



## LONE WORKING

### 1. Definition of Lone Workers

“Those who work by themselves without close or direct supervision” (Health and Safety Executive).

The Council has employees who qualify under this definition in most departments eg. social workers, home helps, drivers, architects, engineers, property inspectors, housing officers, leisure centre staff, grounds maintenance staff, planning officers, cleaning staff, janitors, caretakers.

It should also be remembered that some staff will effectively become lone workers for short periods during the working day e.g. during lunchbreaks or at the beginning/end of flexible working days. Also, some employees who may not normally be considered loneworkers may become so in certain working situations e.g. a teacher interviewing parents.

### 2. Legal Requirements

It is not illegal to work alone, nor is there any legal requirement, with the exception of some high risk electrical work and working in confined spaces, to provide specific numbers of staff to do particular jobs. Employers must, however, comply with the general duties of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 and the specific duties of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. In brief, these duties amount to the requirement on employers to provide a safe place of work and to assess any risks to which employees may be exposed and to take steps to either avoid or control these risks where necessary.

### 3. Risk Assessment

Lone workers should not be any more at risk than other employees, but they still face all the “usual” hazards encountered in work situations and foreseeable emergency situations – for example, fire, equipment failure, illness. The risk assessment should consider whether lone working magnifies these hazards and whether the risks of the job can be adequately controlled by one person. It should also consider the physical aspects of the work area such as the suitability and efficiency of lighting, design and positioning of furniture or the presence of alcoves, doorways, trees/shrubbery which might hide a potential attacker.

There is no magic formula or single set of procedures which will be appropriate for all situations and can be applied corporately – each lone working situation should be assessed separately and treated accordingly to individual and departmental needs. Departments should, therefore, include lone working in their departmental risk assessments.

The HSE particularly advise that the following points should be considered :-



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- Does the workplace present a special risk to the lone worker?
- Is there a safe way in and out for one person? Can any temporary access equipment which 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 or young/inexperienced workers especially at risk if they work alone?
- Is the person medically fit and suitable to work alone?  
(lone working may cause additional physical and/or mental burdens on the individual).
- Is any special or additional training required and are task parameters clear?
- Are there suitable levels of supervision for lone workers?

Having considered the hazards and level of risk which they offer, the risk assessment will consider control methods to reduce the risks to the lowest possible level. Among the common control measures for lone working hazards are the following:-

- Communications – access to telephone (landline or mobile) or radio
- Clear reporting procedures – it is essential that employees who are frequently in lone working situations operate an efficient diary/location indicator procedure. This should ensure that their location, telephone contact number description of work, name of other person(s) involved and estimated time of return is known to supervisory staff or colleagues. The procedure should include action to be taken if any employee fails to return at the indicated time.
- Personal alarms may be carried to dissuade potential attackers.
- For employees in lone working situations a fixed facility (e.g. an office or an interview room) the design of the facility and furnishing (e.g. shape and style of enquiry desks, positioning and type of furnitures) access/egress arrangements, installation of panic alarm buttons etc. will have a controlling influence.
- Managers/supervisors of lone workers should be available to support and able to maintain contact with lone workers.
- The provision of information, instruction and training to facilitate the safe execution of tasks. In the case of lone working this would include information on the hazards likely to be encountered, instruction about the systems and procedures to be applied and training in any skills needed to perform the job safely (this may include training in interpersonal skills such as dealing with confrontation/handling violent situations).
- Where alarm systems or panic buttons are employed it is necessary to set-



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- up response procedures and to train staff who will be responding.
- Periodic visiting of lone workers by supervisory or management staff.
- First Aid arrangements and/or procedures to cover emergency situations of illness.

#### 4. Action Resulting from the Assessment Process

Where a risk assessment indicates action required to reduce risk levels (our aim should always be either “NO RISK” or the lowest level of risk possible) these actions should be costed and included in departmental budgets.

The principal of identifying hazards via risk assessment and budgeting for the resulting action plan is the way to manage any hazard to employees. It is not acceptable to take no action if an assessment concludes any appreciable level of risk.

#### 5. Further Advice/Guidance

Should any further advice or guidance be required, your departmental H & S Adviser will be able to provide this and facilitate the assessment process.