



Lone Danger

Whilst employees working alone is not unlawful employers have a duty to assess the risks of lone working and implement appropriate risk control measures to deal with them. Employers who don't take steps to reduce the risks associated with their employee working alone will be breaking the law.

UK legislation doesn't define lone workers it is, however, generally accepted to be "working in an area where there are no other workers present". Significantly this means that, in the event of an emergency, there is no one to give assistance or summon help!

The Lone Danger

Hazards that lone workers may encounter include accidents or emergencies arising out of the work, or suddenly falling ill, and not having adequate provision of first aid - or someone to administer it!

Violence

Statistics from the British Crime Survey have indicated that as many as 150 lone workers are attacked every day (both physical and verbal). For workers in some sectors it may be the likelihood of injuries from animals you may have to consider!

Lone working is common in the UK

Numerous occupations involve lone working.

Your staff may work night shifts, or in a remote location. E.g. working alone in a small workshop, petrol station, kiosk or shop;

working alone for long periods in a factory, warehouse, leisure centre or fairground. Or they could be people working on their own outside normal hours, such as cleaners and security, maintenance or repair staff.

Mobile workers operating away from their fixed base also often find themselves in a lone working environment. Those affected can include construction workers, staff involved in maintenance and repair, plant installation, or those carrying out cleaning work. They may be service workers such as postal staff, social and medical workers, engineers, estate agents, and sales or service representatives visiting domestic and commercial premises.

Agricultural and forestry workers are particularly high-risk with regards to lone working and can be amongst the most vulnerable. The most common causes of death include being struck by a moving or falling object such as a vehicle or straw bale, being trapped by something collapsing or overturning, or being asphyxiated while trapped in a confined space e.g. a silo. Nearly two-thirds of deaths in the sector involve contact with electricity via overhead power lines (OHPLs).



Stress

Stress can be a common factor in working alone and can be attributed to several factors. These can include feelings of isolation and health issues brought on by sleep deprivation.

Working overnight may adversely affect the health of shift workers. Long-term night shift work is associated with an increased risk of certain cancers, as well as obesity, heart disease, ulcers, gastrointestinal and metabolic problems. People who work night shifts or rotating shifts also often don't sleep enough, and long-term sleep deprivation* is known to be bad for health.

Poor communication with base can be a concern. It may arise because the work location is in a mobile blackspot. If this is the case it should have been considered in your risk assessment and provision for that member of staff to phone in at an arranged time once they return to a mobile area should be arranged.

Lack of Welfare Facilities

Lone workers must have the same hygiene and welfare facilities available to them as their company-based colleagues do. This can be access to a loo or having a suitable place available to rest or take refreshments. Lack of adequate welfare facilities may lead to potential health problems.

Reducing the risks in just a tick

To avoid putting you and your lone workers at risk you should carry out an annual risk assessment.

- ✓ Ask your employees who work alone what they consider the risks to be.
- ✓ Check that all risk control measures work and review them following any significant workplace changes.
- ✓ Assess the risk of violence, manual handling, the medical suitability of individuals working alone and whether the workplace itself presents a risk to them. Being aware that some tasks may be too difficult or dangerous to be carried out by an unaccompanied worker.
- ✓ Consider the impact of the work location & type of work.
- ✓ Evaluate levels of experience, training and how best to monitor and supervise training needs.
- ✓ Ensure you know what is happening, including having systems in place to keep in regular contact with staff. Open communication is key in managing the stress of lone workers.
- ✓ It is a legal requirement to document risk assessments if you have more than 5 employees. It is good working practice to keep a written record irrespective of the number of staff employed.

Following on from your risk assessment, you will need to produce a safety guide which sets out your company's rules on working alone and helps your employees to understand the risks they may face.

The risks associated with lone working are only one of the perils that businesses face. Make sure that your insurance programme covers the complete range of risks that you your business encounters.

Looking after business. Taking care of people.