

Workplace Health and Safety Bulletin



Alberta's Occupational Health and Safety Code

An Explanation of the "Working Alone" Requirements

Purpose of the Working Alone Regulation

The requirements for “working alone” were added to the General Safety Regulation (AR 448/83) on October 4, 2000. With the consolidation of all occupational health and safety rules into the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Code, the requirements became part of the OHS Code. The purpose of the Working Alone requirements is to ensure that workers working alone can do so safely. As a result, employers have responsibilities to minimize and eliminate risks associated with their workers who work alone.

The purpose of this publication is to explain the requirements of Part 28 of the OHS Code, in plain, easy-to-understand language. Each of the “rules” of the OHS Code is presented, followed by information that helps clarify the intent or application of the requirement.

This publication accompanies a handbook of best practices intended to help employers meet their obligations.



http://employment.alberta.ca/documents/WHS/WHS-PUB_workingalone.pdf

Working Alone Safely — A Guide for Employers and Employees

General types of working alone situations

Workers who work alone can be grouped into five broad categories:

- (1) Workers who handle cash. This includes convenience store clerks, retail and food outlet workers and taxi drivers.
- (2) Workers who travel away from base offices to meet clients. This includes home care workers, social services workers and bylaw enforcement officers.
- (3) Workers who do hazardous work but have no routine interaction with customers or the public. This includes workers in the logging, oil and gas industries.
- (4) Workers who travel alone but have no routine interaction with customers or the public. This includes truck drivers and business people in transit.
- (5) Workers who are at risk of a violent attack because their work site is isolated from public view. This includes security guards and custodians.

A worker is considered to be working alone if the worker works by himself or herself at a work site in circumstances where assistance is not readily available when needed. Employers can eliminate the risk of workers working alone, as well as the need to comply with the working alone requirements, if they chose to organize work schedules and workplace procedures to eliminate the need for workers to work by themselves.

Employer obligations

If an employer has workers who work by themselves, the OHS Code requires the employer to:

- conduct a hazard assessment to identify existing or potential safety hazards in the workplace associated with working alone;
- implement safety measures to reduce the risk to workers from the identified hazards;
- ensure that workers have an effective way of communicating with their employer, immediate supervisor or another designated person in case of an emergency situation; and
- regularly contact the worker at intervals appropriate to the nature of the hazard associated with the worker's work.

No province in Canada prohibits working alone. Jurisdictions that have specific provisions regulating working alone include Alberta, British Columbia (B.C), Saskatchewan, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Northwest Territories/Nunavut. All use a regulatory approach very similar to the one adopted in Alberta. Each of these jurisdictions requires employers to conduct a hazard assessment and to develop controls to reduce the risks associated with the identified hazards.

In B.C., if a worker is assigned to work alone or in isolation at a late night retail premise, the employer must

- (a) develop and train the worker in money-handling procedures, and
- (b) either assign more than one worker to work during late night hours or ensure the worker is physically separated from the public by a locked door or barrier during those hours.

The locked door or barrier must ensure the worker cannot be physically contacted or accessed by a member of the public. The use of a barrier is being phased in over time as employer groups in B.C. develop a practical barrier design.

Also in B.C., an employer at a gas station or retail fueling outlet must ensure that customers prepay for all vehicle fuel. Fuel prepayment has been adopted to protect workers from the hazards of “gas and dash” activities. This requirement applies 24 hours a day, seven days a week and includes full-serve and self-serve establishments.

When the requirement was being prepared in Alberta, consideration was given to making it mandatory for employers to have at least two workers at all work sites. However, it was determined that such a requirement was not always practicable or effective in protecting workers. Instead, employers were given some flexibility in determining the best ways of protecting their workers.

Need more information?

This publication provides explanations that apply to most workplaces and situations. However, if you find an explanation is unclear, or additional information would be helpful, please contact Alberta Employment and Immigration. Call the Province-Wide Contact Centre:



Edmonton and surrounding area — 780-415-8690



Throughout Alberta — 1-866-415-8690

Note: All persons making use of this publication are reminded that it has no legislative sanction. The Occupational Health and Safety Code should be consulted for all purposes of interpreting and applying the law.

