

Guide to lone working





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If you work alone, even for just some of your time at work then you are a lone worker.

Lone working doesn't necessarily pose bigger risks than face any employee, but the consequences of the same thing happening can be more serious, because there's nobody around to help. For example, if you work alone at night in a warehouse, and fall over, get ill, or are assaulted by an intruder, it may be harder to call for help and help may take longer to arrive than during a busy day shift.

You might only work alone some of the time, for example, a worker who gets into a café or restaurant early to set up before the rest of the staff arrive. But even if you only work alone some of the time you are a lone worker.

This guide covers best practice for lone working, advice on your rights as a lone worker and what to do if you have any issues.

Understand the risks of lone working

There are lots of different forms of lone working:

- You might work from your own home.
- You might work separately from others, for example if you are a security guard patrolling a site, a facilities worker, office worker, builder or shift worker.
- You might work at a range of different sites. For example, you could be an engineer visiting client sites, a social or healthcare worker visiting clients in their homes, or a probation officer.
- You might work alone in a fixed base like a petrol station or retail store.

- You might be a mobile worker, driving or travelling all day. For example, a taxi driver, HGV driver or surveyor.
- You might only work alone some of the time, for example, if you work in a café or restaurant and get there early to set up before the rest of the staff arrive.

Each of these kinds of lone working carries with it its own types of risks.

The level of risk depends on three things:

People

Are you going to meet strangers, members of the public, or people you know?

Will you meet people who could be violent aggressive or hostile?

Environment

What location will you be working in? Somewhere with public access like a shop or garage? Someone else's home? Out and about in public? Any isolated locations?

What time will you be there? Will there be other people around?

Task

What do you do when you work alone?

Is there anything about the activity that might increase the risk you face? For example, do you handle cash or

valuables, deal with something that could be dangerous, like electricity, or work with people who may be upset?

When you're a lone worker you need to identify the specific risks that you face.

What does the health and safety legislation say?

There is a lot of regulation around lone working. Your employer is responsible for this:

- The Health and safety at Work Act requires your employer to ensure the safety and welfare of all employees and contractors, so far as is reasonably practicable. The law includes safe systems of work and working environment, guidance about health and safety policies, health and safety information, and health and safety training.
- The management of Health and Safety at Work regulations require organisations to do risk management processes for all employees.
- The Reporting of Injuries Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) require employers to notify the HSE (Health and Safety executive) of incidents or accidents at work. Incidents that must be reported include deaths, major injuries or anything that stops the injured person from working for 7 or more days. If someone is stopped



from working for 3 or more days, employers don't need to report it to the HSE, but they do need to keep records.

- The Health and Safety (First Aid) regulations oblige employers to provide access to first aid. You should always have access to first aid facilities.
- The Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) regulations set out what your working environment must be like. It covers topics like access to toilets, water, the temperature of your workplace and other welfare topics.

Employers are responsible for your health, safety and welfare. They must:

- Carry out risk assessments
- Have and implement a lone working policy
- Make sure their policies are regularly reviewed and updated
- Provide training for you, including an induction

- Provide appropriate supervision and support for you
- Communicate with you effectively
- Act on any reports of lone working incidents

You also have responsibilities. You need to keep yourself safe. You must:

- Attend any training you're asked to complete
- Read and understand the relevant policies to your job
- Follow relevant policies and procedures
- Use any PPE you are provided
- Take care of your own safety, and the safety of your colleagues
- Report incidents, accidents, near misses, or acts of aggression
- Report situations when you feel at risk

Risk assessments

There are three steps to a formal risk assessment, which your employer will conduct.

It's useful to understand how the process works because you must follow the risk prevention measures put in place as a result. You will also have to do dynamic risk assessments yourself.

Let your manager or employer know how effective you think the safety measures they have put in place are.

1. Spot the hazards

Some hazards could have worse consequences for lone workers. For example, if you fall when working alone it could take longer to get help.

Others are less likely when you have a colleague there. For example, if you are threatened with violence, but are working with a colleague, you may find it easier to defuse the situation or manage the threat.

Examples of hazards in these two categories include:

- Slips and trips
- Manual handling
- Working at height
- Fire
- Travel incidents
- Gas safety



- Harmful substances
- Machinery
- Electrical safety
- Working in confined spaces
- Sudden illness or injury
- Violence, abuse, or threats

There are also additional hazards you might face only when working alone:

- Theft or intruders
- Abduction
- Not having rest hygiene or welfare facilities

If you work at a workstation at home, you need to have a DSE risk assessment because of the risk of musculoskeletal disorders associated with unsafe workstations.

