

# INFORMATION LEAFLET 004-0415

## Lone Working



April 2015

## Lone working

### 1. Introduction

This article provides guidance on how to keep lone workers healthy and safe. It is for;

- anyone who employs or engages lone workers
- self-employed people who work alone
- employees who work alone

Following the guidance is not compulsory, but it should help employers and lone workers understand how to manage lone working. This guidance is based on the HSE leaflet INDG73 (rev3) Working Alone.

### 2. Is it legal to work alone and is it safe?

Working alone is not against the law and it will often be safe to do so. However, the law requires employers to consider carefully, and then deal with, any health and safety risks for people working alone so that they comply with their legal duties under:

- the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974;
- The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

### 3. Who are lone workers?

Lone workers are those who work by themselves without close or direct supervision, for example:

- harvester or Forwarder driver at the start or end of a site
- machine operators working on different parts of site
- chainsaw operators working on site but out of risk zone of others
- timber purchaser visiting a sale
- drivers (timber haulier/delivery) visiting remote locations
- a person working alone in a workshop

### 4. How must risks of lone working be controlled?

#### Employer's responsibilities:

Employers are responsible for the health, safety and welfare at work of all their workers. They also have responsibility for the health and safety of any contractors or self-employed people doing work



for them. These responsibilities cannot be transferred to any other person, including those people who work alone.

Employers have a duty to assess risks to lone workers and take steps to avoid or control risks where necessary.

This must include:

- involving workers when considering potential risks and measures to control them;
- taking steps to ensure risks are removed where possible, or putting in place control measures, eg carefully selecting work equipment to ensure the worker is able to perform the required tasks in safety;
- providing instruction, training and supervision;
- reviewing risk assessments periodically or when there has been a significant change in working practice.

This may include:

- being aware that some tasks may be too difficult or dangerous to be carried out by an unaccompanied worker;
- where a lone worker is working at another employer's workplace, informing that other employer of the risks and the required control measures;
- when a risk assessment shows it is not possible for the work to be conducted safely by a lone worker, addressing that risk by making arrangements to provide help or back-up.

Employers who have five or more employees must record the significant findings of all risk assessments.

By law, employers must consult all their employees on health and safety matters. Effective consultation will also help ensure that relevant hazards are identified, and appropriate and proportionate control measures are chosen.

You can find more advice on HSE's website:

[www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/managing/consulting.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/managing/consulting.htm).

### **Workers responsibilities:**

**All workers** have responsibilities to take reasonable care of themselves and other people affected by their work activities and to co-operate with their employers in meeting their legal obligations.



## 5. Examples of high-risk activities where at least one other person may need to be present

Risk assessment should help employers decide on the right level of supervision.

- pruning or felling trees whilst working in proximity to an overhead power line
- use of a chainsaws, power pruners or wood chippers
- Using motorized winches or mobile/overhead cranes to lift objects out of vision or objects requiring swing control without the supervision of a Banksman.
- application of pesticides
- work requiring the use of safety harnesses for fall protection
- using portable ladders, which cannot be readily lashed or secured and which therefore require to be secured by a person stationed at the base
- Climbing of trees for any purpose or use of rope access techniques.

## 6. Managing lone working

### A. Assess the hazards and risk

Lone workers should not be put at more risk than other employees. Establishing a healthy and safe working environment for lone workers can be different from organising the health and safety of other employees, but your risk assessment process should identify the issues relevant to your circumstances.

Employers should take account of normal work and foreseeable emergencies, eg fire, equipment failure, illness and accidents. Employers should identify situations where people work alone and consider the following:

#### The task

- Is there machinery involved in the work that one person cannot operate safely?
- Are chemicals or hazardous substances being used that may pose a particular risk to the lone worker?
- Does the work involve lifting objects too large for one person?

#### The environment

- Does the workplace present a specific risk to the lone worker, for example; Remote location with no mobile phone signal or particularly rough ground
- Is there a safe way in and out for one person, e.g. for a lone person working out of hours where the workplace could be locked up?
- Is there a risk of violence and/or aggression?

