Persons' Duties

Self-employed persons must carry out their work so as to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that they and others who may be affected are not exposed to risks to

**Employees are responsible  
for taking reasonable care of  
themselves**

their health and safety. They must also provide persons, who may be affected, with information about their health and safety. The Deregulation Act 2015 amended the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 (HSW) to take



self-employed workers outside the scope of the Act unless working in a "prescribed undertaking". The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 (General Duties of Self-employed persons) (Prescribed undertakings) Regulations 2015 details what constitutes a prescribed undertaking, including agriculture, work with asbestos, and construction work. If work is not on the list, but poses a risk to others, the self-employed are still bound by the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.

## INFORMATION

### What Is 'Working Alone' or 'Lone Working'?

The HSE define lone workers as:

*"those who work by themselves without close or direct supervision".*

### Who Works Alone?

These can be people in fixed establishments such as:

- kiosk, petrol station, shop or a small work shop
- people who are working from home
- people who work along for long periods of time such as in a factory, fairground, warehouse or leisure centre
- people who working outside normal hours on their own such as security guards, cleaners and repair staff

They can also be mobile workers who work from a fixed base such as:

- construction, maintenance and repair
- agricultural and forestry workers
- people working in service industries such as postal workers, delivery drivers, estates agents etc.

Whatever reason people work alone then steps must be taken to eliminate or reduce the risks to as low as reasonably practicable.

There is no time limit attached to working alone - it may be for the whole work period, or only for a few minutes.

### Risk Management

To address any problems that may arise from lone working a risk assessment must be carried out, this a legal requirement under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (MHSW). This process identifies the hazards that exist in the workplace and how likely it is that they will cause harm to employees and others.

The five-step risk-assessment process requires employers to:

1. **identify the hazards**
2. **decide who may be harmed and how**
3. **evaluate the risks and decide on precautions**
4. **record the risk assessment findings and implement them**
5. **review the assessment, as required, and update when necessary.**

This process helps decide what prevention and control measures employers need to take to protect their employees from harm. The obligation on the employer is to 'as far as is reasonably practicable' eliminate or adequately control the risk. 'Reasonably practicable' allows the employer to find a balance between the cost and time of making a job safe and the likelihood of the job causing injury or illness. However, to discharge the duty, the employer has to be in a position to prove that to take any further action to reduce or eliminate the risk would be grossly disproportionate to the risk avoided.

Where a risk assessment shows that the hazards can no longer be effectively controlled, then the work should not be carried out by a lone worker. If a review of a current lone working task also show that the risk is not adequately managed, then this task should cease to be a lone working task. Investigations of accidents, near-misses and dangerous occurrences may also show that lone working is inappropriate and initiate a review of the working alone policy.



## What Should the Risk Assessment Address?

Different work will present different hazards, ranging from low to high risks, and each situation will require different levels of control measures.

Higher risks might include:

- access to and from the workplace - can a person working alone safely use the access equipment provided - entry into confined spaces, for example silos, deep inspection pits, drains or sewers
- handling biological substances e.g. human waste
- handling flammable substances, e.g. organic solvents
- handling valuables item and money - lone occupation of rooms fitted with automatic gas fire protection systems
- travelling alone late at night
- working alone and directly with members of the public
- visiting clients or customers at their premises where there is a risk of violence
- work with high pressure systems e.g. steam boilers and pipelines
- work with toxic substances e.g. cyanides, fumigants
- working in high temperatures e.g. stripping/ applying insulation in boiler rooms
- working outdoors in extreme weather conditions workers where their first language is not English who may not be able to communicate easily in an emergency
- those with a medical condition/disability which may cause them to be more at risk
- those who may be more vulnerable because of age, pregnancy or inexperience.

Activities which may present lower risks include:

- cleaning duties as part of a team
- working alone out of hours in an office occupation
- homeworking
- static security work e.g. monitoring a CCTV system.

The risk assessment should contain:

- details of the risk to the health and safety of the employer's staff
- any risk to others that may be affected by the work
- identify any preventative and protective measures that are needed (as far as reasonably practicable)
- review of the assessment when it may no longer be valid
- although the written record is required if there are 5 employees or more it is worth writing it down so that it is clear for everyone involved
- make sure there are effective arrangement in place for planning, organising, controlling
- monitoring and reviewing the preventative and protective measures
- provide any health surveillance that the risk assessment has identified
- establish procedure to be followed in the event of an emergency
- provide health and safety training to employees
- consult with a safety representative.

