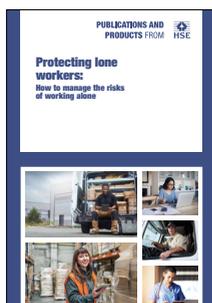


Protecting lone workers

How to manage the risks of working alone



03/20 INDG73(rev4)

You can buy this leaflet at
<https://books.hse.gov.uk/>

This is a web version of the printed edition

This guidance explains how to keep lone workers healthy and safe. It is for anyone who employs lone workers, or engages them as contractors etc, including self-employed people or those who work alone.

Lone workers face the same hazards at work as anyone else, but there is a greater risk of these hazards causing harm as they may not have anyone to help or support them if things go wrong.

As an employer, you should provide training, supervision, monitoring and support for lone workers.

Who are lone workers and what jobs do they do?

A lone worker is 'someone who works by themselves without close or direct supervision'. They exist in all sectors and include those who:

- work alone at a fixed base, for example in shops, petrol stations, factories, warehouses or leisure centres;
- work separately from other people on the same premises or outside normal working hours, for example security staff, cleaners, maintenance and repair staff;
- work at home;
- work away from a fixed base, such as:
 - health, medical and social care workers visiting people's homes etc;
 - workers involved in construction, maintenance and repair including engineers, plant installation and cleaning workers;
 - engineers, assessors and delivery drivers of equipment and supplies who attend construction projects;
 - service workers, including postal staff, taxi drivers, engineers, estate agents, and sales or service representatives visiting domestic and commercial premises;
 - delivery drivers including HGV drivers, van driver/couriers and car/bike-based couriers;
 - agricultural and forestry workers;
- are volunteers carrying out work on their own, for charities or voluntary organisations (fundraising, litter-picking etc). More information is available at: www.hse.gov.uk/voluntary/

Changing ways of working

Ways of working are changing with automation and greater use of technology. Types of workers are also changing, for example people are working until they are older. This means employers need to think differently when considering how to keep them healthy and safe.

The gig economy is also increasing and features short-term, informal working relationships where work is generally:

- on-demand;
- obtained through an online platform;
- delivered on a task-by-task basis.

These workers are usually independent contractors, freelancers or self-employed. Many are lone workers, working to deadlines and exposed to specific road risks for work-related journeys.

Equally, lone HGV drivers are likely to experience long, unsociable hours, high physical and mental demands, and often long periods of sedentary work. Employers should monitor drivers' health regularly and adapt their work to accommodate any individual health needs.

All of these factors can have adverse health consequences for workers, such as musculoskeletal disorders, stress, tiredness and fatigue, as well as issues associated with poor or irregular eating habits.

Health and safety law

The guidance in this leaflet will help you, as an employer, understand what you should do to comply with your legal duties towards all lone workers under:

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

Is it legal to work alone and is it safe?

You are responsible for the health, safety and welfare at work of all your workers, and this applies to any contractors, volunteers or self-employed people. These responsibilities cannot be transferred to any other person, including to those people who work alone.

It will often be safe to work alone. However, the law requires you to think about and deal with any health and safety risks **before** people are allowed to do so.

Establishing a healthy and safe working environment for lone workers can be different from organising the health and safety of other workers. Some things to consider in ensuring lone workers are not put at risk include:

- assessing areas of risk including violence, manual handling, the medical suitability of the individual to work alone and whether the workplace itself presents a risk to them;
- requirements for training, levels of experience and how best to monitor and supervise them;
- having systems in place to keep in touch with them and respond to any incident.

Employees and some self-employed workers also 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. See the 'Responsibilities of workers' section towards the end of this leaflet.

Managing the risks

The law says that employers must assess and control the risks in their workplace.

You must think about what might cause harm to people and decide whether you are doing enough to prevent that harm. If you employ five or more workers, you must write down what you've found.

That record should include:

- the hazards (things that may cause harm);
- how they may harm people;
- what you are already doing to control the risks.

You must review and update this record, for example if anything changes.

There is no legal requirement to conduct a specific, separate risk assessment for lone workers. However, you have a duty to include risks to lone workers in your general risk assessment 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, for example by carefully selecting work equipment to ensure the worker can perform what is required safely;
- instruction, training and supervision;
- reviewing risk assessments periodically and updating them after any significant changes, such as new staff, processes or equipment;
- when the lone worker is working at another employer's workplace, consulting with that employer to identify any risks and required control measures.

Risk assessment should help you decide on the right level of supervision for lone workers. There are some high-risk activities where at least one other person may need to be present. Examples include working:

- in a confined space, where a supervisor may need to be present, along with someone dedicated to the rescue role;
- near exposed live electricity conductors;
- in diving operations, vehicles carrying explosives or fumigation.

