#

# LONE WORKING

## Introduction

People who work alone without direct or close supervision are lone workers. They may be mobile workers e.g. drivers, surveyors, service engineers, care workers, etc. or work at a fixed workplace. A single maintenance worker whose work takes them all over a worksite will be a lone worker for much of their time. ‘On call workers’, those working overtime, those who work outside normal hours and those who open and close work premises may, at times, become lone workers.

In the vast majority of work activities lone working is not illegal. In many cases the risks to which lone workers are exposed are not significantly different to those of their co-workers. However in some situations they may be at greater risk because of the nature and location of their work. These additional risks will include:

* the risk of violent attack to a worker opening or closing a shop or warehouse where the attacker is intent on theft.
* the risk of violent attack because the worker is working with vulnerable people or in an area of social deprivation.
* the inability to summon assistance in the event of sudden illness or an accident.
* unfamiliarity with the particular risks at a remote worksite.
* unsafe practices adopted by lone workers free from supervision.
* involvement in serious road traffic accidents.
* manual handling of tools and equipment between van or car and workplace.
* manual handling during the delivery of goods.
* injury due to the layout of the remote work environment, especially for home-based display screen equipment users.
* injuries due to previously unknown poor health of the lone worker.
* lack of help or advice in the event of the unexpected.

The likelihood of injury to lone workers may be increased due to:

* lack of training or awareness of the risk involved with the work activity and or lone working.
* failure to establish regular communication with the lone worker.
* lack of supervision.
* failure to identify a potentially violent situation and implement effective control measures which include eliminating lone working.
* failure to provide adequate emergency procedures or first aid arrangements and equipment.

## Legal Duties

Employers are required to ensure so far as is reasonably practicable the health, safety and welfare of their employees whilst they are at work. There is no qualification or limitation to this requirement. Therefore, for lone workers, employers must consider where they go, what they do when they get there and the risks they face. Then take steps to reduce those risks so far as is reasonably practicable.

## Control Measures

The first step in controlling the risks that lone workers face is the identification and assessment of the risks to which they are exposed in the course of their work. It is good practice to involve the workforce in this assessment; they may be aware of additional risks that you had not considered.

Once the risks are identified consideration can be given to the appropriate measures required to reduce the risk to an acceptable level. Identifying these measures is no different to organizing the health and safety of other employees. Keep written records of these risk assessments with your safety management documentation or records or save it in the BusinessSafe Online application.

Procedures put in place to monitor lone workers are likely to include;

* supervisors periodically visiting and observing lone workers.
* signing in, especially if working in remote locations on a large site.
* regular contact between supervisors and lone workers by telephone or radio.
* automatic devices which raise a warning if a signal or message is not received at specific intervals.
* tracking devices
* other devices designed to raise the alarm in the event of an emergency.

Measures should be put into place to ensure that the risk of violent attack, illness or accident can be noticed within a short period of time, so that support and help can be provided.

A Safe System of Work (see also Guidance Note 1-20) for lone working should incorporate details of the task to be carried out, precautions to be taken and additional precautions such as protective equipment e.g. mobile phones and personal alarms and communication arrangements etc. Medical fitness for lone working should be considered before any person is required to become a lone worker and at subsequent periodic appraisal interviews.

If lone working cannot be avoided, staff members who are required to work alone should be provided with a means of communication, e.g. mobile phone. Make sure there will be a phone signal in the location where the lone worker is at work. In very remote areas where there is no terrestrial mobile telephone signal, systems using satellite communication have been designed and are available for lone worker tracking and communication.

A contact schedule should be implemented to ensure communication is maintained. A nominated person should contact lone workers periodically; don’t forget that arrangements will also need to be in place to provide adequate cover for training and development, holidays, illness cover, etc. of the nominated person. This person, or their deputy, should know the lone worker’s whereabouts and expected end of work time. A contact log should be maintained where the system revolves around regular telephone or radio contact.

Any control measures established should take account of lone working activities carried out outside normal hours. For example, staff that are ‘on call’ should be monitored when they are working outside normal office hours (nine to five) along with the additional measures that are required for lone workers engaged in night working in remote areas etc.

Staff should be consulted prior to the implementation of any monitoring system or contact arrangement. This will raise the awareness of the lone workers and provide information to staff to ensure that they understand why employers are monitoring them. This should also increase the awareness of their personal safety. When systems are introduced all staff involved including their Managers should be trained in their use. Details of training given should be recorded in personnel files or with your safety management records.

Where they are available and effective, personal attack alarms and or lone worker tracking devices may be utilised. Global positioning or ‘guardian’ systems linked to mobile phones or other communication technology may assist as monitoring devices.

Personal protective equipment such as work positioning lanyards or stab proof vests may be issued to lone workers, as a last resort, as part of the established Safe System of Work. Other control measures which may be implemented to help ensure lone worker safety include:

* Personal safety training at the induction stage backed by regular refresher training;
* Utilising the support of the emergency services. Consider consultation with the emergency services when conducting risk assessments and establishing control measures;
* Consulting with other organisations to establish joint visits and remove the lone working aspect of the work;
* Providing an additional driver or assistant to accompany employees who would otherwise be lone workers;
* Establishing two-way communication between Managers and lone workers, enabling issues relating to personal safety to be raised and discussed and mutually agreeable solutions adopted;
* Where driving is concerned, membership of motoring organisations offering breakdown and recovery services for lone workers should be considered;
* Providing security guards, door entry control systems and panic buttons and CCTV cameras, supported by suitable warning signs, in premises where employees may be lone workers at certain times or in a particular set of circumstances;
* Providing aftercare, including counselling, where an incident has occurred.