The risk assessment should then provide details of the arrangement required to ensure the lone worker is no more at risk than employees working together and that the work can be done safely by a lone worker.

Once the risks have been assessed, a safe system of work should be developed and, ideally, written down. This



should contain as much relevant information as possible, both for the lone workers and their supervisors. The statement should build in the general company health and safety policy, and should reflect all potential types of lone working roles.

The statement should contain details of:

- **emergency procedures**
- **name, address and workplace location**
- **risks faced by each lone worker**
- **suitable control measures**
- **type of undertaking.**
- **The policy should be updated, as necessary, and all lone workers and supervisors should be provided with a copy of the policy and trained/instructed on its content.**

## Dynamic Risk Assessments

Not all hazards relating to role can be identified especially if the role involves working in the community or in areas that the employer does not control. This requires that the lone worker will carry out their own dynamic risk assessment when that are at the work location. This is for situations where the presence of a risk may not be known about in advance, such as a threat from animals or a hostile environment.

The hazards faced by lone workers are not unique to this category of worker. The lone worker should be able to make the decision about whether it is safe for them to carry out the work or not.

## Hazards Encountered by Lone Workers

The hazards faced by lone workers are not unique to this category of worker but their potential severity is increased by the absence of co-workers or supervisors.

Potential hazards include:

- **violence and robbery**
- **abusive customers**
- **extreme weather**
- **back injury due to heavy or awkward lifting**
- **electric shock**
- **smoke, gases and other inhalation hazards**

- **falls**
- **burns**
- **chemical over-exposure**
- **explosion**
- **animal bites**
- **biohazards**
- **falling asleep at the wheel of a vehicle**
- **traffic hazards.**

## Manual Handling

The risk assessment should have identified the lifting and handling tasks that cannot be carried out safely by the lone worker. A system where a task required two or more workers should be identified and a process whereby the lone worker can request additional staff to assist with specific tasks.

## Hazardous Chemicals and Substances

Some lone workers may be required to handles hazardous chemical sand substances and the risk assessment should take account of any special risks that may be faced by people working alone. Workers should be trained in the correct use of PPE and there should be a process for reporting any defects in the PPE. There should also be adequate first aid facilities available to treat minor injuries.

## Fire

Lone workers are at risk if a fire should occur at the place where they are working as they may be less aware of the fire until they can see or smell it if there is no alarm in place. The risk of fire needs to be taken into account in the risk assessment.

## Violence

When employees work alone, the potential for violence exists, and employers should have a policy to deal with such an eventuality. The HSE advises employers to work with their employees to develop a plan of action, and recommends the following steps:

- **decide if a problem exists**
- **record all incidents**
- **classify all incidents**



- **identify preventive measures**
- **decide what to do**
- **implement preventive measures**
- **review/monitor the measures.**

Women may be at a higher risk from violent attacks when working alone in certain occupations. However, although the perception is that women are at increased risk, accident statistics suggest that, overall, men are more likely to be assaulted than women.

Employers should ensure that all staff who work alone, and who have been identified as being at risk from violence, are trained in preventing and dealing with such an attack.

Preferably, there should be regular contact by supervisors. Workers should be provided with any special equipment, as identified by the risk assessment. Examples of equipment include alarms, monitoring devices and mobile telephones. It may be necessary to provide transport, e.g. taxis, for work at night to improve safety.

## **Working in Isolation and Remoteness**

Many workers such as traffic wardens, ambulance workers, home care workers and district nurses work in remote and isolated areas. The risk assessment needs to consider:

- **safe means of travel to and from the workplace**
- **time taken to do the work and how frequently the employee should report in and what happens if they do not**
- **access to toilets and welfare facilities**
- **reporting and responding to emergencies**
- **how will emergency services reach the person in a remote area.**

## **Stress**

Isolation for lone workers can cause problems. Arrangements should be made for workers to keep in

touch and up to date, this could include seminars and training sessions and staff meetings. Lone workers should also have the same training professional development as other employees.

