

WE KNOW

HEALTH & SAFETY

LONE WORKERS

QUICK GUIDE

THE CHALLENGE

Many jobs unavoidably involve working alone, and the law requires the PCBU to consider the risks of lone work and deal with them in a reasonably practicable way. A person is considered to be working alone if they can't physically see or talk to other staff. Examples would include people working alone in petrol stations, or outside normal working hours such as cleaners, security or maintenance staff. It may also include people who work away from a fixed base such as agriculture or forestry, social workers, postal or delivery workers.

Lone workers should not be at anymore risk than any other worker. Creating a safe working environment for lone work can be different than the management of other workers. The issues to be considered may also be very different depending on the industry/job being carried out.

The PCBU should take account of normal work and foreseeable emergencies, e.g. fire, equipment failure, illness and accidents. They should identify situations where people work alone and consider the following:

- Does the workplace present a specific risk to the lone worker, for example due to temporary access equipment, such as portable ladders or trestles that one person would have difficulty handling?
- Is there a 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 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?
- Is there a risk of violence and/or aggression?
- 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 young, pregnant, disabled or a trainee)?
- If the lone worker's first language is not English, are suitable arrangements in place to ensure clear communications, especially in an emergency

The Health and Safety at Work Act tells us the we must consult with our workers on health and safety matters. This will help to ensure relevant hazards are identified, and that appropriate and reasonably practicable controls are put in place.

HOW SHOULD THE RISKS BE CONTROLLED?

First you must always eliminate the risk where you're reasonably able to. Where you're not reasonably able to, then you need to consider what you can do to minimise the risk.

We can do this by:

- involving workers when considering potential risks and measures to control them;
- taking steps to ensure risks are removed where possible, or putting in place control measures, e.g. carefully selecting work equipment to ensure the worker is able to perform the required tasks in safety;
- instruction, training and supervision;
- reviewing risk assessments periodically or when there has been a significant change in working practice.

This may include:

- being aware that some tasks may be too difficult or dangerous to be carried out by an unaccompanied worker;
- where a lone worker is working at another employer's workplace, informing that other employer of the risks and the required control measures;
- when a risk assessment shows it is not possible for the work to be conducted safely by a lone worker, addressing that risk by making arrangements to provide help or back-up.

Risk assessment should help the PCBU decide on the right level of supervision. There are some high-risk activities where at least one other person may need to be present. Examples include:

- working in a confined space, where a supervisor may need to be present, along with someone dedicated to the rescue role;
- working at or near exposed live electricity conductors;
- working in the health and social care sector dealing with unpredictable client behaviour and situations.

TRAINING

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

Lone workers are unable to ask more experienced colleagues for help, so extra training may be appropriate. They need to be sufficiently experienced and fully understand the risks and precautions involved in their work and the location that they work in.

Employers should set the limits to what can and cannot be done while working alone. They should ensure workers are competent to deal with the requirements of the job and are able to recognise when to seek advice from elsewhere.

MONITORING

Lone workers can be monitored through effective means of communication. For instance regular contact times or 'check ins', periodic supervisor observations, or a robust system to ensure the safe return of lone workers.

WELL BEING

The well being of lone workers should be considered, this could include health checks for people who work outside or work with hazardous substances.

Support may be needed for workers for whom lone work would introduce psychological issues. Ensuring your worker remains engaged with the wider organisation would help reduce the feeling of isolation so common in lone workers.

OTHER BUSINESSES

It could be that you are working with another business as a contractor. The HSWA indicates that the PCBU best placed to influence and control a risk should be the person to do so. The overlapping duties of multiple PCBU's means that they should consult, coordinate and cooperate with each other to ensure that risks are adequately controlled.

IN THE EVENT OF AN EMERGENCY

Emergency procedures should be prearranged, and training given on equipment and process. Lone workers should be first aid trained and have access to first aid facilities. If your lone work is in remote areas, a good distance from home base, or where there is a risk of aggressive confrontation, you should consider personal alarms, GPS tracker, or Personal Locator Beacon (PLB).

For further information regarding any aspect of Health and Safety please contact CECC, Helen Mason: email helenm@cecc.org.nz or Alan Boswell: email alanb@cecc.org.nz or phone 03 366 5096.

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