

Working Alone Safely

Controlling the Risks of Solitary Work



Developed by the Division of Occupational Safety & Health (DOSH)
February, 2010

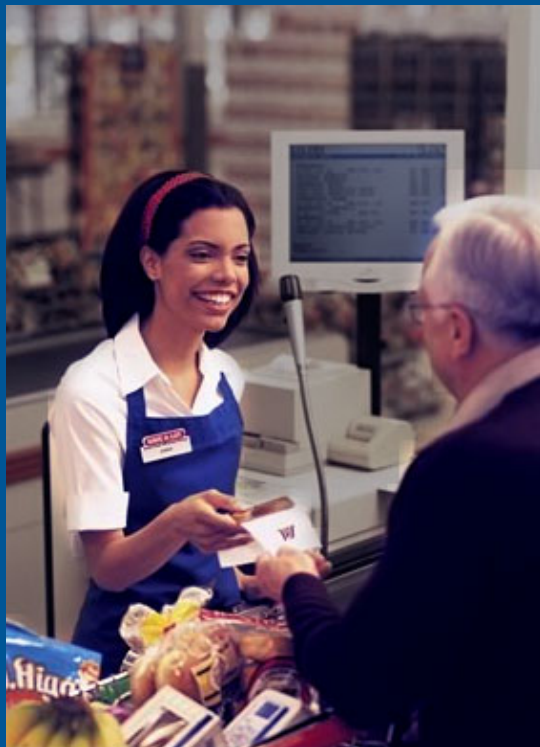
This module will cover:

- Who are lone workers?
- Safety regulations and the lone worker
- Determining safety hazards to lone worker
- Is the person medically fit and suitable to work alone?
- What training is needed for the lone worker?
- How will the person be supervised?
- Procedures needed to help lone workers remain safe.
- What happens if a person becomes ill, has an accident, or there is an emergency?
- Lone workers at late-night retail jobs.



Who are lone workers?

Lone workers are found in a wide range of situations and are those who work by themselves without close or direct supervision. They may also be self-employed people.



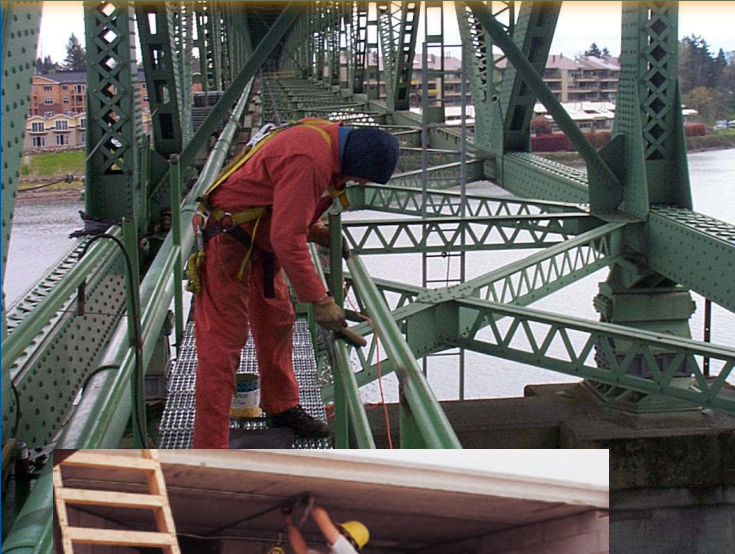
They can be people in fixed establishments where only one person works on the premises, such as in small workshops, gas stations, kiosks, espresso stands, and home workers

Who are lone workers and what jobs do they do?



They include people who work outside normal hours, such as janitors, security guards, special production, plant maintenance or repair staff, delivery truck drivers, and others.

Who are lone workers and what jobs do they do?



They include mobile workers working away from a fixed base in construction, pesticide applicators, office & factory cleaners, and service workers such as social workers, home healthcare workers, real estate agents and others.

What safety regulations address working alone?

Although there is no rules that specifically apply to working alone, the broad duties of the DOSH regulations still apply.

These require identifying hazards of the work, assessing the risks involved, and putting measures in place to avoid or control the risks.

It is important to talk to employees and their safety representatives as they are a valuable source of information and advice. This will help to ensure that all relevant hazards have been identified and appropriate controls chosen.

Control measures may include instruction, training, supervision, protective equipment and communication devices. Employers should take steps to check that control measures are used and conduct a risk assessment from time to time to ensure they are still adequate.

Safe working arrangements for lone workers

- When risk assessment shows that it is not possible for the work to be done safely by a lone worker, arrangements for providing help or back-up should be put in place.
- Where a lone worker is working at another employer's workplace, that employer should inform the lone worker's employer of any risks and the control measures that should be taken. This helps the lone worker's employer to assess the risks.
- Establishing safe working for lone workers is no different from organizing the safety of other employees.
- Employers need to know the law and standards which apply to lone worker's activities and then assess whether the requirements can be met by people working alone.

Some work cannot be done alone

There are some high-risk activities where safety regulations require that at least one other person be present.

Examples include:

confined space work where an attendant needs to be present, as well as someone dedicated to the rescue role,

electrical work at or near exposed live conductors where at least two people are required.



Employers should determine - Is it safe to be working alone in this job?

Does the workplace present a special risk to the lone worker?

Is there a safe way in and a way out for one person?