## **Working on Another Employer's Premises**

The workers own employers risk assessment should identify the risk of the work and any special risk arising from the workplace alone. The risk assessment should also identify whether any aspect of the work could be hazardous to the health and any other employees.

There is a legal requirement for employers to cooperate and coordinate their health and safety arrangement for work activities that interact. This can sometime be made clear in contract as to who is responsible for what. This should cover the provision and use of work equipment, PPE, training and first aid provision, fire and emergency procedures, reporting of incidents and a person to contact. The visiting staff members should be informed of the health and safety policy.

## **Driving**

Some lone workers spend many hours driving as part of their work activity. This risks are fatigue, long hours and the possibility of breaking down in an isolated area. The frequency of rest breaks and contact in an emergency should be clearly communicated.

## **Supervision and Reporting**

Alternative arrangement for supervision should be made as there still needs to be some way of monitoring lone workers to ensure that they remain safe. This level and means of supervision should be identified in the risk assessment. Where work is away from a main base - there should be a process for details of the day including arrive and departure times, itinerary for the day and contact names and numbers. There should also be a system for the lone worker to raise and alarm if an emergency does occur.





## Violence

When employees work alone, the potential for violence exists, and employers should have a policy to deal with it. The HSE advises employers to work with their employees to develop a plan of action, and recommends the following steps:

- **decide if a problem exists**
- **record all incidents**
- **classify all incidents**
- **identify preventive measures**
- **decide what to do**
- **implement preventive measures**
- **review/monitor the measures.**

Employers should ensure that all staff who work alone, and who have been identified as being at risk from violence, are trained in preventing and dealing with such an attack.

There should be regular contact by supervisors. Workers should be provided with any special equipment, as identified by the risk assessment. Examples of equipment include alarms, monitoring devices and mobile telephones. It may be necessary to provide transport, e.g. taxis, for work at night to improve safety.

All lone workers should be aware of the relevant health and safety procedures, and should know what to do in the case of an emergency. In addition, procedures should be in place to avoid unnecessary risks.

Examples of easy-to-implement measures are:

- **carry an alarm at all times, and keep it handy**
- **do not carry valuables unless necessary**
- **ensure someone knows where you are**
- **ensure you park in a well-lit place, preferably in a public place**
- **if you alter your plans, ensure someone is told**
- **prior to meeting a client, check him/her out - for example, are they who they claim to be?**
- **agree a code word which can be used during a telephone conversation with colleagues to indicate that all is not well.**

## Safe Working Methods

In the first instance consideration should be given to working in pairs. If this is not appropriate then, to ensure lone workers are protected, safe working procedures should be designed, implemented and monitored.

Regular checks should be made on those working alone and this may involve regular visits by a supervisor, another employer or other designated person. Alternatively, a system whereby workers are required to check in at regular intervals, or are provided with automatic lone working communication devices that prompt the worker and raise an alarm where there is no response, should be implemented.

Where personal or automatic checks are used, the duration between these checks should be based on the estimated hazard of the job. Periodic telephone contact may be adequate for low-risk working alone situations. Whatever system is adopted, it must be possible for the worker and their manager/colleagues to contact each other at certain points throughout the working period.

## Buddy Systems

The 'buddy system' is a way of staying in contact with someone who is working alone. The buddy is someone

**Employers have a  
responsibility to ensure  
that the hazards of working  
alone have been properly  
considered**



that the lone worker can contact at any time during their working period but can also be an automated system that lone workers use to check in and out of their activities.

It is the employer's responsibility to decide the level of supervision that the lone worker requires and not that of the lone worker and a buddy should be someone who understands the nature of the work that is being undertaken.

A lone working buddy should:

- **have contact details for the lone worker including next of kin**
- **details of any vehicle that the lone worker may be using**
- **know the lone worker's movements during their working time including when their rest breaks will be**
- **if the lone worker does not get in touch at agreed intervals, then there should be an agreed escalation process.**

Buddies operate together as a single unit so that they are able to monitor and help each other. The benefit of having a buddy is increased safety through having someone who can be contacted in the workplace; each may be able to prevent the other becoming a casualty or rescue the other in a crisis.

