

Lone working

Lone working increases the risks of work for several reasons, principally by increasing the consequences of accidents when things go wrong. There are many examples both at Universities and in Industry, where relatively minor injuries have become life-threatening or even fatal because the worker was alone. This document aims to introduce a uniform approach to such lone working conditions across the University.

A working definition of lone working

Lone workers at the University are staff (or postgraduate students) who work by themselves without close or direct supervision or assistance being close at hand. This does not mean only inexperienced persons but deliberately includes experts working in campus buildings or remote sites engaged in research or maintenance activities. In short this includes any person who does not have other people available to assist them in the case of an incident.

The University Safety Policy does not have a specific section on the dangers of Lone Working, which is why this document has been provided. However, there are sections and additional documents on Field Trips, Work Experience and the Supervision of Students, and Work Outside Normal Hours. These are all issues that overlap with Lone Working.

Because 'Lone working' situations apply both on and off-campus and the hazards change dependent on the time (normal hours v out of hours) the basic control measure for Lone Working is the Risk Assessment. This document should be read alongside other Safety Policy Supplements and the personal safety guidance.

Examples of Lone Workers

- Staff working in small workshops, shops or working at home
- Staff and post-graduate students undertaking research, lecturers, sports centre staff
- People work outside normal hours, e.g. cleaners, security, maintenance or repair staff etc.
- On construction, plant installation, maintenance and cleaning work, electrical repairs, lift repairs, painting and decorating
- Agricultural workers, engineers etc.
- Persons visiting / interviewing people in their homes or working in 'rough' or otherwise problematic parts of the City or Countryside. Here the specific risks of personal violence add to the lone working risks.

It is important that schools consider lone working as working alone may increase the likelihood of an accident being caused by violence at work, there may be reduced support such as first aid in the event of an accident and the person may be unable to summon assistance etc.

In this document the term 'supervisor' has been used loosely to include also colleagues and workmates who are undertaking 'supervision' of the safety of a 'lone worker' and it is therefore not intended to denote managerial control in all instances.

Duty of the University

It is acceptable to work alone as long as a risk assessment has been carried out by the employing school / service and control measures are identified and put into place that ensure the task can be carried out safely.

The member of staff undertaking the 'lone work' and safety representatives will also be able to contribute to this process. This will help to make sure that all relevant hazards have been identified and appropriate controls chosen. Control measures may include instruction, training, supervision, protective equipment etc.

Duty of staff and post-graduate students

Staff and post-graduate students also have statutory responsibilities to take reasonable care of themselves and other people affected by their work. They also need to co-operate with management in meeting their legal obligations.

The risk assessment process should help decide the right level of supervision. In some situations, additional arrangements for providing help or back-up should be put in place. More than one additional person may need to be present or be within sight.

The Head of School is not to permit lone working if the proposed work is dangerous or if a suitable Risk Assessment has not been undertaken.

Examples:

- Pesticide spraying or fumigation work.
- High-risk activities such as working at a height.
- Working with high hazard chemical or biological hazards.
- High-risk confined space working where a supervisor may need to be present, as well as someone dedicated to the rescue role
- Operating high hazard machinery (such as chain saws and similar equipment).
- Diving operations. (Legal controls require that there are support and backup persons present and in some cases this will include several people and additional emergency equipment).

Risk Assessment: Hazards & Risks

The first stage of the risk assessment process is to identify what hazards the lone worker may be exposed to and the extent of the risk. Questions which may help you identify possible hazards associated with lone working include the following:

- 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 all the plant, substances and goods involved in the work be safely handled by one person?
- Is there a risk of violence to the worker, and if so who from?
- Are women especially at risk if they work alone?

- Are young workers especially at risk if they work alone?
- Is the person medically fit and suitable to work alone?

Risk Assessment: Control Measures

The next stage of the risk assessment is to decide how you are going to control the risk in terms of either reducing the severity of the injury or likelihood of the accident occurring. This can include measures such as training the lone worker and putting procedures in place which take account of communication and supervision. The risk assessment needs to include routine activities that the lone worker will carry out as well as emergency situations.

