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HS 22

Lone Working Policy

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Working alone presents a unique health and safety problem since on the face of it employees must, to an extent, look after their own health and safety. However, as far as the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 is concerned, the responsibility of the Council as an employer to ensure the health and safety of lone workers does not differ from that responsibility to ensure the health and safety of employees working in groups or under close supervision.

1.2 There is no single answer whether it is safe to work alone, so it will depend on the findings of risk assessments carried out in accordance with the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations and other specific legislation. What is clear is that the Council has responsibilities for the health, safety and welfare of its employees and others affected by its undertaking. These responsibilities cannot be transferred to people who work alone as it is the Council's duty to assess the risk to lone workers and take steps to avoid or control risk where necessary.

It should, however, be noted there is specific legislation prohibiting some lone working. Reference can be made to section 5 of the policy.

1.3 Employees themselves have responsibilities under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 as they too must take reasonable care of themselves and other people affected by their work, and to co-operate with the Council in meeting its legal obligations.

1.4 The Council's Health and Safety Policy HS13 - Violence at Work needs to be referred to. Particular attention should be paid to section 7 of that policy.

2. POLICY STATEMENT

2.1 The Council is aware of the potential risks associated with lone working and therefore all such work will be subject to risk assessment and suitable controls to minimise the risk.

2.2 Depending on the result of the risk assessment, the Council's intention is either to entirely remove the risks from any hazards and/or, where complete elimination is not possible, to reduce them to an acceptable level.

2.3 Managers of lone workers will ensure that risk assessments are carried out and the required precautions taken.

2.4 In situations where as a result of the risk assessment the risks are considered high, or where specific legal requirements exist, a 'permit to work system' will be prepared.

- 2.5 Employees (and others where appropriate) will be given all necessary information, instruction, training and supervision to enable them to recognise the hazards and appreciate the risks associated with working alone.
- 2.6 The Council will ensure that procedures will be put into place whereby employees do not experience significant stress as a result of lone working.
- 2.7 Lone workers will be informed of the potential risks associated with the work, will be required to follow the specified procedures, and to report to their manager if there are any problems.
- 2.8 Attached to this policy is guidance for managers, which will be of assistance in complying with the policy.
- 2.9 The responsibility for implementing the requirements of the policy and the preparation of an implementation strategy rests with each Director or Head of Service.

POLICY GUIDANCE

3. WHO ARE LONE WORKERS?

3.1 There are many definitions of lone workers. For the purpose of the policy the following definition will be used:

‘Lone workers are those who work by themselves, without close or direct supervision’.

4. WHAT JOBS CAN BE CARRIED OUT BY LONE WORKERS?

4.1 Lone workers are found throughout the Council in a wide range of situations. Some examples of these are set out below.

People in fixed establishments where:

- only one person works on the premises;
- people who work separately from each other;
- people who work outside normal working hours.

Mobile workers working away from a fixed base:

- construction workers;
- maintenance employees;
- social workers;
- care workers;
- drivers;
- planning officers;
- environmental health officers.

5. PROHIBITIONS ON WORKING ALONE

5.1 There are a number of specific legal provisions which, in certain circumstances, specify systems of working which require more than one person. These include:

- Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations;
 - Electricity at Work Regulations;
 - Confined Spaces Regulations.
- 5.2 There are other provisions which require work to be done 'under the supervision of a competent person', or similar words. This would suggest that the work, although carried out by one person, must be done in the presence of another.
- 5.3 Apart from the legal provisions, whether an employee can work alone will depend on the findings of the risk assessment.

6. ASSESSING AND CONTROLLING THE RISK

- 6.1 Risk assessment will be the tool for managers to use in ensuring the health and safety of lone workers. The purposes of assessing the risks of working alone or unsupervised for significant periods of time is to establish two main facts:
- whether the work can be done safely by an unaccompanied person;
 - what arrangements will ensure that an individual is not exposed to greater risks than employees who work together.
- 6.2 It is important that when the risk assessor carries out an assessment, he or she talks to employees as they can be a valuable source of information. It will also ensure that all relevant hazards are identified and appropriate controls chosen.
- 6.3 The starting point of the assessment should be the recognition that a lone person is more vulnerable when the unexpected happens. Therefore, when an employee is asked to work alone, certain issues need to be addressed when assessing the risks from the work, examples of which are as follows:

Remoteness and isolation

- the emergency services can gain access to the individual (if necessary);
- there is a clear understanding about how long the work should take;
- there is adequate access to first aid, or provision for mobile workers to carry a first aid kit;
- transport arrangements to and from the workplace are adequate.

Condition of the Workplace

A safe means of entry to and exit from the workplace must be guaranteed. The employer must also ensure that there is adequate illumination and that the physical terrain and atmosphere is investigated. There should be some practical arrangements for meals and drinks to be taken and for appropriate welfare facilities to be available.

Communication

Consideration should be given whether communication is adequate, and in particular:

- what level of supervision is necessary and how is it to be carried out?
- has the lone worker been equipped with a system for maintaining contact, such as two way means of communication, a pager or a personal alarm?

Personal Assault

Employees who are thought to be carrying cash, or who can be seen in possession of valuables such as laptop computers, hand tools, mobile phones, etc., may be at risk from robbery or attack.

Women can face increased risks from particular forms of violence when working alone, such as sexual harassment and assault, although men can also be victims of this type of violence.

Persons with criminal intent may also pose a risk if they find out an employee's address.