This system is required when, for example, workers enter confined spaces, as well as adequate rescue arrangements being provided. Confined spaces are areas that have restricted access or egress, and where a danger of accumulation of hazardous gases, vapours, mists or lack of oxygen exists. Other circumstances where a buddy system might be appropriate include: law enforcement; cash collection and security work; and dealing with unpredictable clients in health and social care.

## Personal Alarms, Mobile Phones and Pagers

Personal alarms are designed to summon help and while part of the solution, they are not a replacement for a well-planned system. If a lone worker is immobilised or faced with an attacker, they may not be able to gain assistance from anyone nearby. They may also be out of sight working behind closed doors or in a remote location. A panic alarm allows a lone worker to send an alert to their employer or an emergency response centre to indicate that they need assistance. There are fixed panic alarms such as those in places where people handle money or high value goods and those which are carried on the lone worker. There are also lone worker apps and devices which can be carried or worn around a neck or clipped to clothing. It is important that if some form of mobile panic alarm is to be used that it relies on mobile phone coverage that will be available if the lone worker is in a remote location.

## Key Actions

Employers have a responsibility to ensure that the hazards of working alone have been properly considered and that implementing a policy of lone working does not put employees at undue risk.

The practical actions that need to be managed in relation to working alone can be summarised as follows:

- **Conduct risk assessments for those activities that involve lone working, both on and off site.**
- **Design and implement policies and procedures to protect those who work alone.**

In practice this means:

- **Consulting with employees and/or their representatives about any planned policy on working alone.**
- **Compiling and maintaining a database of locations/ persons that should never be visited at any time by just one worker. This information must be communicated to all employees, contractors and sub-contractors.**



- Providing suitable and sufficient information, instruction, training and supervision for lone workers on health and safety matters.
- Ensuring lone workers have all necessary communication measures and that they know how to use them (e.g. personal alarms, lone working monitoring devices, mobile phones, personal GPS)
- Requiring lone workers to regularly report to their office base or to a co-worker, maintaining accurate records of their location and having a procedure to check on a lone worker who fails to report in.
- Instructing staff that they must immediately leave any situation in which they feel uncomfortable or at risk and that such action has the support of management.
- Providing lone workers with appropriate tailored skills training (e.g. aggression management, assertiveness and negotiation).
- Ascertaining the medical history/fitness of potential lone workers if their activities are likely to impose extra demands on their physical or mental stamina.
- Establishing procedures to be followed in the event of serious and imminent danger and requiring lone workers to report incidents.
- Deploying building security where appropriate in the case of out-of-hours working.
- Ensuring the workplace is appropriate i.e.
  - suitable and sufficient lighting, ventilation and heating
  - all equipment is provided and is safe to use by lone workers
  - lifting operations can be performed safely by one person
  - means of access and egress are suitable
  - fire precautions are sufficient
  - mechanism exists for effectively communicating with supervisors and co-workers
  - a check-in system exists.

- Arranging for supervisors to periodically visit and observe people working alone and maintaining regular contact between the lone worker and their supervisor.
- Documenting safe working methods.
- Monitoring working procedures to ensure lone workers remain safe and that the working alone policy continues to reflect acceptable practice.

## KEY TERMS

**Buddy system:** a procedure in which two people, the buddies, operate together as a single unit so that they are able to monitor and help each other. The main benefit of the system is improved safety; each person may be able to prevent the other becoming a casualty or rescue the other in a crisis.

**Global Positioning System (GPS):** a satellite-based navigation system that allows the user to determine their exact location at all times and in all weather conditions.

**Homeworking:** describes the arrangements where employees work at home on a regular basis rather than at the employer's premises.

**Lone worker:** someone who works by themselves without close or direct supervision except for low-risk office-based work at home.

**Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):** specialised clothing or equipment worn by employees for protection against health and safety hazards. Personal protective equipment is designed to protect many parts of the body, i.e. eyes, head, face, hands, feet, and ears.

**Working alone:** working without close or direct supervision. The terms 'lone worker' and 'working alone' are interchangeable.



## RELATED DOCUMENTS AND FURTHER INFORMATION

British Standards Institution

- BS8484:2016 Provision of lone worker services.  
Code of Practice

Health and Safety Executive

- Violence at Work: A guide for employers HSE  
INDG69(rev)
- Protecting Lone Workers - How to Manage the Risks of  
Working Alone HSE INDG73 rev4.