

Lone Working Guidance

Introduction

A lone worker can be defined as someone who works by themselves without direct supervision. To prevent serious incidents occurring, organisations are required to ensure the safety of all staff who work alone. This is done by carrying out an assessment of the risks to staff, which may include poor weather conditions, risks of violence to staff and car accidents or breakdowns.

Organisations should then put measures in place to reduce the likelihood of these incidents occurring, such as contingency planning, assessment of possible violence, staff keeping in regular contact with head office and staff training.

Staff must also play their part in maintaining their own personal safety by adhering to the safety measures put in place by the organisation to protect them, for example, phoning in on time, using equipment correctly, reporting areas of concern to their safety and attending staff training.

Definitions

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines lone workers as “those who work by themselves without close or direct supervision”. This can include staff who work by themselves in the following situations:

1. work outside normal working hours.
2. visiting people in their own homes
3. handling cash
4. travelling to quiet rural areas, or high risk urban areas
5. using their car as a mini office/base.

Legislation

A risk assessment is an important step to identifying all the risks associated with lone working. There are no legal duties on employers specifically in relation to lone working and no legal bar to people working alone. However, there is legislation to ensure a safe working environment. The following are relevant.

1. Health and Safety at Work Act 1974

All employers have a duty to maintain a safe working environment ‘so far as reasonably practicable’ for their employees under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. This means that employers are expected to protect their workers against risks to their health and safety. The Act also expects that the working environment is safe and that training to ensure the health and safety of workers is carried out. These requirements are not only for office-based staff but lone workers and the environments they encounter too.

2. Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999

The regulations make it clear what employers must do under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, the main requirement of which is to assess all the risks to the health and safety of

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their employees and, if the organisation has more than five employees, to record the outcomes of the assessment. The risk assessment should identify the risks associated with lone working, outline any safety measure that can help to reduce the risk and ensure that the safety measures are put into practice and reviewed regularly to make sure they are still valid. If the risk assessment shows that the risk is too hazardous for one lone worker to manage alone, other arrangements will need to be introduced. The regulations also expect employees to take reasonable care for their own personal safety.

3. Health and Safety (First Aid) Regulations 1981

The regulations require employers to provide first aid equipment so that emergency first aid can be received by employees if needed. This could include the provision of first aid equipment in the car for lone workers travelling alone in case they are involved in accidents and incidents.

4. Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998

If lone workers use equipment in the course of their working day, the regulations require the risks to the health and safety of employees to be assessed. This is to ensure that the equipment is safe, suitable, regularly maintained and is used only by those who have been specifically trained in its use.

5. Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998

The regulations require any lifting equipment to be used safely and by people who are competent to use them.

6. Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 1999 (COSHH)

These regulations require that any substances that are hazardous, including hazardous waste and cleaning materials used in infected areas, are identified and assessed for their risk to the health of lone workers and that there are safety measures put in place to control these risks.

7. Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995 (RIDDOR)

These regulations place a legal duty on employers to report deaths, major injuries (or injuries that require more than seven days off work) and dangerous occurrences at work. This would include accidents and incidents that happen as a result of lone working.

8. Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (MHSWR) 1999

These Regulations require employers to consider the health and safety risks to employees and to carry out a risk assessment to protect employees from exposure to reasonably foreseeable risks.

Employer Responsibilities

A number of health and safety responsibilities on employers have a particular relevance to lone working. The aim is to ensure that the lone worker not at any more risk than employees that work together. Employers must:

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1. Carry out a risk assessment
2. Put systems in place to ensure that staff who work alone are safe
3. Record all assessment and safety measures identified to alleviate risk
4. Evaluate the systems to ensure they are still valid
5. Ensure staff training takes place
6. Know where lone workers are during the day
7. Ensure lone workers are supervised regularly, even if this is carried out differently from learners who work together

Employee Responsibilities

Employees also have a responsibility under health and safety legislation to:

1. Take reasonable care of their own and other people's safety
2. Have an awareness of their surroundings and the possible threats to their personal safety when working alone
3. Be involved in assessing risk and identifying safety measures
4. Leave the working environment if there is an imminent danger to their safety
5. Undertake and follow training provided to ensure their safety
6. Ensure they take regular breaks to avoid working excessively long hours
7. Follow the organisation's policies and procedures set up to protect their safety
8. Use equipment in accordance with the training given and not misuse it
9. Tell the employer when safety measures are not adequate
10. Tell the employer when they have encountered a 'near miss' or have identified additional risks to their safety that were previously unidentified
11. Report to the employer any actual accidents or incidents that occur, using proper organisational procedure.

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