#### The individual

- Are there any reasons why the individual might be more vulnerable than others and be particularly at risk if they work alone (for example if they are young, pregnant, disabled or a trainee)?



- If the lone worker's first language is not English, are suitable arrangements in place to ensure clear communications, especially in an emergency?
- If a person has a medical condition, are they able to work alone? Employers should seek medical advice if necessary. Consider both routine work and foreseeable emergencies that may impose additional physical and mental burdens on an individual.

## **B. Identify safe working and management procedures**

With hazards and risks understood, action should be taken to protect workers. Where possible lone working should be avoided, however where it is not avoidable you should consider the following:

### **Training**

Training is particularly important where there is limited supervision to control, guide and help in uncertain situations. Training may also be crucial in enabling people to cope in unexpected circumstances and with potential exposure to violence and aggression. Lone workers are unable to ask more experienced colleagues for help, so extra training may be appropriate. They need to be sufficiently experienced and fully understand the risks and precautions involved in their work and the location that they work in.

### **Restricted and prohibited activities**

Employers should set the limits to what can and cannot be done while working alone. They should ensure workers are competent to deal with the requirements of the job and are able to recognise when to seek advice from elsewhere.

### **How will the person be supervised?**

The extent of supervision required depends on the risks involved and the ability of the lone worker to identify and handle health and safety issues. The level of supervision needed is a management decision, which should be based on the findings of a risk assessment, ie the higher the risk, the greater the level of supervision required. It should not be left to individuals to decide whether they need assistance.

Where a worker is new to a job, undergoing training, doing a job that presents specific risks, or dealing with new situations, it may be advisable for them to be accompanied when they first take up the post.

### **Monitoring the work**

Procedures must be put in place to monitor lone workers as effective means of communication are essential. These may include:

- supervisors periodically visiting and observing people working alone;
- pre-agreed intervals of regular contact between the lone worker and supervisor, using phones, radios or email, bearing in mind the worker's understanding of English language;
  - E.g. there are phone-based services, which allow users to log in and out via phone call. Voice messages can be left if going into areas without mobile phone signal
- Implementing robust system to ensure a lone worker has returned to their base or home once their task is completed.



For more complex or higher risk work the following should be considered:

- satellite (GPS) based location and distress beacons
  - E.g. devices are being used in the industry as they communicate via satellites and so do not rely on mobile phone coverage. Devices can be used with monitoring systems that can raise an alarm where pre-set to do so such as when a lone worker fails to identify themselves as safely returned.
- manually operated or automatic warning devices which trigger if specific signals are not received periodically from the lone worker, e.g. staff security systems;
  - There are many such systems, but beware of the reliance on mobile phone signal to communicate information or a GPS position.

### **C. Plan robust responses to an emergency**

Your assessment of the risks should identify foreseeable events. Emergency procedures should be established and employees trained in them. Information regarding emergency procedures should be given to lone workers. Your risk assessment may indicate that mobile workers should carry first-aid kits and/or that lone workers need first-aid training.

Ensure that those required to undertake emergency response know their responsibilities, and that they know how to act. Consider having an easy to understand escalation procedure to avoid unnecessary wasted time.

Consider registering with [emergencySMS](#). To register, text 'register' to 999. You will get a reply – then follow the instructions you are sent.

## **7. Find out more**

Manual handling. Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 (as amended). Guidance on Regulations L23 (Third edition) HSE Books 2004 ISBN 978 0 7176 2823 0  
[www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/l23.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/l23.htm)

Violence at work: A guide for employers Leaflet INDG69 (rev) HSE Books 1996  
[www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg69.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg69.pdf)

Working with substances hazardous to health: A brief guide to COSHH Leaflet INDG136 (rev5) HSE Books 2012 [www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg136.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg136.htm)

Working at height: [www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/height.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/height.htm)

Other sources of advice: You can get additional information from FISA, your trade association or employers' organisation, or from trade unions and some charities.

### **Further information**

For information about health and safety visit [www.ukfisa.com](http://www.ukfisa.com) or [www.hse.gov.uk/](http://www.hse.gov.uk/).