You should take account of normal work and foreseeable emergencies such as fire, equipment failure, illness and accidents. Consider how to control the risks by thinking about who will be involved, where the work will happen and what triggers might be more of an impact for lone workers.

More advice on managing risks is available at: www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/

The lone worker and other people

You should consider the lone worker, the people they may come into contact with, the work they are carrying out, and how this may impact on the risk:

- How experienced is the worker in their role and in working alone?
- Has the worker received relevant training?
- Are there any reasons why the worker might be more vulnerable, for example are they young, pregnant, disabled or a trainee?

Environment and equipment

Consider the environment the worker is in and the equipment they are using:

- Does the workplace present a specific risk to the worker, such as operating equipment alone or lifting objects too large for one person?
- Is the work in a rural or isolated area?
- Is the worker going into someone else's home or premises?
- Is there a safe way in or out for one person working outside normal hours?
- Does the worker have adequate and reliable means of communication and a way to call for help?

How could the work trigger an incident?

Consider the activity being carried out by a lone worker and how it might trigger an incident:

- Is the work a security role, for example having authority over customers and enforcing rules?
- Does the work involve handling cash, asking for payment or removing goods or property?

Stress, mental health and wellbeing

Lone working can negatively impact on employees' work-related stress levels and their mental health.

For example, the Stress Management Standards include factors such as relationships with, and support from, other workers and managers. If these are not managed properly, they can lead to work-related stress. Being away from managers and colleagues could mean good support is more difficult to achieve.

Putting procedures in place that allow direct contact between the lone worker and their manager can help. Managing work-related stress relies on understanding what is 'normal behaviour' for an employee and recognising abnormal behaviour or symptoms at an early point (www.hse.gov.uk/stress/signs.htm).

If contact is poor, employees may feel disconnected, isolated or abandoned, which can affect their performance and potentially their stress levels or mental health.

Keeping contact with lone workers

You should:

- agree how to keep in touch with lone workers through regular meetings, or provide other opportunities to share concerns;
- include lone workers in social events and work or team updates;

- ensure lone workers are included in any consultation on changes – they may have unique implications for them;
- make sure lone workers are included in any training that is required.

You can find advice on consulting workers at: www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/consult

Providing support on mental health

Work can also aggravate pre-existing conditions, and problems at work can bring on symptoms or make their effects worse. Whether work is causing the health issue or aggravating it, you have a legal responsibility to help your employees.

Work-related mental health issues must be assessed to measure the levels of risk to staff. Where a risk is identified, you must take steps to remove it or reduce it as far as reasonably practicable.

If a lone worker has a pre-existing mental health condition, you may need to make reasonable adjustments to their work or workplace and this may require additional interventions, including those required by the Equality Act 2010:

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/multipage-guide/employment-workplace-adjustments>

You can find work-related mental health advice on HSE's website at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/stress/mental-health.htm>

Work-related violence

Any form of violence against workers is unacceptable and may affect their psychological as well as their physical health.

Lone working does not automatically imply a higher risk of violence, but it does make workers more vulnerable. The lack of nearby support from a colleague means that lone workers may be less able to prevent an incident from occurring.

Some of the key violence risks in the workplace can include:

- working in locations where there is a known high risk of violence;
- late evening or early morning work when there are fewer workers around;
- when workers, such as security staff, hold positions of authority over customers or clients;
- alcohol and drug use by clients or members of the public lone workers have contact with;
- carrying money and/or valuable equipment.

Training in personal safety, which may include conflict resolution, can help a worker recognise situations where they may be at risk and to take appropriate steps to avoid or manage the risk.

Other measures to consider include modification or design of the work environment, if appropriate, to avoid workers being isolated and providing work equipment such as devices designed to raise the alarm in an emergency which can be operated manually or automatically, eg phones or radios.

Employers should have measures in place to support any worker who has been subject to an abusive or violent incident – workers should also play an important part in identifying and reporting incidents.

The consequences of violence to lone workers can impact on businesses in several ways including staff turnover, low productivity and damage to business reputation.

The impact of violence on a lone worker can lead to work-related stress, which may have serious and long-term effects on their psychological, physical and mental health.

HSE's work-related violence website includes advice and case studies on preventing violence towards lone workers:
www.hse.gov.uk/violence/

What if a lone worker's first language is not English?

If a lone worker's first language is not English, you should ensure that suitable arrangements are in place to provide clear communications, especially in an emergency.

Workers from outside the UK may encounter unfamiliar risks in the jobs that they do and in a working environment with a workplace culture that may be very different from that of their country of origin.

You must ensure workers have received and understood the information, instruction and training they need to work safely.

There is more information at: www.hse.gov.uk/migrantworkers/about.htm

Can someone work alone if they have a medical condition?

You should seek medical advice if necessary. Consider both routine work and foreseeable emergencies that may put additional physical and mental burdens on an individual.

