

NERC HEALTH AND SAFETY GUIDANCE ON LONE WORKING

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Background

Risks from lone working primarily occur where the working situation involves an increased likelihood of hazardous occurrences which require the intervention of another person to help remedy the situation or summon assistance to cover the emergency. When lone working, problems in situations which would otherwise be easy to deal with and manage safely can escalate and have far more serious consequences due to the lack of assistance and inability to secure help.

For low risk tasks, such as such as working in an office or using a computer, lone working is normally acceptable with minimal additional precautions or risk assessment required. However, related risks such as increased risk of personal attack may need to be taken into account.

Definitions

Lone worker - A person is considered to be a lone worker if they have no visual or audible communication with another person and there is no-one working in the vicinity who is able to provide or summon assistance in the event of an incident.

Normal Site Operational Hours – These will vary from site to site but will not usually include night time, weekends, Bank Holidays or other site holidays/privilege days.

General Guidance

Individuals should not work alone where the nature of the task being undertaken makes it important there is the presence of another person or persons in order to ensure safety. This would especially include emergency situations where a second person needs to be available to provide or summon help because the work involves an increased risk of injury, illness, spill of a hazardous material or other unsafe condition.

Where lone working, other than for low risk tasks such as office or computer work, is likely to occur consideration should be given to the need to have assistance available in case of an accident or other emergency. This should normally be done as part of the risk assessment for the activity.

Risk Assessment

Specific risks associated with lone working should be assessed and, if considered necessary, appropriate control measures put in place that adequately control the risks of working alone.

For lone working to be acceptable it is important to:

- justify that the lone working is necessary and the risks associated with working alone do not warrant being accompanied by another person
- confirm that the job can be safely performed by one person
- consider the levels of experience, knowledge, skill and training required to ensure proficiency in dealing with any foreseeable hazardous situations which may arise when working alone
- specify the type, method and frequency of contact with another person who can provide assistance or other supervision that is required; it should not be left solely to the lone worker to decide whether or not they require assistance
- identify the emergency procedures which apply to the work including how assistance will be obtained in case of an incident or sudden illness
- take into account any additional risks associated with the proposed working, especially when it is either physically or mentally demanding

In assessing whether a task can safely be performed by a lone worker, consideration should be given to:

- the type of incidents or accidents that may occur and the level of assistance that might be required to deal with them
- the nature of the injuries or incapacity that could result
- the need to receive immediate or rapid treatment

The assessment should consider whether the work, or a likely resultant emergency, necessitates more than one member of staff be present at all times.

Work where lone working may not be acceptable

Local management may specify tasks for which lone working is unlikely to be acceptable or for which stringent precautions must be in place before allowing lone working to proceed. These tasks should be considered according to the local situation and working conditions but might include:

- laboratory work involving a risk of exposure to hazardous substances
- work involving an increased risk of electric shock eg live working
- risk of exposure to dangerous atmospheres and loss of consciousness eg oxygen deficient atmospheres
- getting trapped or incapacitated in secure, isolated or secluded areas eg access controlled areas, cold rooms, plant-rooms or in the field*
- operation of dangerous machinery
- handling heavy loads
- working at height where there is a risk of serious injury from a fall.

**the NERC Guidance Note 'A Safe System of Fieldwork' gives more information on lone working during fieldwork.*

Work outside normal hours

It is useful for staff working alone outside normal site operational hours to report their presence to a central control point. Where it has been agreed there needs to be regular contact with other colleagues who are also be on site for the duration of the work, contact needs to be made with those persons before the lone working begins.

Staff working in offices at weekends and outside of normal hours should comply with local security arrangements for signing in and signing out. Where shift-work that involves lone working occurs, arrangements need to be made to ensure all staff are accounted for at the end of the shift.

Contact with other persons when lone working

Where there is elevated risk but it is still deemed acceptable for lone working to occur, a means of contacting other staff or summoning assistance may need to be in place. This could include having two persons working in close proximity (but not necessarily together) or could be by means of a fixed or mobile telephone, two-way radio or lone worker alarm which must be close to their working position at all times or preferably on the lone worker's person.

For some situations where working without a second person in close vicinity (ie within hailing distance) is allowed but further assurance is desirable, contact measures which provide an additional level of safety can include:

- use of a lone worker alarm
- arranging for periodic visits by / to co-workers or 'buddies' at regular intervals*
- telephone calls at regular intervals from / to colleagues who are able to provide or summon assistance within a reasonable space of time
- using a two way radio to provide communication with colleagues at regular intervals
- security patrol checks of the work area at regular intervals
- arranging for regular checks with neighbours or other persons who are working nearby.

** 'regular intervals' can be defined locally with every half an hour being good practice but periods of greater than an hour probably too long.*

When 'buddy' or other regular contact systems are used and there is no suitable contact at the agreed interval, the 'buddy' or other person must investigate as necessary. However, the buddy must not place themselves at risk and must raise the alarm immediately before intervening if further assistance is likely to be required. This type of regular contact precaution is only appropriate for tasks of relatively low risk and is not acceptable when safe working depends on the presence of two people.

Lone worker alarms

Where lone worker alarm systems are used:

- the system must raise an alarm at a point where someone is always available to provide help (a mobile receiver carried by another person is an acceptable alternative provided radio signal reception and coverage is checked and assured)
- written procedures which describe their use must be in place
- training must be given to all users so they are familiar with the method of operation and the sound of the alarm
- alarms must be tested on every occasion they are deployed to ensure equipment is functioning, staff are familiar with the system and a signal can be received at the control/receiving point from the location of the lone working
- procedures or systems that provide an indication of where the person requiring assistance is likely to be located must be in place. A safe system of work must be used if the lone worker alarm does not have a location finding function eg a record kept of where the lone worker intends to work.

Reference: INDG73 (rev2) Working alone: Health and safety guidance on the risks of lone working, HSE, 2009, ISBN 978 0 7176 6371

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg73.pdf>