In the event of an incident or injury involving a lone worker, a thorough investigation should be carried out and the risk assessment and safe system of work reviewed. Additional control measures should be established to minimise the risk of a similar event occurring in the future.

## Some useful pointers for Managers of Lone Workers

When considering lone working managers should always ask themselves if lone working is appropriate or necessary. In reaching that decision and deciding on the measures that should be taken to protect lone workers managers should:

* carry out informal inspections of the workplace, whether belonging to the organisation or a customer, and access on a regular basis to make sure the workplace is safe and that people are working safely.
* consult their workforce.
* ask yourself how you would feel working there – would you feel safe? Would you feel safe in the winter in the dark?
* check to make sure equipment is being maintained properly and records kept.
* make sure Safety Data Sheets (SDS’s) are available for all materials used and stored on the premises.
* make sure risk assessments of all processes and activities are available for workers to refer to and that Safe Working Procedures are available.
* make sure your workers are trained and fully aware of local rules, especially those relating to “working out of hours”.
* check the “working out-of-hours” signing in book to make sure people are signing in, and that they have the Manager’s permission.
* periodically speak to those who work alone informally to find out if they have any concerns that can be dealt with easily.
* make sure they know you do not want them to put themselves at risk. Ask them how the job could be made safer.
* make sure you have a reliable system for contacting the lone worker and for establishing that they are unharmed – this could be by a call-in system, a tracking device, a mobile phone etc.
* consider what emergency situations could arise and make sure you have procedures in place to cover them, e.g. fire and first aid.
* make sure that the workers involved are aware of and understand all the procedures and controls that you have put in place.

## Useful pointer for lone workers

Below are some issues that employees should be aware of before commencing lone working.

* plan ahead. Make sure you know where you are going and how to get there.
* make sure someone knows where you are, and establish a contact system so that you can tell someone you’re at work and when you’re leaving. Sometimes it may be better if they are required to call you on a timed schedule. If you don’t answer they will assume you need assistance.
* don’t do anything which you feel might put you in danger – report any dangerous incident or situation to your Supervisor and ask for advice.
* don’t “cut corners” or rush the work, set yourself a reasonable target and work towards it – do your best;
* if you start to feel tired either stop for a short break, take a walk outside in the fresh air;
* make sure you know, and follow, relevant safe working procedures and guidelines for operating equipment and handling and using substances.
* if you don’t know how to do something – don’t do it – leave it until someone is around to help you.
* if you get injured stay calm, use your training, and if you need assistance call your emergency contact, or ring 999 giving clear instructions to them of where you are.
* greet customers and clients politely and with eye contact.
* be aware of body language, signs of anger, tension, stress, or nervousness, adopting a hostile or aggressive stance. Bear in mind that you may be sending out body language messages.
* avoid invading other people’s space or touching them.
* if attacked your voice is the best defence – shout a positive command or yell loudly to “Stop”.
* have a mobile phone for emergencies but keep it secure and out of sight with a number pre-programmed for emergency use.
* procedures for call-in staff should be in place together with those for non-arrival.
* if using car parks in busy areas, use ones which are well-lit at night.
* don’t leave a briefcase or lap top visible in the car. Lock all doors.
* trust your intuition – if the situation feels unsafe or makes you uneasy, use a plausible excuse and get out. If you need to return consider taking a colleague with you.
* Consider carrying a personal safety alarm, which can be used to shock and disorientate an attacker giving you vital seconds to get away.
* Consider meeting clients etc. in public places, if possible.

It may help to consider the specific issues that arise in individual cases using the checklist (form LWC) attached to this guidance note.

## Records

Completed risk assessments should be kept with your safety management documentation and records or entered in the BusinessSafe Online computer applications. Records of any personal protective equipment issued and details of training in regard to lone working should also be kept with your safety management records or in personnel files.

Further information and guidance on any of the issues associated with lone working or the advice contained in this guidance note is available from our 24 Hour Advice Service.

* In Great Britain call 0844 892 2772 option 2;
* In Northern Ireland call 0844 892 2786 option 2; or
* In the Republic of Ireland call 01 855 5050 option 2.

Guidance Notes are regularly revised and updated to reflect current best practice and take account of revised standards or legislation. The latest version of every Guidance Note is always available at www.peninsula-online.com.

# LONE WORKING CHECKLIST Form LWC

Name of employee \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Job Title\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| No. |  | Y/N |
|   | Has the worker received suitable training to carry out the task or activity? |  |
|  | Is the worker medically fit to undertake the task? |  |
|  | Has the worker sufficient information about the job, equipment or substances? |  |
|  | Does the work involve handling **dangerous equipment** or **substances** that require supervision? |  |
|  | If cash is being handled, will they be at risk of violence? |  |
|  | Have they been fully trained in strategies for the prevention of violence? |  |
|  | Do they know how to control and defuse potentially violent situations? |  |
|  | Is there adequate provision for first aid? |  |
|  | Does the worker have the appropriate PPE and are they trained in its use? |  |
|  | Are there facilities to be able to contact the worker at all times? |  |
|  | Are there suitable arrangements for the worker in the event of an emergency? |  |
|  | Have plans been made to keep in touch with colleagues? |  |
|  | Is there a means for them to contact line managers, including an alternative? |  |
|  | Are they in possession of emergency contact numbers? |  |
|  | Is the access to, or exit from, the workplace safe and well lit? |  |
|  | Does the workplace present special risks for someone on their own? |  |
|  | Do the arrangements cover out of hours working? |  |
| *For mobile staff only;* |
|  | Do they leave an itinerary with another member of staff? |  |
|  | Are personal attack alarms provided where they are appropriate? |  |
|  | Do they carry forms for reporting incidents, including violence or threats of violence? |  |
| Comments and further actions required: |

Prepared by: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_