



| | | | | | | |
|---|---|------------------------------------|---------------|---------------------|---|--|
|  | | <h1>Frequently Asked Question</h1> | | |  | |
| Ref: FAQ 003:03 | | RE: Lone Working | | | | |
| Issue date: | March 2017 | Revised Date: | December 2019 | Review date: | December 2021 | |
| Author(s): | NH&SF-Information & Advisory Team | | | | | |
| Note: | <p><i>This information/advice has been issued in response to frequently asked questions around a specific topic and may not cover all issues arising, should you require more specific advice please contact the Health & Safety Help Desk. The management of any occupational safety and health issue(s) remains the responsibility of local management.</i></p> | | | | | |

Lone working in the healthcare sector has its own unique set of hazards which need to be considered by both employers and employees when considering health and safety risks.

Who are lone workers?

“Lone Workers” are those who work by themselves without close or direct supervision.

- Work separately from others, e.g. a technician working alone in a laboratory providing an out of hours service, a maintenance person working in an isolated area
- Work away from their fixed base e.g. a security person on patrol, a nurse on escort duty
- Work in the community e.g. a psychiatric nurse visiting community homes
- Work outside normal hours e.g. Radiographers
- Are the only person on the premises, e.g. a receptionist alone in a clinic
- Visit people in their homes, e.g. social workers, doctors, home helps, public health nurses

Are people legally allowed to work alone?

Yes, there is nothing specific in general legislation that prohibits a person from working alone. Section 19 of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005, requires the employer to undertake a risk assessment to determine whether or not an employee may work alone. There may be circumstances where specific legislation may not permit lone working e.g. working in confined spaces

What kind of hazards might lone workers be exposed to?

Hazards that lone workers may encounter include:

- Accidents or emergencies arising out of work, including inadequate provision of first aid, road traffic accidents/ breakdowns/ punctures
- Sudden illnesses
- Inadequate provision of rest, hygiene and welfare facilities
- Physical violence/ verbal abuse from members of the public

- Slips/trips/falls
- Patient Moving and Handling/ Manual Handling

What responsibilities do lone workers have?

Lone workers have a responsibility to help their employer fulfil this duty to provide a healthy and safe place in which to work and so they must:

- To take reasonable care of their own safety and the safety of others when working alone
- To co-operate with their employer to enable him/her comply with safety and health legislation.
- To report any defect in the place of work, the systems of work without unreasonable delay
- To report any work being carried on, or likely to be carried on, in a manner which may endanger the safety, health or welfare at work of the employee or that of any other person
- Having regard to his or her training and the instructions given by his or her employer, make correct use of any article or substance provided for use by the employee at work or for the protection of his or her safety

What happens if the risk assessment shows that it is not possible for the work to be carried out safely by a lone worker?

If the risk assessment shows that it is not possible for the work to be done safely by a lone worker, alternative arrangements 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 to be taken. This also helps the lone worker's employer to assess the risks.

What control measures could be implemented to minimise the risk to lone workers?

When establishing safe working arrangements for lone workers, employers need to know the law and standards that may apply to their specific work activity. They must then assess if the requirements of that work activity can be met by people working alone.

The risk assessment should prescribe control measures to be implemented in order to eliminate/minimise the identified risks. Potential control measures to be considered are as follows:

- Information sharing- It is important that all lone workers have access to appropriate, good quality information with regard to the potential hazards associated with the clientele or the working environment.
- Referrals- All referrals, or requests for a visit, should be made through an authorised source where possible. As much information as possible must be obtained prior to consultation.
- Supervision- Given the unique working conditions of the lone worker, supervision becomes even more significant as it offers a source of valuable support to the lone worker.

This can be carried out when checking the progress of work; it may take the form of periodic site visits combined with discussions on health and safety issues. The extent of the supervision is directly related to the risk assessment e.g. an employee new to the job or undergoing training may need to be accompanied at first.

- Control point- A control point should be established for the employee to leave details of their lone working visits. (Please refer to section 7.2.3 in the HSE Policy on Lone Working for further details).

- Visits- all visits should be notified, if planned visits are missed/changed the control point should be informed. Lone workers must operate a notification protocol when they have completed their visit
- Communication is very important; e.g. use of mobile phones, telephone or radio
- Automatic warning devices; e.g. panic alarms, no movement alarms also known as man down alarms
- Instruction and training in proper procedures; e.g. “safe words” or code words for potentially violent situations when combined with mobile phone communication
- First-aid kits and training
- Implementing Standard Operating Procedures (SOP’s)
- Security procedures for workplaces
- Implementing correct incident reporting procedures

What provisions should be in place for lone workers in the case of an emergency?

- Lone workers should be capable of responding correctly to emergencies. Risk assessment should identify foreseeable events e.g. Road Traffic Accident
- Emergency procedures should be established and employees trained in these
- Information about emergency procedures and the working environment should be given to lone workers

Do I Need to Provide Specific Training for Lone Working?

The line manager must ensure that lone workers receive appropriate training in accordance with the risks associated with their work activities to enable them to perform their work safely.

Line managers must identify the appropriate training programme(s) that lone workers require as identified through a risk assessment and training needs assessment which takes specific cognisance of any period when tasks are undertaken when an employee(s) work(s) alone e.g. management of aggression and violence training.

References/Additional Guidance:

[HSE policy for Lone Working 2017](#)