



3.5 *LONE WORKING*

Guidance and Procedures

Summary:

1. Lone Working is not, in itself, against the law, and it will often be safe to do so.
2. Where a person has to work alone a Risk Assessment should be completed.
3. Where the Risk Assessment requires a Safe Working Procedure should be established.
4. It is important that Lone Workers have suitable and sufficient training, monitoring and where required supervision.
5. Lone Workers should be capable of responding correctly in emergency situations.
6. Employers need to check that lone workers have no medical conditions that may make them unsuitable for working alone.

Important definitions:

'Lone Working' refers to situations where staff in the course of their duties work alone in the community, in the homes of individuals or in their own home, or may be the only staff member present in an office or other establishment maintained by South Tyneside Council or by one of its partner agencies. They will be physically isolated from colleagues, and without access to immediate assistance. This last situation may also arise where there are other staff in the building but the nature of the building itself may essentially create isolated areas.

It is recognised that any employee may spend a limited amount of their working time 'alone'.

Lone Working is not against the law:

There is no overall legal prohibition on working alone, but the general duties of the Health & Safety at Work etc Act 1974 and the specific duties of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 still apply. These require the identification of the hazards at work, assessment of any significant risks involved, and devising and implementing safe working arrangements to ensure that the risks are either eliminated or adequately controlled.

Many employees work alone and in the majority of cases they do so without significant risk. For example, persons working alone in offices carrying out typical office activities outside normal working hours are unlikely to be at significant risk. However, there are occasions when it is not possible to devise arrangements for work to be done safely by one person. In these cases, alternative arrangements involving help or back up have to be put into place.

Lone Worker Risk Assessments:

Where a person may have to, work alone, it is the responsibility of Corporate Groups to ensure that a risk assessment is carried out and, if appropriate, that clear written procedures are drawn up and put into place to ensure that the work can be carried out safely and without risk to health. Lone working must not be undertaken where there is a reasonably foreseeable risk that the work might result in personal injury or trauma. Those tasks which are deemed unacceptable to be performed by a lone worker under any circumstances must be documented together with the local arrangements for safety for those tasks which are deemed acceptable.

Safe Working Procedures:

Establishing safe working procedures for lone workers is no different from organising the safety of other employees. The obvious question that has to be asked is whether one person can adequately control the risks associated with the work.

Lone workers should not be exposed to significantly higher risks than others who work together. Precautions should take account of normal working conditions and foreseeable emergency situations. All situations where employees may be working alone should be identified.

Training, Monitoring and Supervision:

Training is particularly important where there is limited supervision in order to control, guide and help in situations of uncertainty. It may be critical to avoid panic reactions in unusual situations, and lone workers, therefore, need to understand fully the risks involved in the work, the necessary precautions and be sufficiently experienced. Directorates should, therefore, establish clear procedures to set limits as to what can and cannot be done whilst working alone, and, where appropriate, when to stop the work and seek advice.

Although Lone Workers cannot be subject to constant supervision, there is still a duty on the Council to provide appropriate control of the work. Supervision complements information, instruction and training and helps to ensure that staff understands the risks associated with their work and that the necessary safety precautions are carried out. It can also provide guidance in situations of uncertainty.

The extent of the supervision required depends upon the risks involved and the proficiency and experience of the person carrying out the work to identify and handle safety issues. Persons new to a job, undergoing training, doing a job, which presents special risks, or dealing with new situations may need to be accompanied at first.

The extent of the supervision required is a management decision, it should not be left to the individual to decide they require assistance.

Illness, accidents and emergencies

Lone Workers should be capable of responding correctly in emergency situations. Emergency procedures should be established in departments and the appropriate persons given clear and concise training and instructions on how to implement them.

Suitable systems should be devised to monitor the conditions of Lone Workers and include at least a check at the end of the working period. In addition, it may be necessary to consider:

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- Procedures where a member of supervisory staff periodically visits and visually monitors Lone Workers.
 - Procedures where regular contact between the Lone Worker and a member of Supervisory staff is maintained using an effective means of communication.
 - Automatic warning devices, which raise the alarm in an emergency and are activated by the absence of activity from the Lone Worker.

If a person has a medical condition, are they able to work alone?

If an employee discloses a disability or chronic health problem that may make them unsuitable for working alone they should raise this with their Manager. The Manager should complete a Risk Assessment of the employee and the work they complete and should seek further advice and guidance from the Occupational Health Department if necessary.

Working from home:

Whilst employees are working from home they have the same level of support and assistance as they would if they were working from an office or other council building. Line managers should ensure that suitable risk assessments are completed prior to people working from home and consider the additional measures which may need to be taken to keep the employee safe and healthy. These measures would include considering the security of the home e.g. not giving out home addresses or phone numbers to clients or customers and any other equipment and training which may be required.

Links:

Violence Towards Employees (HR)

http://intranet.st.net/documents/documentLibrary_List.asp?class=1862&classorder=a&docorder=a

Home Based Working (HR)

http://intranet.st.net/documents/documentLibrary_DocumentSummary.asp?pk_document=22455&class=1843

Working Alone (HSE)

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg73.pdf>

Example Risk Assessments/Case Studies (HSE)

www.hse.gov.uk/risk/casestudies