

Health and Safety – Guidance Sheet GS2

Subject: Lone Working and Risk Assessment

Issue: 2

Date: January 2023

Review Date: January 2025

Introduction

A risk assessment is an important step (and legal requirement) in protecting our employees, our most valuable asset. It helps us focus on the risks that really matter – the ones with the potential to cause harm. In many instances, straightforward measures can effectively control risks. This can mean that simple, cost-effective measures can be implemented to ensure our most valuable asset is protected.

The law does not expect us to eliminate all risk, but we are required to protect people as far as is 'reasonably practicable'.

This short guide will take you through a process of assessing the risk from lone working. It does not and cannot cover all possibilities, but it should enable you to apply your own knowledge and experience (together with that of your employees) to complete a suitable and sufficient assessment of the risk from lone working. Examples are given throughout, but these are only examples, you will need to consider your exact circumstances and apply the principles appropriately.

What is a risk assessment?

A risk assessment is simply a careful examination of what, in your work, could cause harm to people, so that you can weigh up whether you have taken enough precautions or need to do more to prevent harm.

How do you assess the risks from lone working?

Any risk assessment may be broken down into 5 steps:

1. Identify the hazards;
2. Decide who might be harmed and how;
3. Evaluate the risks and decide on precautions;
4. Record your findings and implement them;
5. Review your assessment and update if necessary.

The process should not be overcomplicated, the key is to ensure it is effective – remember, a risk assessment is only a process to help you decide whether risks are adequately controlled or whether you need to do more. In all cases you should involve employees and / or their representatives, as they will have useful information about how the work is done.

1. Identify the hazards – a hazard is anything with the potential to cause harm. For lone working, the significant hazards that will need to be considered will include:

Violence and aggression – may be a greater risk due to employee being alone, is there any history of violence, does the work involve enforcement activities or other ‘negative’ actions, does the employee have to work in isolated areas, does the employee have to visit high crime areas, does the employee carry cash, equipment or other valuables, etc.?

Illness or injury – may be a risk of being unable to get assistance, is there any underlying medical condition, does the employee have to visit remote areas, is there a means of summoning assistance, is there a mobile phone signal, is there a history of previous accidents, etc.?

Vehicle breakdown – may be a risk of becoming stranded, does the employee work in remote areas, does the employee have to travel great distances, does the employee carry passengers, does the employee use their own car or a Council vehicle, is the vehicle maintained in accordance with manufacturer’s recommendations, does the employee have to drive during inclement weather, etc.?

2. Decide who may be harmed and how? - Identification of employees at risk and how they may be harmed should be a simple process. You should already know which individuals or groups of employees are routinely required to work alone. However, you will also need to consider abnormal or unusual circumstances, for example, any emergency situation, out of hours call out, etc.

3. Evaluate your risks and decide on precautions – the level of risk employees is exposed to must be determined. This is not an exact science – rather a measure made on available information and past experience. There are various methods available to support you in this evaluation and remember to consult with employees and / or their representatives. The table below may be useful.

Severity / Likelihood	SLIGHTLY HARMFUL	MODERATELY HARMFUL	EXTREMELY HARMFUL
HIGHLY UNLIKELY	LOW	LOW	MEDIUM
UNLIKELY	LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
LIKELY	MEDIUM	HIGH	INTOLERABLE

The aim is to ensure that control measures are proportionate to the degree of risk. Where a risk is assessed as **INTOLERABLE**, action must be taken immediately to reduce the risk, or the work stopped.

Some example control measures for lone working:

LOW	MEDIUM	HIGH
Office diary (hard copy / electronic) of movements kept. Signing in / out sheets (hard copy / electronic). Basic training and information for employees. Information available on clients' past history, locations to be visited, etc.	Mobile phones. Formal movements log (hard copy / electronic) with nominated persons to supervise and escalation procedures in place. Comprehensive training for employees. Panic alarms in offices – with procedures.	Avoid lone working. At least 2 employees with access to back-up support. Support of outside agencies.

4. Record your findings and implement them – the significant findings of your risk assessment must be recorded and brought to the attention of your employees. If further control measures are identified, you will need to develop an action plan detailing how and when these will be implemented. An example assessment is given at the end of this guide.

Remember, this is only an example and must not be used as a final assessment. You must consider your exact individual circumstances.

5. Review your assessment and update if necessary – the law requires you to review the assessment ‘periodically’ or if circumstances change. In practice, you should review assessments at least annually, or following an incident, accident, change in working practices, new employees, etc.

Dynamic Assessments

In addition to the formal, recorded risk assessments you carry out, all lone working employees should be trained to enable them to complete dynamic assessments as they go about their work. Generally, employees will not be expected to complete forms for this, rather, they should be able to make an assessment ‘in their head’ as their work progresses and if circumstances change. For example, an employee may arrive at a client’s property where there is an aggressive dog. The presence of a dog may not have been included in the formal assessment. The employee must be confident and competent enough to assess the situation they find themselves in and be able to identify suitable control measures – in this example, perhaps ask for the dog to be secured in another area or, if necessary, leave the property and make alternative arrangements.

