

# Safety for the Lone Worker

At least two employees working at CIRSA member entities have died while working alone. One incident was due to a damaged railing that was not repaired and the other incident involved a medical issue. A lone worker is an employee who works independently for an extended period of time without direct contact with a co-worker. For example, a water or wastewater operator in an isolated location onsite or off premises, a public works employee performing task around the entity, code enforcement officer on patrol, meter reader, airport worker or building inspector.



While it is not always hazardous to work alone, it can be when other circumstances are present. A high or low risk situation will depend on the location, type of work, interaction with the public, or the consequences of an emergency, accident, injury, where others cannot offer help. This wide variety of circumstances makes it important to assess each situation individually.

High risk activities may include working at heights, in confined spaces, with electricity or hazardous chemicals, using equipment such as chainsaws or task with high pressure devices, or working in areas with high crime that may have the potential for assault. Also, consider employees who may be assaulted by someone they don't know or trust or an individual working in a secluded parking area.

## **Steps to help ensure the safety of the lone worker include:**

- Assess the workplace hazards.
- Obtain employee input about their work and possible solutions.
- Avoid using lone workers whenever possible, especially for jobs with high risks.
- Take corrective action to prevent or minimize the potential risks of working alone.
- Provide appropriate training and education.
- Report and investigate all situations, incidents or 'near misses' where being alone increased the severity of the situation and make changes to policy where necessary.
- Schedule higher risk tasks for normal business hours, or when another worker capable of helping in an emergency is present.
- Establish ways to account for people (visually or verbally) while they are working during both regular business hours or after hours.
- If a cell phone is the main source of contact, ensure it is reliable in your area or have alternative methods of communication available such as site visits or satellite technology.

**An example of a check-in procedure is:**

- Prepare a daily work plan so it is known where the lone employee will be and when.
- Identify one main person to be the contact at the office, plus a backup.
- Define under what circumstances the lone employee will check in and how often.
- Stick to the visual check or call-in schedule. Keep a written log of contact.
- The contact person should call or visit the lone worker periodically to ensure safety.
- Use a code word to identify or confirm that help is needed.
- Develop an emergency action plan and use when the lone worker does not respond.

**Consider the following points:****Length of Time**

- What is a reasonable length of time for the person to be alone?
- Is it reasonable for the person to be alone at all?
- How long will the person be alone to finish the job?
- What time of the day will the person be alone?

**Communication:**

- What forms of communication are available? Will it be verbal, visual, or an electronic device that detects no movement?
- Will emergency communication systems work properly in all situations?
- If the communication systems are located in a vehicle, do you need alternative arrangements to cover the person when they are away from the vehicle?

**Location of the work:**

- Is the work in a remote or isolated location such as a storage room?
- Is transportation necessary to get there? What kind of transportation is needed?
- Is the vehicle equipped with emergency supplies such as food, drinking water, and a first aid kit?
- Will the person need to carry some or all the emergency supplies with them when they leave the vehicle?
- Does the person need training to be able to use the first aid equipment?
- What are the consequences if the vehicle breaks down?
- Will the person have to leave the vehicle for long periods of time?
- Are traction devices (ice grips) needed to reduce possible slips and falls?

**Type or nature of work:**

- Does the worker have adequate training, education and experience to work alone safely? (For example: first aid, communication systems repair, vehicle breakdowns, relevant administrative procedures, and/or outdoor survival?)

- Is there adequate personal protective equipment available such as rain gear, rubber boots, coats, traction devices available? Is it in good working order or free of defects?
- What machinery, tools or equipment will be used?
- Is there a high-risk activity involved?
- Is fatigue likely to be a factor?
- Are there extremes of temperature?
- For excessive heat, are work breaks allowed and is there adequate fluid replacement at least hourly?
- For excessive cold is sheltering, warm liquids, boots, a winter coat and face protection available?
- Are employees prohibited from working while hail is falling or when tornado warnings have been issued or tornados seen?
- Is there risk of an animal attack, insect bite (poisonous, or allergic reaction), etc.?
- If the person is working inside a locked building, how will emergency services be able to get in? (For example: a night cleaner in a secure office building)
- Does the work involve working with money or other valuables?
- Are there any pre-existing medical conditions that may increase the risk?

Sources: CCOHS [Violence in the Workplace Prevention Guide](#)  
Government of Western Australia, "Guidance Note: Working Alone