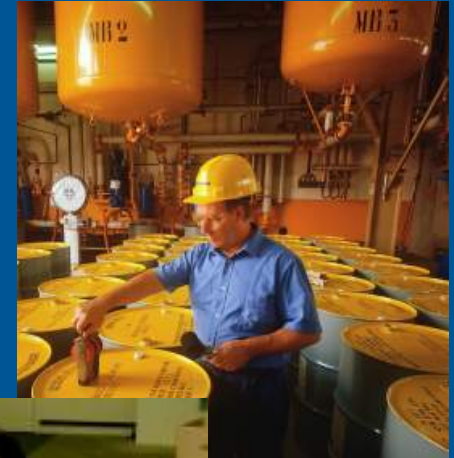
Can any temporary access equipment, such as portable ladders or trestles, be safely handled by one person?

Can all the machinery and goods involved in the workplace be safely handled by one person?



Is it safe to work alone?

Are there any chemicals or hazardous substances being used that may pose a risk to the worker?



Does the work involve lifting objects too large for one person?



Is more than one person needed to operate essential controls for the safe running of equipment or workplace transport?



Is it safe to work alone?

Is there a risk of violence?



Are young, pregnant or disabled workers at risk if they work alone?



If the lone worker's first language is not English, are arrangements in place to ensure clear communication, especially in an emergency?



Is the person medically fit and suitable to work alone?



Check that lone workers have no medical conditions which make them unsuitable for working alone.

Seek medical advice if necessary.

Consider both routine work and foreseeable emergencies which may impose additional physical and mental burdens on the individual.

What training is needed to ensure a safe work environment?

Training is particularly important where there is limited supervision to control, guide and help in situations of uncertainty.

Training may be critical to avoid panic reactions in unusual situations.

Lone workers need to be sufficiently experienced and to understand the risks and precautions fully.

Set the limits to what can and cannot be done while working alone.

Ensure employees are competent to deal with circumstances which are new, unusual or beyond the scope of training, such as when to stop work and seek advice from a supervisor and how to handle potential workplace violence.

How will the person be supervised?

- Although lone workers cannot be subject to constant supervision, it is still an employer's duty to ensure their health and safety at work.
- Supervision can help to ensure that employees understand the risks associated with their work and that the necessary safety precautions are carried out.
- Supervisors can also provide guidance in situations of uncertainty.
- Supervision of health and safety can often be carried out when checking the progress and quality of the work; it may take the form of periodic site visits combined with discussions in which health and safety issues are raised

Procedures to help keep lone workers safe



Supervisors periodically visiting and observing people working alone.

Regular contact between the lone worker and supervision using either a telephone or radio.

Automatic warning devices which operate if specific signals are not received periodically from the lone worker, such as systems for security staff.

Other devices designed to raise the alarm in the event of an emergency and which are operated manually or automatically by the absence of activity.

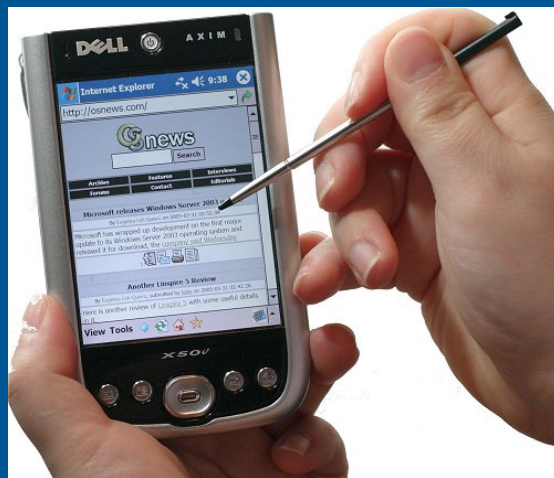
Checks that a lone worker has returned to their base or home on completion of a task.

Devices to keep in contact with lone workers

Regular contact between the lone worker and supervision using cell phone, computer, satellite, webcams, RFID technology or PDAs. (Do a Google search for “lone worker protective devices”.)

Automatic warning devices which operate if specific signals are not received periodically from the lone worker, such as systems for security staff;

Other devices designed to raise the alarm in the event of an emergency and which are operated manually or automatically by the absence of activity.



PDA



RFID



What to do in case of illness, accident, or emergency

Lone workers should be capable of responding correctly to emergencies.

Risk assessment should identify foreseeable events.

Emergency procedures should be established and employees trained in them.

Information about emergency procedures and danger areas should be given to lone workers who visit your premises.

Lone workers should have access to adequate first-aid facilities and mobile workers should carry a first-aid kit suitable for treating minor injuries.

Occasionally risk assessment may indicate that lone workers need training in first aid.



Link to [“Leave when It’s Unsafe”](#) video from WorkSafe B.C.

Late Night Retail Rule

DOSH has a rule that applies specifically to minimarts, gas stations and other late night retail stores to protect the lone workers from workplace violence in these establishments.



[Link to late night retail workers crime prevention rule](#)

Workplace Violence and the Lone Worker

Lone workers are especially vulnerable to injury from workplace violence.



For more information on workplace violence prevention, see our [online workplace violence presentations](#)

Additional Information

Working Alone in Safety : Controlling the risks of solitary work -
Health and Safety Executive the United Kingdom

Working Alone – Canadian Centre for Occupational Safety & Health
<http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/hsprograms/workingalone.html>

Core Safety Rules (WAC 296-800)
(Basic safety and health rules needed by most employers in
Washington State)

Additional Safety Rules
(Fall protection, ladders, machine safety, lockout/tagout,
electrical, hearing conservation, etc.)

DOSH Consultation Services

Safety & Health program review and worksite evaluation

- By employer invitation only
- Free
- Confidential
- No citations or penalties, we are here to help
- Letter explains findings
- Follow-up all serious hazards

For additional assistance, you can call one of our consultants. Click below for local L&I office locations:

<http://www.lni.wa.gov/Safety/Basics/Assistance/Consultation/consultants.asp>