

*Guidance Note, GN006*

## LONE WORKING GUIDANCE

### **Risk Assessment**

Lone work is work which is specifically intended to be carried out unaccompanied or without immediate access to another employee. It is not the same as an individual finding themselves on their own. For example, in every workplace individuals may be the first or last person in an office or they may have to go into an unoccupied storeroom.

Lone working can occur:

- During normal working hours at a remote location either within the normal workplace or offsite visit; and
- When working outside normal working hours.

Departmental procedures need to take account of the possibility of both situations arising and should define what constitutes 'normal working hours'.

Working alone is specifically prohibited by law only in a small number of well-established dangerous situations such as working with live electrical conductors and entry into confined spaces. However, there is no general legal prohibition on lone working and the University's responsibility is to ensure the health and safety of staff working alone and others affected by these activities.

Risk assessment is essential to good risk management, and must be carried out by a competent person.

Completing a risk assessment for lone working is no different to completing other risk assessments. The risk assessor should:

- Identify The hazards associated with the work and carrying it out unaccompanied;
- Assess the risks associated with the work and decide on the safe working arrangements to control these risks;
- Record the findings of the assessment;
- Implement the safe working procedures; and
- Monitor and review the safe working procedure.

### **Identify the hazards associated with the work and carrying it out unaccompanied**

The hazards associated with the work are likely to be the same whether it is carried out alone or accompanied, although the possibility of violence towards the lone worker, in certain situations, should always be considered. Those carrying out assessments should therefore use the techniques they normally use for hazard identification when considering the hazards of lone working.

### **Assess the risks associated with the work and decide on the safe working arrangements to control the risk**

Although working alone may not introduce any new hazards, the risks may differ significantly when a task is carried out unaccompanied.

Some of the issues that need to be considered when evaluating the risks and planning safe working procedures are as follows:

#### **Can one person adequately control the risks of the job?**

Lone workers should not be placed at more risk than other employees and extra control measures may be required. Precautions should take account of normal work and foreseeable emergencies such as fire, equipment failure, illness and accidents. Managers should identify situations where people work alone and consider the following:

- Does the workplace present a special risk to the lone worker?
- Is there safe way in and out for one person, e.g. for a lone person working out of hours where the workplace could be locked up?
- Is there machinery or equipment involved in the work that one person cannot operate safely?
- Are chemicals or hazardous substances being used that may pose a particular risk to the lone worker?
- Does the work involve lifting objects too large for one person?
- Can one person safely handle any necessary temporary access equipment, such as portable ladders or trestles?
- Are there any reasons why the individual might be more vulnerable than others and be particularly at risk if they work alone for example if they are a young worker, pregnant, disabled or a trainee)?
- Are the welfare facilities adequate?
- Can one person safely handle all plant, substances and goods involved in the work?
- Is there a risk of violence and/or aggression?
- If the lone worker's first language is not English, are suitable arrangements in place to ensure clear communications, especially in an emergency?

## **What training is required to ensure competency in safety matters?**

Training is particularly important where there is limited supervision to control, guide and help people in uncertain situations. Training may also be crucial in enabling people to cope in unexpected circumstance and with potential exposure to violence and aggression.

Lone workers need to be sufficiently experienced and fully understand the risks and precautions involved in their work and the location they work in. Managers should ensure employees are competent to deal with the requirements of the job and are able to recognise when to seek advice. There should be an agreement on the circumstances in which it is reasonable to stop work and seek advice. It is a management responsibility to ensure employees are competent to carry out the work unaccompanied and are competent to deal with circumstances that are new, unusual or beyond the scope of training.

## **How will the person be supervised?**

Although lone workers cannot be subject to constant supervision, there is still a duty on the employer to provide appropriate control of the work. Supervision complements the information, instruction and training provided and helps to ensure that staff understand the risks associated with their work and that necessary safety precautions are carried out. It also provides guidance in situations of uncertainty.

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 level of supervision required is a management decision which should be based on the outcome of the risk assessment. The higher the risk, the greater the level of supervision required. It should not be left to individuals to decide whether they need assistance.

## **Monitoring**

Procedures that may need to be in place to monitor lone workers include:

- Managers periodically visiting and observing people working alone;
- Managers maintaining contact with lone workers using either a telephone or radio or possibly e- mail or SMS as available.
- Contact arrangements should be documented as part of the risk assessment;
- The use of University's Safezone app for signing in/out system or some other system; and
- Checks that a lone worker has returned to their base or home on completion of their tasks.

Contingency plans should specify the action to be taken if a pre-arranged contact cannot be reached, or if an alarm device is activated, and should be included as part of the risk assessment.

Where a worker is new to a job, undergoing training, doing a job that presents specific risks, or dealing with new situations, it may be advisable for them to be accompanied when they first take up the post.

### **If a person has a medical conditions, are they able to work alone?**

Where a manager is aware that a lone worker has a medical condition, they should check whether they require any additional support in order for them to work alone safely. They should consider both routine work and foreseeable emergencies that may impose additional physical and mental burdens on the individual. When medical advice is necessary, the Occupational Health Service should be consulted.

### **What happens if a person becomes ill, has an accident, or there is an emergency?**

The assessments should take account of the fact that a lone worker is may be more vulnerable when the unexpected happens. Risk assessment should identify foreseeable events and emergency procedures such as use of University's Safezone app or other procedure should be established and employees trained in them. Information regarding emergency procedure should be given to lone workers. They should also have access to adequate first aid facilities.

### **Record the outcome of the risk assessment**

Specific risk assessments need to be recorded individually. This should be done in a way that provides a useful working document for managers and staff.

All records of risk assessments should include information on:

- The hazards identified.
- The safe working procedures that are necessary, including the physical controls, training, supervision and monitoring/contact arrangements.
- The contingency plan, should the monitoring/contact arrangements fail to operate.
- Any limits to what can and cannot be done while working alone.
- In the case of work outside normal hours, the definition of the term 'normal hours'.

A blank template for a Risk Assessment for Lone Workers is at Appendix B.

### **Implement the safe working arrangements**

The risk assessment will have identified the physical controls, systems of work, training and supervision necessary to ensure the safety of the lone worker. If all of these arrangements are not already in place, they will need to be implemented in a structured way before the lone working can start. An action plan with target dates for completion of the outstanding work is often the most appropriate way of ensuring that the necessary arrangements are put in place effectively.

### **Monitor and review the safe working arrangements**

Once the safe working arrangements have been implemented they need to be regularly monitored and reviewed to ensure they remain effective. Monitoring the way in which people are working is a routine day-to-day management function. More formal monitoring of the arrangements will also take place as part of the health and safety audit programme. Lone workers must be actively encouraged to report any incidents which could affect their safety, to allow a proper review of the adequacy of the working arrangements.

All risk assessments should be reviewed at regular intervals, at least once a year or whenever there is a reason to believe that the existing assessment is no longer valid. A record should be made of every review carried out.