

EHS Guidance

Lone Worker

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to outline dangers to lone workers and provide best practice methods for mitigating the associated risks. Due to the variety of situations, there is no “one size fits all” approach and each department is encouraged to create their own lone worker policy that works best for their individual situations. When best practice recommendations are not feasible to implement, a department should find a suitable equivalent practice.

Background

Various jobs fall under the lone worker umbrella: working a graveyard security shift alone, working in an isolated location, or driving public transportation. While each job has its own hazards and mitigation strategies, the shared hazard for lone workers is the lack of someone nearby to intervene in an emergency. Without a communication system in place, help could arrive too late.

The basic components of a lone worker policy should include the establishment of the following:

- Communication
- Check-in intervals
- Missed check-in procedures
- Designated check-in individuals

Communication:

Communication shall be reliable and instantaneous in nature. Both the individual transmitting the message and the receiving individual shall acknowledge that the message was received and understood.

The contact method chosen shall allow for the rapid establishment of verbal communication during an emergency. Communication should be able to be transmitted and received throughout the facility. If this is not possible, those areas need to be identified, marked and understood by the employee working in that area.

Text messaging is not sufficiently dependable to use due to potential transmission delays and lack of reliable message confirmation. Instant messaging, such as MS Teams, could be used only if the receiving person can constantly monitor for and respond to all messages. If this method is used, an additional communication method such as a radio should be available as a backup.

Check-in intervals:

Check-in times need to be clearly established. Intervals should be frequent throughout the shift to reduce the response time in an emergency. Check-in times can be set intervals of time or tied to individual tasks. Task-associated check-ins can be more worker-friendly; using this method when appropriate is encouraged.

Checking in solely before and after a shift is not an acceptable lone worker policy.

Missed check-in procedures:

A missed check-in procedure shall be written clearly and understood by everyone in the communication chain. This procedure must address what to do if the affected lone worker misses a check-in and if the lone worker does not receive a response when they check in.

If a lone worker does not receive confirmation that their check in was received, they must stop all work until communication is reestablished.

Designated check-in individuals:

The individual receiving and responding to the lone worker's communication shall be designated by name or position. This individual/position needs to be working/staffed at the facility throughout the lone worker's shift. The designated individual(s) must have a copy of the lone worker policy and understand the responsibilities.

"On-Call" individuals should not be used as designated individuals. If an employee is working outside of normal business hours, communication should be established with one of the staffed 24-hour desks.

Regulations

OSHA has no direct regulation regarding lone workers, but the two following regulations are often cited as they relate to jobs that often include lone workers.

OSHA 1926.84 Workers in Shipyards

- 1915.84(a)
- 1915.84(a)(1)
- 1915.84(a)(2)
- 1915.84(b)

OSHA 1926.800 Underground Construction

- 1926.800(f)(1)
- 1926.800(f)(2)
- 1926.800(f)(3)
- 1926.800(f)(4)
- 1926.800(f)(5)