



Hardfacts

Norwich Union Risk Services

Ref No 5007 (v3)

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Lone Working

Contrary to popular belief there is nothing in general health and safety legislation that prohibits an employee from working alone.

General Duties

Section 2 of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act, 1974, places a general duty on employers to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of all his employees. Employees also have responsibilities under section 7 of the Act to take reasonable care of their own safety and that of others who may be affected by their acts or omissions.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations, 1999, require employers to assess all risks to the health and safety of their employees and anyone else. This risk assessment should identify what measures they need to take to comply with the law. This is where the risk of lone working should be assessed.

Common Examples of Lone Working

Many people routinely work by themselves, or at a location some distance away from direct supervision. These may include security personnel, librarians, filling station attendants, switchboard operators, drivers, travelling salespeople, cleaners, shop assistants, homeworkers.

In addition to these examples there will be many occasions where people in other jobs are working early or late in offices, factories or other places of work. It may not be practicable for the employer to implement a general rule that people must not work alone.

There are bound to be occasions where lone working is unavoidable. Someone has to be the first or last person to arrive or depart at the start and end of the working day.

Where Lone Working is Not Permitted

Certain hazardous working situations are stipulated in the law where more than one

person should be in attendance. The second person is often required to act as a supervisor. Some examples are as follows:

- Where a young person is working on dangerous machinery until he/she has received full instruction and training under Regulation 19 of The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.
- Where there is entry into a confined space, as defined by Regulation 1 of the Confined Spaces Regulations 1997 (see NURS Hardfacts No 5018). In an emergency the second person should be capable of pulling the first person out of the danger zone, without entering it themselves.
- Except where an exemption has been issued, accompaniment is needed when unloading petroleum spirit at certain premises under the Road Traffic (Carriage of Dangerous Substances in Road Tankers and Tank Containers) Regulations, 1992.

Nearly a quarter of all deaths involving vehicles at work occur while the vehicle is reversing. The use of a properly trained banksman or guide is recommended when necessary to ensure reversing manoeuvres are conducted safely.

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

Factors to be Taken into Account

The only way to decide whether lone working should be allowed to take place is to carry out a formal risk assessment of the circumstances under which the work will take place.

Before an employer asks, or allows an employee to work alone, some of the factors to be taken into consideration are:

- What are the hazards and risks associated with the intended job and are these reduced to the lowest possible reasonably practicable extent and, in addition, have all staff likely to be involved

received adequate information, instruction and training on the matter?

- What is the lone worker to do if a problem arises and there is nobody to ask? Are there written instructions for the task including contingency measures to deal with foreseeable problems?
- Are "lone worker alarms" needed to highlight the problems for lone workers to a third party?
- Are there any legal requirements for accompanied working?
- Is there a risk of violence, such as when working late at night, or when cash or other valuables are handled?
- What would be the effects on the plant or process, due to the illness or injury of the lone worker operating the plant?
- Are the individuals likely to be involved suitable persons to be allowed to work alone, both in terms of competence to carry out the work required and with respect to personal health and fitness?
- Would a second person be able to substantially contribute to reducing the risk of or preventing injury?
- Are there occasions when assistance would be required, such as during the manual lifting of heavy loads?
- In the case of illness or injury, where is the nearest first-aid box kept and the nearest hospital or access to medical personnel?

Precautionary Measures

Where an employer concludes that it is safe to carry out lone working with the minimum of risk, it is very important to have some sort of precautionary measures to monitor safety.

These should be appropriate for the task and the environment. The Health and Safety Executive recommends that employers should devise a system to monitor the status of lone workers.

Such arrangements should include:

- a check-in arrangement where the worker periodically telephones a supervisor, or is visited at regular intervals;
- provision of emergency call buttons or other similar devices to alert a responsible person;
- a surveillance system which can be introduced without infringing individual privacy.

The complexity of contingency plans should be based upon the consequences of an injury or illness; the frequency with which unaccompanied working is to be carried out; the duration of each working period; the time

that it would take to raise the alarm and for assistance to reach the location.

Employers should take steps to check control measures are used and renew the risk assessment from time to time to ensure it is adequate.

Key Action Points

- Identify work situations where employees are likely to be working alone.
- Carry out a formal assessment of the circumstances under which the work will take place, taking into consideration the risk factors.
- Once concluded that it is safe to be working alone, implement precautionary measures to monitor lone working.

References

HSE Information Leaflet - Working Alone in Safety Ref: IND(G)73 - HSE Books 1998
HSE Information Booklet - Violence at Work Ref: IND(G)69L (rev.) - HSE Books 1997
HSE Information Leaflet - 5 Steps to Risk Assessment Ref: IND(G)163 - HSE Books 1998

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Norwich Union Risk Services operates a Risk Helpline during normal business hours for the cost of a local telephone call. The telephone number is:
0845 366 66 66
www.nu-riskservices.co.uk