Rules Related to Working Alone

Defining “to work alone”

“To work alone” means to work alone at a work site in circumstances where assistance is not readily available in the event of an injury, illness or emergency.

EXPLANATION

Visual contact too limiting

Many situations arise in which workers may be unable to see one another but can maintain audible contact. Examples include workers in adjoining offices, a welder working behind a welding screen, and a tradesperson and their helper separated by an intervening wall. In such circumstances, the working alone requirements need not apply.

Two conditions

The working alone requirements of the OHS Code apply when **both** of the following conditions are met:

- (1) a worker is working by himself or herself; and
- (2) assistance, in the event of an injury, illness or emergency, is not readily available to the worker.

If two or more workers of the same employer are working together, the working alone requirements of the OHS Code do not apply. If two or more workers of different employers are working together, the working alone requirements of the OHS Code do not apply as it is reasonable to expect that the workers will provide assistance to one another.

Readily available — three assessment factors

Three factors must be assessed when determining if assistance is “readily available” in the event of an injury, illness or emergency:

- (1) *awareness* — will other persons capable of providing assistance be aware of the worker’s needs?
- (2) *willingness* — is it reasonable to expect those other persons will provide helpful assistance?
- (3) *timelines* — will assistance be provided within a reasonable period of time?

This assessment must consider the level of risk associated with the circumstances of the work, e.g. type of work, location, hazards, etc. If the worker faces hazards that pose a high risk of injury, “readily available” may become “immediately available”. Worker expectations of the availability of assistance increase as the level of risk associated with the work increases. Employers are reminded that the level of risk may change over time and with changing workplace conditions.

Example situations

The following examples describe typical workplace situations in very general terms. Circumstances at individual workplaces may vary, influencing whether or not a working alone situation exists.

Example 1:

A worker is the only staff member on duty at “Bison Burgers” in a food court where other workers are present at nearby food outlets.

Although the worker is by himself or herself, workers present at other food outlets could reasonably be expected to provide or get assistance. The working alone requirements of the OHS Code would not apply in this situation since both conditions described above are not met.

However, a lone worker at a stand-alone food outlet would meet the “working alone” conditions because the worker, if seriously injured due to an incident or as a result of a confrontation with a customer, would have no way of getting assistance.

Example 2:

A worker, equipped with a portable two-way radio or cellular telephone, is working by himself or herself in an area where the worker cannot be seen or heard by persons capable of offering assistance.

The two conditions applicable to working alone apply in this example. The worker is working by himself or herself and assistance is not readily available because the worker cannot be seen or heard by persons capable of offering assistance. While it may be part of the solution, the fact that the worker has a portable two-way radio or a cellular telephone is irrelevant when assessing the situation against the two conditions.

Because the two working alone conditions are met, the employer is required to conduct a hazard assessment to identify existing or potential hazards arising from the conditions and circumstances of the worker’s work. The employer must establish an effective

means of communication between the worker and persons capable of responding to the worker's needs. The employer (or their designate) must also regularly contact the worker at intervals appropriate to the nature of the hazard associated with the worker's work. The assessment may show that the portable two-way radio or cellular telephone is effective, or it may suggest that alternatives are necessary.

Example 3:

A worker driving on the highway between Calgary and Edmonton versus a worker driving on a remote abandoned logging road.

It is reasonable to expect that during daytime hours, if a worker driving the highway requires assistance, other highway users will become aware of the need. It is also reasonable to expect that other highway users will willingly provide assistance and do so in a timely manner. The working alone requirements do not apply. However, if the driving occurs throughout the night, particularly on a less travelled roadway, the working alone requirements may apply.

By contrast, it is reasonable to expect that a worker driving on a remote abandoned logging road will not encounter anyone on the roadway. In the event of an injury, illness or emergency, it is unreasonable to expect someone will be aware of the situation or be willing to provide assistance in a timely manner. The working alone requirements apply.

