

Lone working guidance



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Scope

This guidance document outlines some of the potential hazards associated with lone working, defines roles and responsibilities, and describes the practical steps that can be taken to minimise any risks and to comply with legislation.

The document is not intended to prohibit or place rigid restrictions on lone working but rather to provide guidance to enable Schools and Services to develop their own local rules based on the principles of measured risk management.

Introduction

The principal aim of the guidance is to ensure that any lone working carried out for the purpose of University business is performed in a controlled and co-ordinated manner therefore minimising any health and safety risks to members of staff and students.

The guidance outlines some of the potential hazards associated with lone working, defines roles and responsibilities, and describes the practical steps that can be taken to minimise any risks and to comply with legislation.

Definition of lone working

A lone worker for the purposes of this guidance is defined as someone who works on their own with no close or direct supervision.

Lone working is not where individuals experience transient situations in which they find themselves alone, but where individuals are knowingly and foreseeably placed in circumstances in which they undertake work activities without direct or close supervision.

In practical terms, persons are considered to be working alone if they have neither visual nor audible communication with someone who can summon assistance in the event of an accident or illness.

Lone working is undertaken by a range of University employees and students either by virtue of their working hours, remote location, or methods of working. Some common examples include:

- security, librarians, grounds, and gardens staff
- cleaning and portering staff
- maintenance staff and service engineers
- individuals who work on their own in a laboratory or workshop
- members of staff or students undergoing fieldwork within the UK or abroad
- staff or students undertaking research based in the community
- students undertaking practical or experimental work as part of their academic programme
- home workers
- members of staff travelling alone on University business

Responsibilities

Under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, the University as an employer has a duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety, and welfare at work of all its employees. There is also contained in the legislation a general duty of care to protect students and members of the public.

These requirements are applicable to all work situations, including where staff (and others) are working alone or outside normal working hours.

Head of School/Service responsibilities

The Head of School/Service is responsible for ensuring that arrangements are in place to eliminate the risk from lone working where possible and effectively manage lone working in their areas of responsibility and that these arrangements are communicated to all staff, students and visitors via a local rules document.

Line manager or supervisor responsibilities

The Head of School/Service meets their responsibility by delegating to line managers or supervisors who have the responsibility to ensure that:

- All lone working activities are formally identified, and appropriate risk assessments undertaken, which identify the risk to lone workers and the control measures necessary to minimise those risks, as far as reasonably practicable.

- Arrangements for lone working are communicated effectively and the details of what can or cannot be done while working alone is explicit.
- The lone worker is made aware of the hazards and understands all the necessary control measures that need to be put in place.
- Reasonable enquiries are made to ensure that the lone worker is medically fit to undertake the work alone.
- Adequate supervision, instruction and training are in place and that the lone worker is competent. The extent of the supervision is a management decision, which should be established through the risk assessment process. It should not be left to individual members of staff or students to decide if they require assistance/supervision.
- Monitoring of lone working practices is in place to ensure that control measures identified in the lone working risk assessment are being adhered to.

Employee responsibilities

All employees have a responsibility to take care of their own safety and to co-operate with University procedures.

Employees should not knowingly place themselves in situations which expose them to additional risk by working alone.

If a person finds that they are placed in a situation, which may be that of a 'lone worker', then they should:

- ensure that their line manager is made aware of the circumstances at the earliest opportunity
- assist in the process of identifying the steps needed to either prevent the lone worker situation from arising
- or, if this is not possible, assist in developing the precautions necessary to ensure their own safety

Lone workers have a responsibility to inform their line manager:

- if they have any concerns over the effectiveness and efficiency of the agreed arrangements
- if there are any reasons why they would not be able to work alone or to continue to work alone in safety

Student responsibilities

Students also have responsibilities to comply with health and safety instructions, including the University's rules and regulations for students, and not to misuse or damage equipment provided. They may be held responsible for the consequences should they neglect to carry out a task required for the health or safety of others.

