

LONE WORKING

Definition

Lone workers are defined as those who work by themselves and without close or direct supervision. They are found in a wide range of situations, such as:-

People in fixed establishments where:

- only one person works on the premises (e.g. small workshops, petrol stations or shops)
- Homeworkers
- people work separately from others in places such as factories, warehouses, leisure centres etc.
- people work outside normal hours, such as cleaners, security personnel, maintenance staff etc.

Mobile workers working away from their fixed base:

- on construction, plant installation, lift repairs, vehicle recovery etc.
- agricultural and forestry workers
- service workers, such as rent collectors, postal staff, drivers, estate agents, sales representatives etc.

Risk Assessment

All lone working operations must be assessed and appropriate control measures introduced. The assessment must cover all eventualities and it is often useful to talk to lone workers, who will usually be able to provide valuable information about their work.

Control measures will include instruction, training, supervision, protective equipment and communication procedures. All control measures must be checked for their effectiveness and to ensure that they are being properly implemented. The amount of monitoring required will usually depend on the level of risk being encountered by the lone worker.

In certain instances, the assessment will establish that it is not possible for the work to be done safely by a lone worker. Clear and effective arrangements must then be made for providing help or back-up.

Lone workers should not be placed at more risk than other employees. This may require extra control measures. Precautions should take account of normal work and foreseeable emergencies, such as fire, equipment failure, illness and accidents. When planning work activities which may involve lone working, the following questions may be considered :-

- Can the risks of the job be adequately controlled by one person?
- Does the workplace present a special risk to lone workers?
- Is there safe access and egress?
- If access equipment is needed (e.g. ladders or trestles), can it be safely handled and used by one person?

- Can all the plant, substances and goods involved in the work be safely handled by one person?
- Does the work involve lifting objects too large or heavy for one person?
- Is more than one person required to operate essential equipment?
- Is there a risk of violence against the lone worker?
- Are women especially at risk?
- Are young persons especially at risk?
- Is the individual medically fit and suitable to work alone?
- What training is required for the lone worker?
- How will the lone worker be monitored and supervised?
- What arrangements will be necessary should the lone person become ill, have an accident or if there is another type of emergency?

Control Measures

In addition to the control measures which would be required whether or not lone working was involved, the following procedures should be considered and implemented as necessary:

- Supervisors periodically visiting and observing lone workers
- Regular contact between the lone worker and their supervisor, using telephones or radios
- Use of automatic warning devices which operate if specific signals are not received from the lone worker (e.g. systems for security staff)
- Alarms which are activated automatically by the absence of activity
- Permits to Work
- Access to fire fighting and first aid equipment