Training

Lone workers need to be sufficiently experienced and to understand the risks and precautions fully. Training is particularly important where there is limited supervision to control and guide. Lone workers need to be able to deal with circumstances which are new, unusual or beyond the scope of training, for example when to stop work and seek advice from a supervisor, and how to handle aggression. As part of this, management should agree limits to what can and cannot be done while working alone with the employee or student.

Supervision

The line manager or supervisor of the lone worker or student should:

- Ensure that the employee or student understand the risks associated with their work and that the necessary safety precautions are carried out.
- Provide guidance in situations of uncertainty.

In this document the term ‘supervisor’ has been used loosely to include also colleagues and workmates who are undertaking ‘supervision’ of the safety of a ‘lone worker’ and it is therefore not intended to denote managerial control in all instances. However there are specific legal responsibilities in the case of junior staff and postgraduate students that must be fulfilled by their management supervisors and Principal Investigators etc. Use of ‘workmates’ and other loose forms of supervision is not acceptable for high hazard situations with trainees or inexperienced staff etc.

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 risks include the environmental risks as well as the risks from the work being undertaken.

New staff (including those undergoing training such as post-graduate students) and staff doing a job with special risks or new situations may need to be accompanied at first.

The level of supervision should be agreed between management and the lone worker as part of the risk assessment. The higher the risk, the greater the level of supervision required. This needs to take into account the environmental conditions as well as the risks from the work being undertaken and account for the actions that need to be taken in an emergency situation.

Procedures need to be put in place to monitor lone workers to see they remain safe. Safety considerations can often be incorporated into progress and quality checks. In some cases

monitoring may take the form of periodic site visits combined with discussions in which health and safety issues are raised, or the use of a telephone call-out system such as Guardian Angel. Such systems are programmed to call for assistance if they are not activated within set time limits. Further details can be obtained from the University safety Office.

Monitoring systems may include:

- Supervisors visiting and observing people working alone, such as periodically ‘looking in’ on lab staff working elsewhere in the building.
- Automatic warning devices which operate if specific signals are not received periodically from the lone worker, e.g. systems for security staff or the Guardian Angel system.
- 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 such as ‘man down’ alarms.
- Checks that a lone worker has returned to their base or home on completion of a task.

Communication

Communication is important in lone working situations. This may be regular contact between the lone worker and supervisor either face to face or using either a telephone or radio. ‘Walkie-Talkie’ type radios can be used between labs within buildings in many cases so there need not be a need for high disturbance for the people involved.

This should take account of practicalities such as if a mobile phone is to be used off site, this should be able to pick up a signal. For this reason first visits to remote sites should routinely be done with accompanying persons enabling this type of information to be gathered and then the Risk Assessment for subsequent visits can be revised if appropriate.

It is essential that the whereabouts of the lone worker are known to colleagues, especially if there is travelling between sites or buildings. This may be done by writing the details of the visits on a marker board or in a diary. Whatever system is used it should be specified in the Risk Assessment and should also be known and routine for the persons involved.

Emergency Considerations

Lone workers should be capable of responding correctly to emergencies. Risk assessment should identify foreseeable events. Emergency procedures should be established and the people concerned trained in using the procedures (especially if they are complex as can be the case in some lab based emergencies – such as oxygen resuscitation therapy).

Emergency Procedures may include,

- Process fires (fires resulting from the process or work being undertaken).
- Man-down procedures (if the person has an accident what needs to be done to recover them, especially important in high hazard laboratories).
- Actions to be taken in case of a chemical spill (especially high hazard substances)
- Actions to be taken in the event of power failure (for example where the person is reliant on power for their safety systems or for egress from a building (e.g. wheelchair user on an upper floor).

Information about standard emergency procedures and danger areas in your control should be given to lone workers who visit your premises. This includes contractors undertaking work for the School / Service out of hours or in restricted laboratories etc.

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, for example when working in remote areas on field trips.

If the lone worker does not return when expected there should be a procedure where to look for them. This could include the make and registration of any vehicle they are using as well as the route that they are expected to have used (where possible).

Work on Non-University Premises

There may be situations where a member of staff or post-graduate student is working at another employer's workplace. In this case there should be liaison between the University and the employer to ensure that any risks have been identified and the control measures that should be taken. In particular the lone worker should be informed of emergency procedures in place at the other employer's site. This is especially important for high hazard sites such as chemical works, construction sites, docks, rail facilities etc.