2. Decide who could be harmed and how?

As part of risk assessment, there will need to be consideration of whether there are greater risks to some groups than others. For example:

Group	Additional risk
New and expectant mothers	New and expectant mothers require an additional assessment of risks related to stress, infectious diseases, breaktimes, manual handling, and standing or sitting for a long time.
Employees	Will employees need specific training about risks that apply in their workplace? For example, there might be specific risks associated with working with gas that apply to your workplace.
Contractors	Do temporary workers need specific training?
Migrant workers	Will migrant workers need additional support to help them work safely? Is that because they are used to different health and safety requirements? Do they need more help communication in an unfamiliar language?
Customers and members of the public	These groups may be unfamiliar with the safety procedures. What control measures are necessary to keep them safe? For example, do staff need to be trained to evacuate them in case of emergency?
People with disabilities	Lone working could mean additional safety measures or reasonable adjustments for a lone worker who has a disability.
Young workers or those new to the job	Are these groups at greater risk because they're less familiar with the workplace environment?
Lone workers	Yes, lone workers are one of the groups that may face additional risks. For example, they might be more likely to be injured when handling heavy items as there's nobody to help.

3. Evaluate and decide

Your employer must evaluate the likelihood and the possible impact of the risk. Then they must decide what measures to put in place to prevent or minimise the risk.

Dynamic Risk assessments

It's not possible for your employer to anticipate every risk, especially if you're working in lots of different places.

You'll need to carry out a dynamic risk assessment when you arrive on site, or as things change.

You need to evaluate and assess the situation as you see it. Identify risks and decide what to do to minimise them. Think about environment, people, and tasks as you do so.

Dynamic risk assessments don't replace formal risk assessments, but you'll need to use your judgement.

What can I do to keep myself safe whilst lone working?

There are several key components to keeping yourself safe.

- Stay traceable
- Carry personal safety device so you can use it
- Follow training processes and procedures
- Do dynamic risk assessments
- Trust your instincts
- Travel safely

Stay Traceable: Make sure that someone knows where you are at all times.

Regular check-ins can keep you safe because if something happens that prevents you from checking in it will be quickly noticed.

You should tell a colleague where you are, how long you expect to be and when you will check in next.

You might use an app to periodically report your location and status. Technologies like tracking or activity logging can save and send your location regularly, report your activity, or let you check in at a particular location.

You might use a buddy system. A buddy is a responsible point of contact when you are lone working. Your buddy should know where you are and what you are doing and be ready to report if there are any concerns.

Your buddy should have your schedule, contact details, details of any medical conditions you have, information about your vehicle, if applicable, (such as its reg, colour, make and model) and know who to contact in an emergency.

You should schedule regular check in times with your buddy.

You should have a protocol for what happens if you've not made contact within a specified time. For example, you might agree if they've not heard from you within 20 minutes, they should contact your line manager, and if they have not heard from you within an hour, they should call the emergency services.

Carry a personal safety device

Some workers are given emergency alert technology. This lets you send an SOS and your current location to the emergency services, or a responsible person.

A personal safety device can be designed to suit your working conditions. For example, someone working in remote areas with poor mobile coverage might use a GPS device with a panic alarm, accident detection, fall detection and no-motion detection. If your work involves dealing with difficult people

you might have a small device on hand so you could call for help without arousing attention. Alternatively, you might have a phone app with similar functionality.

Whatever safety device you have, make sure it's always on hand so you can use it when you need it.

Follow processes and procedures.

Follow all the safety guidelines you've been given. Every job is different so this will look different at your workplace, but it might mean you should:

- Use the equipment you're provided with properly. Any equipment you are supplied with must be in good condition by law.
- Use PPE. If you're given PPE, make sure you understand how to use it, how to look after it, it and how to store it properly.
- Be prepared for bad weather. That might mean having equipment or clothing ready just in case.
- Follow training on manual handling.
- Follow training on hazardous chemicals. Take extra care when using hazardous chemicals when alone.
- Keep calm and follow processes for dealing with difficult individuals.
- Follow security processes. For example, you might close blinds so you can't be seen, or use shutters

when setting up or locking down the building. Your building might have security badges or passes so that you know that only authorised people can enter.

- Take short breaks and drink plenty of water to help prevent fatigue, which can lead to mistakes. Snacks will keep you energised too.

Dynamic risk assessments: Trust your instincts

Your work is risk assessed to make sure it's safe for a lone worker, but don't take unnecessary risks if you aren't sure. Check equipment that you use is safe each time you use it - that includes everything from checking ladders are secure, to checking that your vacuum cleaner doesn't have any visible wires.

Trust your instincts if you don't feel safe. Stay alert and do a dynamic risk assessment as the situation involves.