Example 4:

A nurse on night shift at a psychiatric unit versus a nurse on day shift at a children's unit.

The circumstances of the work in these two situations are quite different, although the worksite — the health care centre — is the same. The availability of assistance in each situation must be assessed individually from the perspective of awareness, willingness and timeliness. Given the increased risk to personal safety of working the night shift on a psychiatric unit, expectations on the availability of assistance are also greater.

Particularly if the unit is large and few staff are on duty, it may not be reasonable to expect other persons capable of offering assistance to be aware of the nurse's needs. Given the potential hazards to which the nurse is exposed, the timeliness of a response for assistance should be faster. The situation of a nurse on night shift at a psychiatric unit may trigger the working alone requirements.

Example 5:

Table 1 describes situations that might be encountered involving two workers, one of which is a tradesperson and the other is the tradesperson’s helper.

Table 1 Degrees of worker separation

Tradesperson and helper work together continually	Not working alone
Helper passes behind loading bins and is momentarily out of sight or cannot be heard	Not working alone
Helper goes to the next room to get supplies Helper goes to another floor to get supplies Helper goes to outside loading area to get supplies	Workers <i>may</i> be working alone – workers should be aware where each other is and the approximate return time. Factors that may influence whether this is a working alone situation include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ how long the workers are separated ▪ whether the work poses a high risk of injury ▪ the presence of other persons at the work site
Helper gets into vehicle to go to warehouse to get more supplies	Working alone

Is the worker working alone?

A worker is **not** “working alone” if **all** of the following conditions are met:

- (1) *awareness* — the worker can get the attention of someone capable of providing helpful assistance when the worker requires it, i.e. by maintaining visual contact, staying within the hearing range of others, being continuously monitored by remote surveillance camera, sounding an alarm, making frequent contact with other workers or persons throughout the work period.
- (2) *willingness* — persons expected to provide assistance to the worker must be capable and willing to do so when required. There should be a reasonable expectation that the persons being relied on to provide assistance can and actually will provide that assistance. Depending on circumstances, those persons may need access to a telephone to call Emergency Services (dialling 9-1-1), to access to some other type of communication device to call for assistance, or specialized skills e.g. confined space entry training, the ability to use a self-contained breathing apparatus, etc. The employer must consider these factors when assessing the working alone situation.

- (3) *timeliness* — the required assistance will be provided in a reasonable period of time. What is reasonable depends on factors such as the nature of the illness, injury or emergency, the physical location of the work and the workers, the type of work being performed, the level of risk and others. In general, assistance must be provided as quickly as reasonably practical. Employers should discuss this and the other conditions with workers to ensure that workers' needs are met.

Video surveillance camera

Maintaining contact with workers may be achieved through the use of video surveillance cameras. The employer's hazard assessment should assess to what extent workers using this system can respond to other workers who require assistance. A remote video monitoring room, or a non-continuous surveillance system that regularly switches images between several monitoring cameras may or may not meet the "readily available" assistance criterion of the OHS Code. The hazard assessment should help to determine if this is the case.

Employers can eliminate the risk of workers working alone, as well as the need to comply with the working alone requirements, if they choose to organize work schedules and workplace procedures to eliminate the need for workers to work by themselves. Overlapping shifts, having multiple workers work together, and rearranging the physical location of the work so that workers maintain contact with one another are examples of how working alone situations can be avoided.

Work site and worker

Subsection 1(n) of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* defines a work site as a location where a worker is, or is likely to be, engaged in any occupation. For workers who work out of their vehicle, any vehicle, or mobile equipment used by the worker as part of the job is also considered a work site. The *Act* clearly indicates that a work site is any location where there is, or is likely to be, a worker doing work as part of their occupation.

Subsection 1(m) of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* defines a worker as any person engaged in an occupation. It is not necessary for the worker to be paid and therefore volunteers and other unpaid persons are considered to be workers.