What if a person becomes ill, has an accident, or there is an emergency?

Your assessment of the risks should identify foreseeable events. Emergency procedures should be established, put in place and employees should be trained in them.

Regular and realistic practice should take place to allow quick and effective action to ease the situation and reduce the consequences.

Your risk assessment may indicate that some lone workers should carry first aid equipment and/or may need first aid training (including how to administer first aid to themselves). They should also have access to adequate first aid facilities.

Emergency procedures should also include appropriate guidance on how and when lone workers can contact their employer.

More information on first aid is available at: www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/firstaid/

What if a lone worker is working from home?

You have the same responsibility for the safety and health of employees who work from home as for any other employees.

This means providing supervision, education and training, as well as implementing enough control measures to protect the homeworker. You should accept liability for accident or injury of a homeworker as for any other employee.

Training

Training is important where there is limited supervision to control, guide and help in uncertain situations. It may also be crucial in enabling people to cope in unexpected circumstances and with potential exposure to violence and aggression.

Lone workers are usually 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. Training should be relevant to the work activity.

You should set the limits to what can and cannot be done while working alone. Ensure workers are:

- competent to deal with the requirements of the job;
- suitably trained in the use of any technical solutions provided;
- able to recognise when to seek advice from elsewhere.

Supervision

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 – the higher the risk, the greater the level of supervision required.

Lone workers may need to be accompanied at first where they are:

- new to a job;
- undergoing training;
- doing a job that presents specific risks;
- dealing with new situations.

Monitoring and keeping in touch

Technology advances mean there is a wide range of systems and devices available to employers to monitor lone workers.

Any monitoring system needs to be embedded into an organisation so it is well understood by workers. You must put clear procedures in place because 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 employer, using phones, radios, email etc, bearing in mind the worker's understanding of English;
- other devices designed to raise the alarm in an emergency which can be operated manually or automatically;
- implementing a robust system to ensure a lone worker has returned to their base or home once their work is completed.

You should regularly test technical solutions and all emergency procedures to ensure lone workers can be reached or contacted if a problem or emergency is identified.

Responsibilities of workers

Workers have a duty to take care of their own health and safety and that of others who may be affected by their actions at work. They must co-operate with employers and co-workers to help everyone meet their legal requirements.

If workers have specific queries or concerns relating to health and safety in their workplace, they should talk to their employer, manager/supervisor or a health and safety representative.

Some employers use dynamic risk assessments for lone working situations. This is where workers themselves make operational decisions based on risks which cannot necessarily be foreseen. This is not a substitute for a comprehensive risk assessment.

When a risk assessment identifies circumstances where a lone worker may have to undertake a dynamic risk assessment, they must:

- receive training on how to make that assessment;
- consider the range of possible control measures and what action to take;
- get support for their decisions.

If they're self-employed

Health and safety law may not apply to them but they will need to check at <http://www.hse.gov.uk/self-employed/what-the-law-says.htm>

As their employer (for example, if you have contracted them to work on your premises) you will still be responsible for their health and safety.

Find out more

Homeworkers: Guidance for employers on health and safety Leaflet INDG226(rev1) HSE 2011 www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg226.pdf

Manual handling. Manual Handling Operations Regulations 1992 (as amended). Guidance on Regulations L23 (Third edition) HSE 2004 www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/l23.htm

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

Driving at work: Managing work-related road safety Leaflet INDG382(rev1) www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg382.pdf

Managing work-related violence in licensed and retail premises Leaflet INDG423 HSE 2008 www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg423.pdf

Stress at work – Mental health conditions: www.hse.gov.uk/stress/

Working in confined spaces: www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/confined.htm

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

Working at height: www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/height.htm and *Working at height: A brief guide* Leaflet INDG401(rev2) www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg401.htm

Advice for self-employed workers: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/self-employed/what-the-law-says.htm>

Other sources of advice

You may find more information from trade associations or employers' organisations, or from trade unions and some charities, eg the Suzy Lamplugh Trust at www.suzylamplugh.org

Age, Health and Professional Drivers' Network – a network promoting best practice in the transport industry:
<https://sites.manchester.ac.uk/ahpd/>

Further information

For information about health and safety visit <https://books.hse.gov.uk> or <http://www.hse.gov.uk>. You can view HSE guidance online and order priced publications from the website. HSE priced publications are also available from bookshops.

To report inconsistencies or inaccuracies in this guidance email: commissioning@wlt.com

This guidance is issued by the Health and Safety Executive. Following the guidance is not compulsory, unless specifically stated, and you are free to take other action. But if you do follow the guidance you will normally be doing enough to comply with the law. Health and safety inspectors seek to secure compliance with the law and may refer to this guidance.

This leaflet is available in packs from HSE Books
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Further information

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