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:

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

Staff by definition includes:

- Employees
- Freelance
- Self Employed
- Fixed Contract
- Volunteers

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.

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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 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.

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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:

- Carry out a risk assessment
- Put systems in place to ensure that staff who work alone are safe
- Record all assessment and safety measures identified to alleviate risk
- Evaluate the systems to ensure they are still valid
- Ensure staff training takes place
- Know where lone workers are during the day
- 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:

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

Mandatory building procedures

Security of buildings

Line Managers and their employees must ensure that:

- All appropriate steps are taken to control access to the building, and that emergency exits are accessible.
- Alarm systems are tested regularly – both fire and intruder.

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- There is access to a telephone and first aid kit.
- External doors are locked to avoid unwanted visitors if working alone.

Working alone at another building / location

Line Managers and their employees must ensure that:

- All appropriate steps are taken to control access to the building/room and that emergency exits are accessible.
- They are familiar with the fire and, if applicable, intruder alarm procedure and know the location of both exits and alarms.
- When making a booking at a venue there will be somebody else present in the building (i.e. Building Manager or Caretaker) and that this person can be contacted in the event of an emergency.
- There is access to a telephone and first aid kit.
- If there is any indication that the building has been broken into, they call for assistance before entering.
- Staff are familiar with the no-smoking rules and procedures.
- Whenever possible that they park in a well-lit and busy area.
- Ensure sign in and sign out procedures are followed.

Personal safety

- Staff should avoid working alone if not necessary and where possible the final two people should leave together.
- Staff must not assume that having a mobile phone and a back-up plan is a sufficient safeguard within itself. The first priority is to plan for a reduction of risk.
- Staff should take all reasonable precautions to ensure their own safety, as they would in any other circumstances.
- Before working alone, an assessment of the risks involved should be made in conjunction with the Line Manager.
- Where required, staff must ensure that they sign in and out of building registers.
- Staff must inform their Line Manager or other identified person when they will be working alone, giving accurate details of their location and following an agreed plan to inform that person when the task is completed. This includes occasions when a staff member expects to go home following an external commitment rather than returning to their base.
- Staff including Trainers, who work to a pre-planned programme of sessions/visits, must inform their Line Manager if they deviate from the agreed plan.
- If a member of staff does not report in as expected, an agreed plan should be put into operation, initially to check on the situation and then to respond as appropriate using emergency contact information if necessary.
- Arrangements for contacts and response should be tailored to the needs and nature of the team.

- As part of this Policy, it is a requirement that all staff keep their Quest Calendar up to date.

Issues to take into account include:

- Staffing levels and availability – developing links with a residential establishment may be the best out of hour's solution.
- The identified risks.

Assessment of, and avoiding risk

Reducing risk

- Where staff work alone for extended periods and/or on a regular basis, managers must make provision for regular contact, both to monitor the situation and to counter the effects of working in isolation.
- Staff working away from the office should ensure that they have access to a mobile phone at all times.

In drawing up and recording an assessment of risk the following issues should be considered, as appropriate to the circumstances:

- The environment – location, security, access.
- The context – nature of the task, any special circumstances.
- The individuals concerned – indicators of potential or actual risk.
- History – any previous incidents in similar situations.
- Any other special circumstances.
- All available information should be taken into account and checked or updated as necessary. Where there is any reasonable doubt about the safety of a lone worker in a given situation, consideration should be given to sending a second worker or making other arrangements to complete the task.

Planning

- Staff safety should be considered when choosing locations for courses etc.
- Staff should be fully briefed in relation to risk as well as the task itself.
- Communication, checking-in and fall-back arrangements must be in place. Staff should ensure someone is always aware of their movements and expected return time.
- The Line Manager is responsible for agreeing and facilitating these arrangements, which should be tailored to the operating conditions affecting the staff member.

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Staff working at home

- Staff working from their own homes should take every reasonable precaution to ensure that their address and home telephone number remain confidential.
- Staff working from home should be in regular contact with their Line Manager or other designated person if working at home for extended periods.
- Managers should be particularly aware of the importance of such arrangements for staff that live alone.
- Staff working from home should be aware that even ex-directory and mobile numbers will show up on Caller Display, and can be retrieved on 1471. To prevent the person you call accessing your number, dial 141 before their number, or check the instructions for your mobile phone.

Precautions

There are a number of things you can do to avoid issues in the first place. The organisation has a responsibility as an employer to ensure the health, safety and welfare of staff, but employees also have a duty to take reasonable care themselves.

This is not about raising anxiety levels, but about recognising potential dangers and taking positive steps to reduce risk, for yourself and for service users in your care as follows:

Reasonable precautions might include:

- Checking directions for the destination.
- Ensuring your car, if used, is road-worthy and has break-down cover.
- Ensuring someone knows where you are and when you are expected home.
- Avoiding, where possible, poorly lit or deserted areas.
- Taking care when entering or leaving empty buildings, especially at night.
- Staff should ensure that they are familiar with and comply with the appropriate Health & Safety guidance for the site that they are visiting.
- Ensuring that items such as laptops or mobile phones are carried discreetly.
- Be aware of the environment.
- Know what measures are in place where you work: check out alarm systems and procedures, exits and entrances, and the location of the first aid supplies.
- Make sure that your car and mobile phone are in good working order, and that electrical and other mechanical equipment is safe to use. Check the instructions for use, and ensure that faults are reported /dealt with.
- If your work takes you into areas which are isolated, poorly lit at night or known for high crime rates arrange to check in when the visit is over.
- If a potentially violent situation occurs, be aware of what might be used as a weapon against you, and of possible escape routes.
- Try to maintain a comfortable level of heating and lighting in buildings you control.
- Be aware of yourself.
- Think about your body language. What messages are you giving?

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- Think about your tone of voice and choice of words. Avoid anything which could be seen as sarcastic or patronising.
- Think about what you are wearing. Is it suitable for the task? Does it hamper your movement? What signals does it send out? In a potentially risky situation, does a scarf or tie offer an opportunity to an assailant?
- Be aware of your own triggers – the things that make you angry or upset.

For more information visit the *Suzy Lamplugh Trust* website which gives further advice and information: http://www.suzylamplugh.org/personal-safety/personal-safety-tips/

Awareness of others

- Be aware of other people
- Take note of their non-verbal signals.
- Be aware of their triggers.
- Don't crowd people – allow them space.
- Make a realistic estimate of the time you will need to do something, and don't make promises which can't be kept, either on your own or someone else's behalf.
- Be aware of the context of your meeting – are they already angry or upset before you meet, and for what reason?
- Listen to them, and show them you are listening.