Exempted workers

The *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, as well as the OHS Code, do not apply to farmers and ranchers, workers working in their own private dwellings, domestic workers such as nannies and housekeepers, federal government workers, or workers in federally-regulated industries such as banking, telecommunications, television and radio broadcasting, and interprovincial transportation.

Are students workers?

Although the definition of “worker” is broad enough in the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* to include a student, the definition of “employer” is difficult to apply to a school. The Alberta Court has accepted the word “employ” as involving “using the services of someone”. In the context of a student and a school, it is difficult to see how the school can be considered to be using the services of a student — the reverse is more likely the case. There is also no case law to support the notion that a student attending classes can be considered to be self-employed and therefore subject to the *Act*.

Based on this information, Alberta Employment and Immigration takes the position that the *OHS Act, Regulation* and Code do not apply to students receiving training in an educational setting, regardless of the activities being performed e.g. wood-working class at a grade school, automotive repair course at a technical school, chemistry laboratory course at a university, etc. Responsibility for the safety of students rests with the school under existing legislation that may apply to educational institutions.

When a student provides services to an employer

Two situations arise in which a “student” provides services to an employer and therefore becomes a “worker”.

- (1) *A student involved in a work-experience training program that takes place at an industrial setting* e.g. working at a chemical plant as part of the work-experience program, the work term of an apprenticeship program, etc. In these cases the operator of the industrial setting is considered to be the employer and the student is now a worker. The requirements of the *OHS Act, Regulation* and Code apply to both the employer and worker.
- (2) *A student performing work on behalf of an educational institution or an instructor* e.g. conducting research for a university or a professor. The institution or instructor is considered to be the employer and the student is now a worker. The requirements of the *OHS Act, Regulation* and Code apply to both the employer and worker.

Hazard assessment

If a worker is required to work alone, the employer must

- (1) conduct a *hazard assessment* to identify existing or potential hazards arising from the conditions and circumstances of the worker's work,
- (2) implement appropriate measures to control or eliminate the hazards identified,
- (3) ensure workers have an effective means of communication between the worker and persons capable of responding to the worker's needs in case of an emergency or the worker is injured or ill, and
- (4) regularly contact the worker at intervals appropriate to the nature of the hazard associated with the worker's work.

EXPLANATION

Hazard assessment

A work site hazard assessment is a common sense look at the workplace to identify existing hazards for workers working alone. To perform such an assessment, employers need to

- (1) review records and past incidents, and
- (2) identify measures or actions needed to correct any hazards.

Completing those two initial steps is important to the success of any health and safety program. The OHS Code requires employers to involve in the hazard assessment those workers who may be affected by it. The OHS Code also requires that the assessment be in writing and be communicated to all workers affected by it. The assessment should indicate the work site(s) to which it applies and the date(s) on which it was performed.

Employers having limited experience with assessing hazards, or who are unsure of what corrective measures or actions to take, may wish to contact outside experts. These may include the industry association to which they may belong, the provincial health and safety association that best represents their industry, or a private occupational health and safety consultant. Employers in the retail sector may also wish to contact the Crime Prevention Unit of their local police service.

One hazard assessment for multiple work sites

Hazard assessments are only required for each different set of working conditions. A taxi company for example, could complete one hazard assessment to cover all its drivers and the typical situations those drivers encounter. An assessment does not need to be completed for each driver individually. The same is true of a worker selling products door-to-door, or a worker inspecting a number of essentially identical transformer substations. A single hazard assessment can cover the hazards generically rather than assessing each taxi, house or substation individually.

Review of records and past incidents

When identifying workplace hazards, employers should talk to their workers and review the experience of the business over the previous two or three years. Collect and examine the history of past events that may reveal the risk of workplace incidents, injuries and violence. Consider what happened before and during the incident. Note the relevant details of the situation and its outcome. If an employer does not have any personal experience with past incidents, the employer should check with similar businesses so that a variety of potential problem situations and circumstances are identified and considered.

Employers should see if there are any trends in injuries or incidents relating to their type of business, a particular work site, job title, activity, or time of day or week. Employers should identify specific tasks that may be associated with increased risk.

