Lone Working

Guidance for University Departments and Functions

December 2009

Safety Services Office
Introduction

Lone working is not covered by any specific piece of legislation and, indeed, there is no general legal prohibition on working alone. However the broad duties placed on employers by the Health and Safety at Work Act and Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations still apply and prohibition of lone working is included in some regulations that relate to particular high risk situations, such as work in confined spaces, or carrying out fumigations. The University is required to assess risks relating to lone working activities and to put in place measures to eliminate the risks or to control them.

What is Lone Working?

Lone workers are those who work by themselves without close or direct supervision and who are out of direct contact with others (i.e out of sight or sound). This description covers a wide variety of activities and situations where workers may be at particular risk of harm because they are working alone and includes:

- mobile workers away from their fixed base, e.g.
  - maintenance workers,
  - fieldworkers
  - social researchers working in the community
  - drivers

- workers in a fixed establishment e.g.
  - only one person on the premises, e.g. site hut or office.
  - working alone in remote parts of work premises such as store rooms, library
  - working in University buildings or offices out of hours when alone e.g cleaners, security workers and researchers

There may be other cases where lone working may occur inadvertently, e.g. a task that is normally carried out by two persons may be only carried out by one when sickness or other absence occurs.

Hazards & Risks of Lone Working

The University requires Heads of Departments to ensure that suitable and sufficient assessments of the risks to the health and safety of staff, students and visitors are carried out within the area of their charge. Many of the risks to which lone workers will be exposed will have been considered in a general assessment of the work that they will be undertaking but it will be necessary to consider whether there are additional risks arising from the fact that they will be on their own.

The significant risks associated with lone working are:
Violence. - is there a history of threats or violence to staff? Those particularly at risk include:

- those carrying out enforcement duties
- women working alone
- lone workers who may confront theft
- security staff monitoring premises
- those working within the community

Manual handling. Consider whether the work involves lifting or moving objects too large or awkward for one person to handle safely

Using/operating work equipment. Consider whether work equipment can be used/operated safely by one person e.g.-

- lifting equipment
- live electrical equipment
- ladders or other access equipment

Hazardous substances can the substances in use be safely handled by one person?

Hazards and risks specific to the individual, which may create particular risks for lone workers e.g. medical conditions, disabilities, expectant mothers, age, inexperience, etc.

It is essential that lone workers are able to respond correctly when things go wrong. Risk assessments should not only consider routine work but also identify foreseeable emergencies.

Lone workers sometimes may not be able to:-

- receive timely warning of emergencies (e.g. due to hearing impairment)
- summon help
- evacuate premises safely
- control deteriorating situations

Where there are risks specific to the individual (as listed above) emergency situations may impose additional physical and mental burdens that will need to be considered.
Risk Management

Risk Assessment

Within the University, there is a wide range of potential lone working situations and the risks will vary accordingly. **Heads of Department must ensure that when lone working is planned:**

- adequate assessment of the associated risks is made,
- any necessary additional precautions are taken
- procedures and precautions are fully documented and made available to all affected parties

Often lone workers themselves can be the best people to help complete risk assessments; they are a valuable source of knowledge and advice.

Risk Control

Arguably the most important decision surrounding lone working will be “should it be allowed at all?” The risk assessment process will identify activities that involve risks that cannot be controlled by an individual working on their own (particular attention should be given to potential emergencies). In these cases, arrangements must be made to provide adequate assistance. In a restricted number of cases the activities may be covered by specific legislation that prohibits lone working. These activities involve higher risk procedures such as work in confined spaces, electrical work at or near exposed live conductors, diving operations and fumigation work.

Where lone working can be permitted, lone workers should not be at more risk than other staff and this may require the implementation of extra risk control measures. Additional controls may include:

- specific information, instruction and training (e.g. emergency procedures, out-of-hours procedures, personal safety training, etc).
- increased supervision
- increased security (e.g. cctv, secure access, personal alarms)
- increased lighting at entrances, exits, car parks

**Training & Instruction:** Training is particularly important where there is limited supervision to control, guide and help in situations of uncertainty. Training may be critical to avoid panic reactions in unusual situations. Lone workers must be sufficiently experienced and need to understand the risks and precautions fully. Supervisors should set the limits to what can and cannot be done while working alone. They should ensure workers are competent to deal with circumstances which are new, unusual or beyond the scope of training, eg when to stop work and seek advice from a supervisor and how to handle aggression.
Those lone workers who may encounter potentially violent situations should be trained to counter such situations. Courses that include how to reduce conflict and how to defuse violent confrontations should be considered.

