

Lone Working: Management Briefing

Lone workers are those who work by themselves without close or direct supervision, and they can be found in many working environments.

Examples of lone working include:

- people working alone in premises, such as shops or kiosks
- home workers
- people working outside of normal working hours, such as cleaners, security staff, maintenance or repair staff
- those who work separately from others, such as research staff, or those in leisure centres, warehouses etc
- agricultural and forestry workers
- service workers, such as postal staff, social workers, doctors and nurses, drivers, estate agents, etc
- those involved in trades such as electrical repairs, plumbing, lift repairs, painting and decorating etc.

Recommendations for employers:

- when carrying out risk assessment involve staff or their representatives
- put relevant control measures in place – and periodically check that they remain in place
- if a lone worker works at another employer's workplace, that employer should inform the lone worker's employer of any risks and the controls in place
- if lone work is not able to be conducted safely, help or back up should be provided
- review risk assessments annually, or when there are any significant changes in working practice.

Case Law

2010 – Mental Health Charity fined £30,000 with £20,000 costs after lone working employee was killed at work.

A mental health charity was found guilty of failing to protect a support worker who was stabbed to death during a home visit to a service user. The attacker, who had paranoid schizophrenia, admitted manslaughter on the grounds of diminished responsibility in October 2007. He was ordered to be detained indefinitely at a high-security mental health facility.

The charity admitted breaching Section 2(1) of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, which requires employers to ensure the "health, safety and welfare at work" of employees.

2013 – The trustees of a Boarders estate were prosecuted and fined after a gamekeeper died following an accident involving a quad bike. His absence was not detected for 52 hours following the accident.

When carrying out the risk assessment, the following questions should be asked, to ensure adequate control measures are put in place:

- is there safe access and egress for one person?
- can one person handle any necessary temporary access equipment, such as portable ladders?
- can one person handle all the necessary machinery and goods?
- are any chemicals or hazardous substances 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 particularly at risk if they work alone?
- if the lone worker's first language is not English, are suitable arrangements in place to ensure clear communication, especially in an emergency?
- do lone workers have any medical conditions that make lone working unsuitable?
- can suitable levels of supervision be provided?
- what happens if the lone worker become ill, has an accident or there is an emergency including first aid arrangements?
- are special lone working alarm or communication devices needed?

Legal duties

The main areas of health and safety law relevant to lone working are:

- The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974
- The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
- The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992
- The Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998
- Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013
- Confined Spaces Regulations 1997
- The Electricity at Work Regulations 1989.

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Examples of where lone working is not suitable, and at least one other person should be present are:

- working at or near exposed electricity conductors
- working in confined spaces where there may be toxic materials, or lack of oxygen or other risks.