Good sources of information include injury and illness records resulting from “working alone” incidents, workers’ compensation claims, and police department robbery reports that identify specific incidents related to working alone.

Inspect and analyze the workplace

After reviewing records or past incidents, employers need to carefully examine the workplace, day-to-day management practices and other situations that may put workers at risk. This will help to develop and put in place specific preventative measures to address these problems.

The employer’s review should look at:

- (1) all factors that may make the risk of violence more likely, such as physical features of the building and environment, inadequate lighting, lack of telephones and other communication devices, telephones that do not permit out-going calls, areas of unsecured access, and areas with known security problems such as parking lots;

- (2) factors that make the risk of occupational injury more likely or severe, such as high hazard work e.g. tree cutting, isolation from first aid services, and inability to call for help; and
- (3) the effectiveness of existing safety measures. Find out whether these measures are actually being used and whether workers have been adequately trained in their use.

Appendix 1 of *Working Alone Safely — A Guide for Employers and Employees*, contains sample hazard assessment checklists (see Figure 1). The checklists present a series of questions that may help employers perform their work site inspection and analysis of hazards. In some cases (depending on the type of business and the hazards present), completion of the appropriate checklist may be all that is required. In other cases, the checklist is a starting point for a more comprehensive assessment.

 http://employment.alberta.ca/documents/WHS/WHS-PUB_workingalone.pdf
 Working Alone Safely – A Guide for Employers and Employees

Figure 1 Examples of hazard assessment checklists

Appendix 1.1: Working Alone

Checklist For Employees Who Handle Cash
(e.g. convenience store clerks, retail and food outlet employees, taxi drivers)

This checklist is intended to help employers implement best practices for employees working alone in situations with substantial risk of robbery or other criminal acts because of cash exchange with the public. The questions in bold reflect mandatory requirements. Other questions suggest recommended practices that are highly desirable.

Yes **No** **N/A** **CASH AND MERCHANDISE CONTROL**

Do you have a policy to control cash and valuables in the workplace?

Do you have a procedure to minimize the cash availability?

Do you use devices such as drop safes to limit the cash-on-hand to less than \$1000?

Do you post signs in prominent places notifying the public that limited cash is kept on the premises?

Yes **No** **N/A** **VISIBILITY**

Do you have good visibility in the workplace to discourage robbery?

Are doors and windows clear of signs, posters and window displays to a two-way visibility of the cash handling area?

Is the check-out stand or cash register located near the front, and in the line of sight of the business where it is clearly visible to observers outside?

Is the cash register visible from all sides?

Are aisles and counters kept low enough for good visibility throughout the workplace?

Are all indoor lights bright and working properly?

Is the entrance to the building easily seen from the street and free of shrub growth?

Is lighting bright in parking and adjacent areas?

Yes **No** **N/A** **EMPLOYEE TRAINING**

Do you ensure employees are trained and competent to work alone?

Do you provide training on working alone to employees?

Does the training program include:

The use of the "Robbery Awareness Education Kit" developed by the Police Services, or equivalent resources?

Strategies used by the business to discourage robberies?

How to behave during a robbery attempt?

Training in conflict resolution and non-violent response to threatening situations?

Training in emergency response procedures for robberies and other crimes?

Proper maintenance of the security system?

How employees get timely assistance when needed?

Testing employees' knowledge at the end of the orientation program?

Appendix 1.2: Working Alone

Checklist For Employees Who Meet Clients Away From Their Base Office
(e.g. home care workers and nurses, social services workers, real estate agents, bylaw and government enforcement officers)

This checklist is intended to help employers implement best practices for employees working alone with clients away from the employer's premises. The questions in bold reflect mandatory requirements. Other questions suggest recommended practices that are highly desirable.

Yes **No** **N/A** **EMPLOYEE TRAINING**

Do you ensure employees are trained and competent to work alone safely?

Are employees trained to recognize potentially violent situations?

Are employees trained in non-violent responses to threatening situations?

Have employees been instructed to follow the employer's safe work procedures when meeting clients at their premises?