**Supervision:** An important control measure is that of ensuring adequate supervision (even though for lone working, by definition, direct supervision is not possible). Supervision can help to ensure that employees understand the risks associated with their work and that the necessary safety precautions are carried out. Supervisors can also provide guidance in situations of uncertainty. The extent of supervision required is a management decision which should be based on the findings of risk assessment. It will depend upon the level of risks involved and the ability and experience of the lone worker. It should not be left to individuals to decide whether they require assistance.

Depending on the level of risk identified, supervision of lone working will include some or all of the following measures:-

- ensuring that workers understand the risks associated with lone working and that they know how to raise the alarm
- monitoring of work practices by a supervisor making periodic site visits and undertaking reviews with the worker (see below)
- putting in place a system for monitoring the whereabouts and wellbeing of lone workers e.g. regular contact between the lone worker and supervisor/contact, eg via a mobile phone or radio (this system should also include provision for investigating the non-return of lone workers to their workplaces or homes following a lone working assignment)
- use of warning devices
  - manual - e.g., panic alarms
  - automatic - e.g., motion sensors

**Monitoring & Review**

Departments should take steps to check that control measures are used and review risk assessments from time to time to ensure that they continue to reflect the current working practices and conditions.

Particular considerations should be:

- have there been any accidents, incidents or near misses associated with lone working?
- has there been any feedback on the arrangements from staff?
- have the circumstances of lone working changed, ie new activities, new locations, new plant or equipment?
- have new lone workers or supervisors been employed?
• have all those involved in lone working received the necessary training, instruction and briefing?

It is crucial that lone workers report any accidents, injuries, near misses and other dangerous occurrences. Without this information, it’s much more difficult to review the risk assessment and to make any necessary alterations to safety procedures and precautions.

Record Keeping

Copies should be kept and maintained of:

• risk assessments
• safe systems of work developed as a result of the risk assessments
• the provision of training, including the issue of written instructions
• the results of any monitoring (e.g. checklists)
• records of accidents, incidents and near misses.

Building Security

Most University buildings will be locked between 6.00pm and 7.00pm each working day and opened from 7.00am to 8.00am, some will remain open longer if there is pre-arranged evening teaching. Staff planning to work in buildings after lock up should ensure that they have arranged a safe and secure exit from the building i.e. do not use the Fire Exits or windows. As buildings may have a lock or swipe card system, those planning to work alone should ensure either that they properly close electronically locked doors, have a key and re-secure the building after exit or arrange with the Security Lodge to have the building re-secured.

Lone Workers who do not have a key or swipe card permissions and plan to enter a building after lock up will need to arrange access with the Security Lodge and prove that they are entitled to that access.

Some buildings are fitted with burglar alarms and departments must consider how to activate and de-activate these alarms as part of granting permission to work alone.
References

University of Leicester Health and Safety Policy and Statement of Organisation and Arrangements

This document can be accessed via the Safety Services web pages at:

http://www.le.ac.uk/safety/

The University of Leicester's Statement on Safety in Laboratories

This document contains additional advice on working unaccompanied in laboratories and can be accessed via the Safety Services web pages at:

http://www.le.ac.uk/safety/


This document can be accessed via the Safety Services web pages at:

http://www.le.ac.uk/safety/

Working Alone in Safety Ref: IND G 73 (rev), Health and Safety Executive.

Violence at Work Ref: INDG 69, Health and Safety Executive.

HSE publications can be downloaded directly from their website at:

http://www.hse.gov.uk/index.htm

The Suzy Lamplugh Trust offers a range of free and priced publications providing guidance on various aspects of personal safety in the workplace including lone working.

http://www.suzylamplugh.org/