For example, if your work involves visiting other people in their homes keeping safe might mean:

- Planning your visit thoroughly, thinking it through step by step
- Not going in if a person is drunk or intoxicated.
- Noting the locations of exits.
- Having your bags and possession to hand so you can easily leave. If you have identified a risk that a client might become aggressive this will allow you to make a quick exit if this happens.

- Having an excuse ready, so you can leave without being confrontational.
- Putting yourself between the person you are visiting and the door.
- If you don't know the person, checking their identity.

Travel safely

Do you travel alone? There are ways to keep safe, however you are travelling:

On public transport

- Prepare before you travel on public transport. Check timetables and buy tickets in advance. This prevents you having to use cards or cash, and makes you look confident.
- Wait with other people, if possible, in well-lit areas that have CCTV. Look for emergency alarms so you could call for help.
- Don't display anything that looks valuable like jewellery, wallets, or phones, and keep your bags closed.
- Stay alert. If anything about the situation makes you feel nervous, leave.
- On buses and trains, try to sit near a driver, avoid empty carriages, and report any suspicions to staff.
- If you're taking a taxi, use a licensed taxi or minicab. You can get a list of licensed firms from



your council. Minicabs cannot pick you up without a booking, so don't take one that stops in the street, and book the outward and return journey in advance. If you're hailing a taxi, check for the license badge. When you book a cab, check the driver and vehicle details so you can look out for the right car. Check the driver can confirm your name and destination before you get in. Sit in the back - you'll have more exits available to you.

Walking

- Don't use headphones or text when walking, as you might not notice problems.
- Plan your route so you can walk with confidence and don't look vulnerable. Plan routes that are well lit, and busier.
- Tell someone where you are going and what time you expect to arrive/get home.
- Walk against the flow of traffic if you can so that thieves can't drive up or ride up behind you.

- Keep one hand free, keep your keys accessible, and carry a safety alarm. Keep valuables out of sight.

Driving

- When driving, carry a winter car safety kit. Make sure you know what to do if you break down or have an accident. There is a kit checklist at the back of this guide.
- If you're driving your own car, make sure you've got your MOT, tax and insurance sorted.
- Regularly do service checks on tyres oil and water. Get your car regularly service.
- Make sure there are no hazards that can roll around the driver's feet.
- Choose where to park carefully. Park close to lights and exits when you can. Don't park next to obstructions. Reverse into your space so you can leave more quickly. Don't leave possessions on display that could attract attention. Try to choose spots where other people are likely to be.

If you have an accident:

You *must* stop at the scene and exchange details. Details include your vehicle registration, your name and address and the vehicle owner's name and address. This is a legal requirement if someone else is injured, a vehicle is damaged, or an animal has been killed or injured.

If you don't exchange details you must legally report the incident to the police within 24 hours. If someone else is injured, you also need to show your insurance certificate, either at the scene, or at the police station within 7 days.

Report the accident to your insurance company, even if you don't want to make a claim. If you don't it could affect your cover in future.

Information to record if you have an accident:

- The time and date
- Contact details (names, addresses, and phone numbers) of drivers, passengers, pedestrians, and witnesses.
- Employer's name (if someone involved is driving for work).
- Vehicle details (make, model, reg, colour, any modifications, and number of passengers).
- Insurance details for the driver of the other vehicle.
- If the cars involved had headlights or indicators on.

What to do if you break down:

- Get off the road.
- Use hazard warning lights.
- Get out of the car on the side away from the traffic.
- Put on a reflective jacket so cars can see you.
- Use a red warning triangle if it's safe to do so.
- Get your passengers to safety.
- Make sure any pets are safe too.
- Call for help.

Do not stop unless you have to. If you have to park on the hard shoulder, then you should:

- Park on the left.
- Put on your hazard warning lights.
- Get out on the left-hand doors.
- Call the highways agency.
- Wait for help away from the motorway.
- If you feel unsafe, get back in the car.



Your car safety checklist

Kit:

- Fire extinguisher
- First aid kit
- Blanket
- Lifehammer
- Jump leads
- Spare bulb kit
- Reflective emergency jacket
- Weatherproof torch and batteries
- High grip cotton gloves
- Foot pump (with gauge)
- Tow rope and booster cables
- Hazard warning triangle

Extra kit for the winter

- Warm, waterproof clothing
- Boots or shoes that are good for snow or ice
- A blanket
- Food, snacks, water and a hot drink
- A fully charged phone
- Salt or similar to clear ice
- An old carpet or carboard to put under tires
- A shovel
- Ice scraper, de-icer, and screen wash
- Snow chains



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