Yes **No** **N/A** **SAFE WORK PROCEDURE**

Do you have a safe work procedure for employees working at their client's premises?

Does the safe work procedure include an evaluation based on risk awareness and take into consideration the following:

Client behaviour?

Location (unsafe area, isolation, poor lighting, unlit parking, unsafe building)?

Presence of dangerous items (weapon, vicious pets)?

Previous case history of client and location?

Others? Specify: _____

Are employees required to have a safe visit plan for high risk situations based on the above evaluation?

Does the safe visit plan consider the following control measures:

Use of a cellular telephone to maintain regular contact with the office?

Phone designated person prior to and after leaving the client's premises?

"Buddy system" – arrange for a second person to accompany the employee in a high risk situation while on the visit?

Arrange to meet the client at a safe location?

Use of security services?

Defer visit until proper safety measures can be met?

Others? Specify: _____

Yes **No** **N/A** **COMMUNICATION**

Do you have an effective means of communication for employees to contact persons capable of responding when employees need immediate assistance?

Does the method of communication involve one of the following:

Regular telephone, cellphone, or radio contact with designated persons?

Check-in points with other employees?

Others? Specify: _____

Appendix 1.4: Working Alone

Checklist For Employees Who Travel Alone
(e.g. truck drivers, field workers, and business people in transit)

This checklist is intended to help employers implement best practices for employees travelling alone while working, with no interaction with customers. The questions in bold reflect mandatory requirements. Other questions suggest recommended practices that are highly desirable.

Yes **No** **N/A** **EMPLOYEE TRAINING**

Do you ensure employees are trained and competent to work alone safely?

Are employees informed of the hazards associated with working alone?

For employees who have to travel alone to remote locations, do they have some training in emergency survival?

Yes **No** **N/A** **SAFE WORK PROCEDURE**

Do you have a safe work procedure for employees travelling alone?

Do employees have adequate rest periods between work periods when they are travelling alone?

Yes **No** **N/A** **EQUIPMENT SAFETY**

Do you ensure vehicles used by employees are in good working condition?

Are all vehicles used by employees under regular maintenance program?

Yes **No** **N/A** **EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES**

Do you provide employees with the appropriate first aid supplies?

Do employees carry the required first aid supplies?

Do employees carry emergency supplies when they travel in extreme cold or inclement weather conditions?

Yes **No** **N/A** **COMMUNICATION**

Do you have an effective means of communication for employees to contact persons capable of responding when employees need immediate assistance?

Do you have a procedure for tracking "overdue" employees that is appropriate to the hazards?

Does the method of communication involve the following:

Regular telephone, cellphone, or radio contact?

Reporting to designated locations according to the "travel plan"?

Others? Specify: _____

Means of communication

According to subsection 394(1) of the OHS Code, an “effective communication system” consists of two component parts. The first involves the employer providing a radio, telephone or other effective means of electronic communication to the worker working alone. The second involves regular contact with the worker by the employer (or their designate) at intervals appropriate to the nature of the hazard associated with the worker’s work.

Alternate means of communication

In cases where effective electronic communication is not practicable at the work site, subsection 394(1.1) requires that the employer (or their designate)

- (a) visit the worker, or
- (b) ensure that the worker contacts the employer (or their designate) at intervals appropriate to the nature of the hazard associated with the worker’s work.

EXPLANATION

The purpose behind having an “effective communication system” is to provide workers with a method of signaling their need for assistance. The “means of electronic communication” is **not** limited to verbal communication — the OHS Code does not require employers to provide cellular or satellite phones to each of their workers.

To be effective, signals or messages from electronic communication systems must be capable of reaching their intended destination. The systems must also be capable of operating in the work environment in which they are being used. In cases where an effective electronic communication system is not practicable at a work site, the employer (or their designate) must visit the worker, or ensure that the worker contacts the employer (or their designate) at intervals appropriate to the nature of the hazard associated with the worker’s work.

