

# Controlling the Risks of Solitary Workers

## Solitary Worker

Solitary workers are found in a wide range of situations and are those who work by themselves without close or direct supervision. They can be people in fixed establishments where only one person works on the premises or mobile workers working away from a fixed base.

There are not specific rules that apply to working alone; however, state and federal regulations still apply.

## Safe Working Arrangements

Establishing safe working conditions for lone workers is no different from organizing the safety of other employees.

When risk assessment shows that it is not possible for the work to be done safely by a lone worker, arrangements for providing help or back-up should be put in place.

When 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 that should be taken. This helps the lone worker's employer to assess the risks.

The employer should identify hazards of the work and assess the risks involved. Measures should be put in place to avoid or control the risks.

Lone working hazards may include weather, health, equipment, etc.

Employers should take steps to check that control measures are used and conduct a risk assessment from time to time to ensure they are still adequate. Control measures may include instruction, training, supervision, protective equipment and communication devices.

It is important to talk to employees and their safety representatives as they are a valuable source of information and advice. This will help to ensure that all relevant hazards have been identified and appropriate controls chosen.

## Workplace Violence and the Lone Worker

Lone workers are especially vulnerable to injury from workplace violence. Employers should have regular discussions with staff about their perceptions and comfort level.

## Questions You May Want to Ask Yourself

- Does the workplace present a special risk to the lone worker?
- Is there a safe way in and out for one person?
- Can all the machinery and supplies involved in the workplace be safely handled by one person?
- Are there any chemicals or hazardous substances being used that may pose a risk to the worker?
- Does the work involve lifting objects too large for one person?
- Is there a risk of violence?
- Are young, pregnant or disabled workers at risk if they work alone?
- If the lone worker's first language is not English, are arrangements in place to ensure clear communication, especially in an emergency?

## Is the Person Medically Fit and Suitable to Work Alone?

- Check that lone workers do not have medical conditions which make them unsuitable for working alone.
- Ask Human Resources for help.
- Seek medical advice if necessary.
- Consider both routine work and foreseeable emergencies which may impose additional physical and mental burdens on the individual.

## Training

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 understand the risks and precautions fully.

Set limits as to what can and cannot be done while working alone.

Ensure employees are competent to deal with circumstances which are new, unusual or beyond the scope of training. Employees should know when

to stop work and seek advice from a supervisor and how to handle potential workplace violence.

Employees need to understand the risks associated with their work. Employees must realize that the limits and precautions that are in place are for their benefit.

Consider training your Weights and Measures Inspection Staff, Laboratory Staff and other employees. Discuss situations; write policies and plan of action. Train in a one on one or group setting. Have necessary supplies for training available. Tools may include flip charts, markers, trainers, spokespersons, or imagination etc. Consider what you have done and what you will do to improve the situation for the lone worker.

## Supervision

Constant direct supervision is not a reasonable expectation. However, it is still the employer's duty to ensure that the lone worker's work environment is healthy and safe. Employers may want to conduct periodic site visits. Regular dialogue among co-workers and management is necessary for knowing how to handle different risks.

Checking that a lone worker has returned to their base or home on completion of a task may be necessary.

Supervisors need to know the workers schedule and whereabouts. It is important to have regular contact with employees. Devices such as a telephone or radio are helpful.

Contact devices might be cell phone, computer, satellite, webcams, RFID technology or PDAs. Conducting an internet search for "lone worker protective devices" may be helpful.

Automatic warning devices which operate if specific signals are not received periodically from the lone worker are available. There are devices available designed to raise the alarm in the event of an emergency and which are operated manually or automatically by the absence of activity.

Emergency procedures should be established in case of illness, accident or emergency.

Lone workers should have access to adequate first-aid facilities. Mobile workers should carry a first-aid kit suitable for treating minor injuries. Risk assessment may indicate that lone

workers need training in first aid.

Take the necessary steps to ensure that you and others working in your program maintain the highest level of safety in a solitary working environment.

**Additional Information:**

Working Alone Safely: Controlling the

Risks of Solitary Work – Washington State Department of Labor and Industries, Division of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH).

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