



Health and Safety Guidance

GUIDANCE/31/OHLW/12

Guidance on Out of Hours Activities and Lone Working

Section 2: Lone Working

It is inevitable that at certain times staff, students and visitors will find themselves working alone. This may be because of:

- the time of day, e.g. early in the morning, at lunch time or late at night;
- the time of the year, e.g. during holiday periods;
- the location of the work, e.g. an individual office, a remote building or location or off campus;
- the nature of the work, e.g. maintenance, horticulture or security.

Apart from some specific work activities there are no regulations prohibiting lone working. Lone working is required to be considered in the overall risk assessment for a particular activity. If a significant risk is identified then suitable control measures should be put in place to reduce the risks to an acceptable level. If the risk is significantly high the control measure may be to prohibit lone working.

Definition of Lone Working

Lone working is an activity where a person has neither visual nor audible communication with someone who can summon up assistance in the case of an accident, emergency or illness.

Activities where Lone Working is prohibited by law and/or University policy include:

- working on live electrical equipment;
- diving;
- working with pyrophoric and cryogenic substances;

- entry to a confined space.

Categories of Lone Working

Lone working can be divided up into two categories:

- low risk lone working;
- higher risk lone working.

'Low risk' Lone Working

Examples of low risk lone working include:

- administrative tasks;
- office, library, lecture theatre and study room based academic work;
- travelling around the campus;
- basic cleaning tasks;
- some basic maintenance work;
- some manual horticultural work;
- some basic assembly work in workshops;
- some basic laboratory work.

'Higher risk' Lone Working

Examples of 'higher risk' lone working include:

- laboratory work;
- using machinery and electrical equipment;
- using hazardous substances;
- carrying out hazardous procedures;
- travelling and working off campus in this country and abroad.

'Low risk' and 'higher risk' lone working:

Lone workers should not be exposed to significantly higher risks than those who work together. When carrying out a risk assessment the following points should be considered, assessed and control measures put in place:

- **Are there safe means of egress?** e.g. if working out of hours will suitable exits be available. **Is there a risk to personal security?**
- **Is the person medically fit to work alone?**
Anyone can be taken ill whether alone at work or elsewhere. The consequences have to be considered, e.g. how long will it be before they are found if they collapse, what risks are there if they cannot control a piece of equipment etc.
- **How competent is the lone worker?**
The risk associated with an experienced member of staff working alone may be considered acceptable but the risk associated with a student doing the same work may be unacceptable.
- **What extra training will lone workers need?**
e.g. in unusual or emergency situations when they have to make decisions on their own.
- **What are the supervision arrangements?**
Although there will be no direct supervision, arrangements will have to be made to know what the person is doing and when.

Additional points to consider for 'higher risk' lone working

- **Does the workplace present a special risk to the lone worker?**
e.g. confined spaces, laboratories, remote areas, some urban areas etc.
- **Does the work activity present a special risk to the lone worker?**
e.g. working with machinery, hazardous substances, visiting people in their own homes etc.
- **Can one person handle equipment safely?** e.g. items may be heavy, awkward.
- **Can one person use or operate the equipment safely?**
e.g. ladders may need footing, plant may need more than one person to operate it.

Specific activities where two or more people should be present

(This is not a definitive list) Activity	Examples
Use of machinery	Saws, drills, lathes, slicers
Use of hazardous substances	Substances that can cause significant injury, fire etc
Where a permit to work is required	Confined spaces, high voltage electrical systems
Work where there is a high risk to personal security	Transporting large sums of money, working in certain urban or remote areas