Regular contact at appropriate intervals

In addition to the employer providing the worker working alone with an effective communication system, the employer (or their designate) must regularly contact the worker at intervals appropriate to the nature of the hazard associated with the worker’s work. Regular contact must also be made if effective electronic communication is not practicable at the work site.

The time intervals at which contact is made should be based on the level of risk that the worker is exposed to. For example, a person working at a retail store located in a strip mall, with workers of other employers nearby, may not require contact as frequently as a person working in a free-standing retail store.

As a second example, consider a laboratory setting. When establishing the time interval between contacts the employer needs to consider the materials and equipment being worked with, including anything stored in the lab that a worker could accidentally hit or spill. If a worker is unlikely to encounter any hazardous materials or equipment, then checking in with someone upon arrival or departure should be sufficient. If a worker is working with hazardous chemicals or equipment, then the contact interval should be based on the likelihood of serious health consequences should the worker be injured while working alone.

In many situations the most practical approach may be to make contact at the beginning and/or end of a work shift. The nature of the hazard associated with the worker's work, as reflected in the employer's hazard assessment, should help to assess the level of risk that the worker is exposed to and set the appropriate contact interval.

Methods of maintaining contact to confirm worker well-being

In working alone situations, employers are required to provide affected workers with an effective communication system that allows a worker to call for assistance if there is an emergency or the worker is injured or ill. This same communication system provides a means by which the employer can contact the worker to confirm his or her well-being. Portable two-way radios and telephones are obvious methods of communication.

Employers may also use other effective means of electronic communication. An acceptable system is one that allows the worker to send an "OK" signal at predetermined intervals and which activates procedures to contact the worker or initiate emergency response if the worker does not send a signal at a predetermined interval or if a signal for assistance is received. A discussion of systems currently available in the marketplace, suitable for urban/rural and remote locations follows. Additional systems not described here may also be acceptable.

Means of electronic communication — urban/rural settings

The following electronic communication systems serve as examples of approaches currently available to employers and workers.

- *Call-in systems* — these systems are available from security service providers and only require access to a phone. Workers call into the system at scheduled intervals during their shift and enter a code to confirm their safety. In the event that a worker fails to phone in by his or her scheduled interval, the service provider follows a predetermined protocol to make contact with the worker. If the worker cannot be contacted, emergency assistance is dispatched.
- *Externally monitored panic alarm devices* — numerous security service providers offer panic alarm devices for use in their service area which workers can carry with them, eliminating the need for access to a phone. As in the case with call-in systems, panic alarm devices can be programmed to require a worker to confirm his or her safety at scheduled intervals.

Some devices also offer a “person down” feature which notifies the security provider when a worker does not move for a given period of time, as well as a panic button which notifies the security provider of an emergency. In the event that the “person down” or panic alarm feature is activated, or a worker fails to confirm his or her safety at a scheduled interval, the service provider attempts to contact the worker before emergency assistance is dispatched. These devices are designed to be carried on the worker at all times and can be worn around the worker’s neck or on his or her belt. It is the employer’s responsibility to ensure that the workers consistently wear the device when assigned to work alone.

- *Internally monitored panic alarm devices* — panic alarm devices can also be purchased with a monitoring station that is operated by the employer, rather than an external security service provider. The employer’s monitoring station can be linked to a number of different panic alarm devices and will emit an audible signal in the event that a worker fails to confirm his or her safety or the “person down” or panic button features are activated.

Means of electronic communication — remote locations

Examples of work activities in remote areas include range riding, field biology work, timber crushing, surveying, fire watch, mineral exploration, seismic blasting and guide work. Working alone in remote areas can present particular risks given that the work is typically done outdoors and often in difficult terrain or in otherwise relatively inaccessible areas.

Such areas also present particular challenges to providing a means of making regular contact with workers. Land-based telephone lines and security services are typically unavailable, and cell phone coverage may be limited or non-existent. However, examples of electronic communication systems that may be of use in such locations include the following.