Therefore, students must follow any local rules with regard to lone working on University premises or during their study or research.

Risk assessment

To satisfy the legislative requirements, it is necessary for the risks associated with lone working to be assessed.

- A generic School/Service risk assessment covering all employees may be appropriate for a low-risk environment such as lone working in an office.
- Specific risk assessments will be a requirement for high-risk activities such as fieldwork in remote locations.

It is expected that the risk assessment process:

- is undertaken as a collaborative exercise by both the lone worker and their line manager/supervisor
- the agreed safe working procedures are recorded and communicated to all persons who may be required to work alone and any other employees who have a role to play in ensuring their safety

The following outlines the five steps that must be taken for a lone working risk assessment:

1. **Identify the hazards** to which the person(s) may be exposed. The hazards are likely to be the same for a particular activity whether lone working or not. The assessment of the risks to which a lone worker may be exposed must take into account normal and foreseeable scenarios.

The hazards may be such that the risk cannot be controlled sufficiently and therefore lone working is prohibited. Examples of high-risk activities where at least one other person may need to be present include:

- working in a high risk confined space where a supervisor may need to be present, along with someone dedicated to the rescue role
- people working at or near live electricity conductors
- other electrical work where at least 2 people are sometimes required

High risk activities that require specific attention when planning safe lone working arrangements include working with:

- chemicals, particularly substances, products or reactions that are; corrosive, toxic, explosive, flammable, asphyxiant, narcotic
- cryogenic substances
- class 3B/4 lasers where the beam is not fully enclosed
- power tools and machinery
- working on or near water
- working at height

2. **Identify all persons** who may be required to work alone. Consideration must be given to:

- an individual's ability to carry out their activities safely on their own. Some individuals may be at greater risk than others for example new and expectant mothers and young persons or those who are new to a role
- students due to their possible lack of experience in the work they are doing. It may be necessary to make reasonable enquiries to ensure that lone workers are medically fit to undertake the work alone

Both routine work and foreseeable emergencies may impose additional physical and mental burdens on the individual. When medical advice is necessary, the University's Occupational Health Service should be consulted.

3. **Assess whether current controls are adequate**, and if not, consider what additional/alternative control measure(s) can be put in place. Examples of control measures could include:

- the provision of suitable training
- occupational health fitness assessments
- effective communication strategies

It may be necessary to prohibit certain tasks or activities if the risks cannot be adequately controlled (see hazard section listed above).

University Security Services are not able to provide a monitoring service to staff or students who are working alone in a University building. However, Security Services will provide a service to escort staff to their car after normal office and can be contacted on ext. 87848.

There are systems in operation locally for lone working monitoring. Bristol City Council offers such a [Lone worker protection service](#) (costing £1.00 per person, per week).

4. **Record the findings.** Record your risk assessment findings for any significant risks identified. Have a procedure in place that ensures that the lone worker is made aware of the findings of the risk assessment.

5. **Monitor and review the risk assessment.** Arrangements which are implemented to ensure the safety of lone workers need to be subject to a monitoring regime which is commensurate with the risk, by their supervisor/line manager.

This may range from simple periodic visits to the more complex implementation of 'Permits to Work', Review the risk assessment regularly for example if any significant changes take place, following an accident / incident or following any concerns being raised. Any review should make sure existing control measures are adequate and check if any additional controls are needed.

Where contingency plans form part of the arrangements, they should be clear, precise, communicated, practised and subject to periodic monitoring and review.

The risk assessment process

The following is a list of key questions which can be used as a checklist for the completion of a suitable and sufficient risk assessment. It provides an indication on whether the risks can be adequately controlled by one person:

- Does the workplace present a special risk to a lone worker, e.g., due to:
 - environment
 - location
 - contents
 - unfamiliarity, etc?

The building's Facilities Manager may need to be contacted to ensure a safe entry/exit to the workplace.