Further Guidance

Further advice and guidance may be obtained from the documents referred to below or from the Council’s Corporate Health and Safety Team, tel. 01443 425531.

Council Policy HS22 – Lone Working

Council Policy HS13 – Violence at Work

Health and Safety Executive Guide INDG73 – Protecting lone workers: How to manage the risks of working alone:

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

RA Ref:		EXAMPLE Work Activity Risk Assessment				Form RA/03	
Assessment Date		Work Activity being assessed:				Assessors:	
Review Date		A Planning Officer Visiting Sites Alone					
Item No.	Main Hazards (Something with the potential to cause harm)	Risk [H,M,L]	Reason (Explain the reasons why you have decided on either a H,M,L risk rating in the previous column. Include the person(s) at risk and the seriousness of the injuries they may sustain)	Current Control Measures (What are you doing already to control the hazard and risk? These controls must be in place and working effectively)	Residual Risk [H,M,L]	Further Action Required	
						Yes	No
1	The employee suffering an instance of violence and / or aggression.	M	<p>For instance, a planning officer visiting an individual in that individual's home to discuss a proposed development at the property could be at risk of violence and aggression.</p> <p>For example, the individual may take exception to the planning officer's view on the likelihood of the development being granted planning permission and may become violent / aggressive as a result.</p> <p>This is an unlikely outcome, but should it occur there is a risk of a moderate degree of harm to the employee.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Office diary (hard copy / electronic) kept of all visits. Procedures in place for reporting in / out. Arrangements in place for escalation if employee does not return to the office or does not report in as having returned home safely. Employees have Council-issued mobile phones to enable them to contact someone if a violent / aggressive situation were to arise. Employees receive training in safe-working procedures, including how to carry out dynamic risk assessments so as to be able to react appropriately should a situation deteriorate. Employees advised not to carry any significant amounts of money / valuables whilst working alone. Incidents of violence and aggression are not considered likely based on past evidence. 	L	Yes	

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Review Date							
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						Yes	No
2	An employee becoming ill or suffering and injury.	M	<p>Employees are required to keep their manager informed of any medical conditions that could result in them becoming ill whilst lone working, and none of the planning officers currently employed have advised their manager of any such condition.</p> <p>Planning officers sometimes visit ongoing construction projects to check that any planning conditions imposed on the development are being complied with and whilst they are unlikely to suffer an accident whilst doing so, if they were to suffer one, it could result in a moderate degree of harm.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees required to inform their manager of any underlying medical condition that could result in them becoming ill whilst lone working. • Employees have Council-issued mobile phones to enable them to contact someone if they become ill or suffer an injury. • Employees trained in safe-working procedures, including awareness of likely hazards on construction sites. 	L	Yes	

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Review Date							
Item No.	Main Hazards (Something with the potential to cause harm)	Risk [H,M,L]	Reason (Explain the reasons why you have decided on either a H,M,L risk rating in the previous column. Include the person(s) at risk and the seriousness of the injuries they may sustain)	Current Control Measures (What are you doing already to control the hazard and risk? These controls must be in place and working effectively)	Residual Risk [H,M,L]	Further Action Required	
						Yes	No
3	Vehicle breakdown.	L	<p>If an employee uses their own car whilst making visits, they must ensure it has a valid MOT certificate (where required).</p> <p>If they use a Council-owned vehicle, the Council ensures it has a valid MOT certificate (where required) and that it is maintained regularly.</p> <p>If they use a hire vehicle, they must use reputable firms approved by the Council.</p> <p>Breakdowns are unlikely to occur, but can happen, and if one does, the employee is unlikely to suffer any degree of harm.</p> <p>It is only likely to be a problem if they are visiting a remote site and may become stranded and vulnerable to an assault if alone.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vehicles used by employees are roadworthy. Employees have Council-issued mobile phones to enable them to contact someone if their vehicle breaks down. 	L	Yes	

RA Ref:		EXAMPLE Risk Assessment – Action Plan			Form RA/04	
Responsible Person:		Work Activity:			Date:	
Designation:		A Planning Officer Visiting Sites Alone				
Item No.	Main Hazards	Action Required	Date Action to be taken by	By Whom	Date Completed	
1	Though unlikely, there is a possibility of injury to employee as a result of a physical assault.	Ensure that a register (hard copy / electronic) is kept of any person who displays any indications of violent or aggressive behaviour towards employees, that this information is available to all employees and that employees view this register prior to making site visits. Where a violent / aggressive confrontation is a possibility, re-assess – e.g., minimum of two officers to attend.	Ongoing As appropriate	Manager Manager		
2	An employee suffering a medical incident whilst alone.	Periodically remind employees of the need to report any change in their medical status which could result in them becoming ill whilst lone working.	Periodically	Manager		
3	An employee becoming stranded if their vehicle breaks down whilst visiting a remote site, leaving them vulnerable to an assault if alone.	Where a site to be visited is remote, re-assess – e.g., minimum of two officers to attend.	As appropriate	Manager		

Safe to proceed	Yes	No
	Yes	