- *Wireless satellite hand-held alerting and tracking devices* — several systems are available and provide capabilities such as alerts, simple messaging and position reporting through the use of GPS (Global Positioning System) technology. Systems are available that can provide coverage in most outdoor situations. Because of potential operational limitations based on the terrain in which the systems will be used, any system being considered for use should be tested for reliability in the type of setting that it will eventually be used.
- *Satellite phones* — these can also be effective in remote areas and offer the advantage of permitting extended two-way voice communication. Satellite phones should be evaluated for reliability in the areas they are intended to be used.
- *Radio transmitters* —in some circumstances i.e. where there is a relatively permanent base worksite with power generation capability, it may be feasible to use a local radio transmitter that provides surface-to-surface two-way radio contact. In some areas repeaters can be accessed for a wider coverage area.

Hazard assessments at intervals

In addition to conducting a hazard assessment, the employer must conduct further hazard assessments at intervals of time appropriate to the conditions and circumstances of the worker's work.

EXPLANATION

A new hazard assessment needs to be performed when the circumstances of the working alone situation change. For example, exchanging one worker for another may not substantially change a working alone situation but extending the worker's hours of work from 6 p.m. to midnight may have a substantial effect on their personal safety and the results of the existing hazard assessment. The change in working hours alters the working alone situation and triggers the need for a new hazard assessment.

Even having a new business opening next door may trigger the need for a new hazard assessment. If that new business involves late night entertainment for example, then the potential impact of its operation on the existing employer's workers who work late and alone needs to be considered.

Elimination and control of hazards

The employer must take all reasonable steps

- (1) to eliminate any hazard identified during a hazard assessment, or
- (2) to control any hazard identified during a hazard assessment if it is not reasonably practicable to eliminate the hazard.

EXPLANATION

Employers must first try to eliminate the hazard(s) identified by the hazard assessment. Then and only then should the employer try to reduce or control the hazard(s). Elimination ensures the hazard no longer exists, regardless of which worker is working and their experience, skills and abilities.

Reduction or control of hazards may only be a temporary measure and may be dependent on specific workers being able to make the control function as intended. For example, securing of an access door that depends on a worker using a significant amount of force to close it and a special way of twisting the lock to get it to latch is unacceptable. All of the employer's workers should be able to operate the door and lock, regardless of their strength or abilities. The hazard can easily be eliminated through repair or replacement of the door and lock. Subsection (2) above uses the phrase "reasonably practicable" to reflect the fact that many hazards, by their very nature, cannot be eliminated e.g. toxic gases, chemicals, confined spaces, heights, etc. These types of hazards can and should be controlled.

Participation of affected workers

The employer must have the workers affected by a hazard assessment participate

- (1) in conducting the hazard assessment, and
- (2) in the elimination or control of any hazard identified during the hazard assessment.

EXPLANATION

The intent of this requirement is to involve workers in activities that directly affect them and to which they can provide meaningful advice and guidance. Workers can provide information and practical solutions that might otherwise be missed by an employer or his designate who does not routinely work under the circumstances experienced by the workers.

In some cases, it may not be practical to involve all of the affected workers who work alone. In such circumstances, employers should try to involve a sample of workers, perhaps selected on the basis of experience, gender, age or other appropriate criteria, that represents the total affected workforce.

Assessment communicated to affected workers

A hazard assessment must be in writing and be communicated to all workers affected by the assessment.

EXPLANATION

The hazard assessment must be in writing. A written assessment provides evidence that hazards were identified and considered.


Appendix 1 of the *Working Alone Safely — A Guide for Employers and Employees*, contains sample hazard assessment checklists (several examples are included in Figure 1). In some cases, depending on the type of business and the hazards present, completion of the appropriate checklist may be all that is required. In other cases, the checklist is a starting point for a more comprehensive assessment.


The assessment should indicate the work site(s) to which it applies and must indicate the date(s) on which it was performed. Upon completion, the results of the hazard assessment must be communicated to all workers affected by its results. This communication must include a description of how the employer intends to eliminate or control the various hazards identified.

Workers who work alone must also be trained in any procedures or practices developed to protect them from hazards identified in the assessment.

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