- Does the work activity present a special risk to a lone worker, e.g.,
 - equipment
 - process
 - substance
 - location
 - time
 - members of the public?
- Is there safe entry and exit from the location for one person, both in the course of the normal work and in the event of an emergency? This may include information on not using lifts in an emergency.
- Can the equipment in use be adequately controlled and handled by one person?
- Can all goods, substances and materials in use be safely handled by one person?
- Is the working environment appropriate:
 - heating
 - lighting
 - ventilation, etc?
- Are the welfare facilities adequate and accessible:
 - toilet
 - washing facilities
 - drinking water, etc?
- Does the lone worker have, or have access to, first aid facilities?
- Does the lone worker have access to a suitable means of communication, or other means of summoning assistance, should this be required:
 - telephone
 - mobile phone
 - radio
 - inactivity alarm, etc?
- Is there a risk of violence associated with the work activity and/or location?
- Is the lone worker more at risk due to their gender or inexperience?

- Has the employee received sufficient information, instruction, and training to enable the work to be undertaken safely whilst alone?
- Has the employee received specific training in how to respond to foreseeable emergencies which may arise in the course of their work alone?
- Is the lone worker medically fit to undertake the work alone? And is there a requirement for on-going health checks, health monitoring?
- Are there contingency plans in place should an alert/alarm be raised by a lone worker and are these plans well known and rehearsed:
 - what to do
 - who to contact, etc?

Summary of actions required

- Schools and Services must assess the risks to the lone worker by means of a risk assessment.
- Once the risk assessment has been carried out, the necessary controls identified should be implemented.
- If required, the lone worker should receive the correct information and training with regards to the hazards identified.
- Arrangements should be in place to establish a form of communication with the lone worker.
- Periodical monitoring of lone working practices should be carried out to ensure that all procedures are correctly working.

Useful resources

- [Health and safety roles, responsibilities, and organisation](#)
- [General risk assessment policy and guidance](#)
- [Home working guidance](#)
- [Community based research, health, and safety guidance](#)

External resources

- [Suzy Lamplugh Trust](#)
- [HSE: Working Alone – Health and safety guidance on the risks of lone working](#)
- [Bristol City Council Lone Worker Protection Service](#)

Appendix – example risk assessment

Lone working risk assessment			School or Service: Safety and Health Services Completed by: Tony Butterworth Date: 22 August			
Description and location of hazard	Who might be harmed	Existing control measures	A: Likely severity of injury (1-3)	B: Likely occurrence (1-3)	Risk rating (A) x (B)	Comments and actions
Out of hours lone working in low-risk office	Staff	<p>Lone working after hours or at weekends discouraged by the Director of Health and Safety. No higher risk work to be carried out of hours.</p> <p>This environment includes working in the radiation store and/or radiation lab area.</p> <p>Signing in and out board is situated in the main office to be completed when member of staff leaves the office.</p> <p>It is the responsibility of the last person in the office to monitor the board and ensure that they know the safe whereabouts of their colleagues before they go home. If they are in any doubt, they must contact the individual's immediate line manager to make them aware of the situation.</p> <p>Members of staff are required to make sure that they inform their line manager if they are intending to work at weekends from the main office. Appropriate arrangements can then be put in place to ensuring that someone knows where they are and their estimated return time.</p>	2	1	2	

Score	3	2	1
Column A: Severity of injury	Major injury or death	Injury requiring medical treatment	Minor or no injury
Column B: Likely occurrence	Regular exposure of several employees to hazard	Occasional exposure of few employees	Exposure to hazard very rare

Risk score	Response times	Risk score	Response times
9	Immediate cessation of activity until interim controls are agreed and implemented.	3 & 4	Review on change of process or if circumstances change. Provide additional training, supervision and monitoring.
6	Critically examine the areas of exposure in the process and agree timetable for completion of all agreed actions.	< 3	12 months review (date of next audit). No real changes in procedure required to reduce risk further.