'Worst Case' Scenarios

In case of emergency, consideration must be given to:

- whether sufficient preparation has been made to cope with the emergency, e.g. fire, illness or accident, and have appropriate procedures been established;
- what provisions are in place to make the workplace secure if it must be left unattended.

Information and Training

Managers must ensure that sufficient information has been given to enable the lone worker to recognise the hazards and appreciate the risks of working alone. Where safe working procedures are laid down, these must be followed by the employees.

Given the relative lack of supervision, extra care must be taken to ensure that the lone worker is competent to both carry out the task and to deal with foreseeable problems. There should be agreement as to the circumstances in which it is correct to stop work and seek advice.

Medical Fitness

Issues that must be discussed in relation to medical fitness include:

- do the circumstances of working alone place additional requirements of employees in terms of their physical or mental stamina?
- is there a medical condition that makes them unsuitable for working alone?
- would a pre-employment questionnaire or medical examination be helpful under the circumstances?

Tools and Equipment

Where machinery or power tools are being used, consideration of the electrical safety, guarding and fire precautions required are paramount.

The use of flammable, explosive or toxic chemicals must be carefully assessed and the presence of any automatic fire protection systems, such as carbon dioxide gas, may pose special risks.

Access equipment that is suitable for handling by one person alone may be required, and all lifting operations should be safe.

Consideration must be given to supplying correct and comfortable personal protective equipment and clothing, bearing in mind the limited possibilities for supervision.

Providing Support

Sometimes a second person may be able to contribute to the safety of an activity and corresponding guidance may recommend this. A second person may also contribute to the safety of the first person, thus the manager will need to determine whether accompaniment brings a definite benefit to the safety of the worker.

Another example of a task where a second person could usefully contribute to the reduction of risk is in the case of reversing vehicles. A number of fatal injuries involving vehicles occur during unsupervised reversing manoeuvres.

7. PERMITS TO WORK

- 7.1 In certain circumstances, particularly when the risks are considered high or where specific legal requirements exist, a written permit to work system must be prepared. This system is a powerful tool in the planning and control of work activities and enables specific hazards to be identified and places strict requirements on how work is to be carried out.
- 7.2 Some activities are commonly associated with permits to work, such as entry into confined spaces and on to roofs, hot work, excavations, electrical testing, etc.

The use of a permit to work system may be a useful control measure wherever hazardous conditions arise out of work activities. Health and safety risks over and above those normally encountered in the workplace can be minimised in this way.

- 7.3 It is in the nature of permits to work that a high degree of supervision is implied, requiring authorising signatories and some detailed documentation, for example, start and finish times, the exact work to be carried out, safety requirements, etc.. The manager issuing the permit to work should carry out an inspection to confirm that all specified measures have, in fact, been taken.
- 7.4 However, it is inherent in lone working that the remote site or peripatetic worker cannot be subject to the same degree of inspection or supervision. As a means for ensuring safety, a modified permit may be useful in establishing that all the foreseeable outcomes have been taken into account.

A modified permit differs from the standard format in that an employee will not 'permit' himself or herself to work unless certain conditions prevail. The burden in this case is very much on the individual employee to act responsibly and with discretion. It also underlines the fact that it is the employee alone who can make that decision.

This is not to suggest in any way that an employer's/manager's legal responsibilities can actually be transferred to the employee by this means, but certainly, every employee has the ultimate right to stop work in the event of him or her being exposed to serious and imminent danger.

Precautions that can be written into a modified permit include:

- agreed check-in arrangements;
- test of emergency communication equipment;
- estimated duration of the working period;
- provision of suitable first aid kit;
- equipment and tools inspection before use and electrical safety established;
- checklist of appropriate personal protective equipment and clothing;
- ability to escape safely;
- manual handling suitable for a single person;
- agreement reached about working in bad weather and when work can be suspended.

7.5 Copies of permits must be issued to everyone directly involved with the activity.

8. MONITORING/SUPERVISION

8.1 Although lone workers cannot be the subject of constant supervision, it is still the manager's duty to ensure their health and safety at work.

8.2 Monitoring procedures should be put into place, taking into consideration the following:

- periodic visits, which could involve spot checks or a rota system;
- regular contact between the lone worker using telephone or radio;
- checks that the lone worker has returned to base or home on completion of a task.

8.3 In every situation there must be adequate means of ensuring that, at some stage, contact is made with the lone worker. Further it must also be possible for the worker to initiate contact.

8.4 The extent of the monitoring procedures will depend on the findings of the risk assessment.

9. RECORDS TO BE KEPT

9.1 Examples of records that should be kept are as follows:

- risk assessment;
- documented procedure to be followed by the lone worker (including communication arrangements, supervision, etc.);
- any specific or other training required;
- verbal or practical instructions required;
- permits to work.

10. ADVICE

10.1 Advice on the implementation of the policy can be obtained from the Health and Safety Team, Human Resources, Ty Elai, Williamstown, CF40 1NY, telephone 01443 425531.

MANAGERS CHECKLIST

	✓ As Appropriate		
	N/A	Yes	No
• Has a risk assessment been carried out where employees work alone?			
• Has action been taken as a result of the assessment?			
• Have all persons working alone received adequate training?			
• Where 'permits to work' are in place, are they being adhered to?			
• Are all working practices reviewed, where necessary?			
• Are appropriate communications in place and tested at periodic intervals?			
• Are there monitoring procedures in place to ensure that the requirements of the policy are being met?			

Completed by: _____
(Signature)

Confirmed by: _____
(Signature)

Name: _____
(Print)

Name: _____
(Print)

Designation: _____

Designation: _____

Date: _____

Date: _____