Lone Working In The Convenience Sector

A Guide for Usdaw Reps and Members

USDAW

USDAW'S CAMPAIGN TO PROTECT WORKERS FROM VIOLENCE AND ABUSE
Freedom From Fear

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Introduction

Lone working is where an employee spends all, or a large proportion, of their work day working by themselves without direct or close supervision and support.

Lone working does not just include those that are completely isolated from other colleagues. Shopworkers may find themselves working in a store whilst a duty manager is working in another area of the store. Whilst the shopworker is not completely alone, their immediate working environment is isolated and therefore they would be classed as a lone worker.

The prevalence of lone working in the convenience sector has seen a significant increase in recent years. The introduction of self-service checkouts and other new technologies, in combination with increased competition in the sector, has resulted in the number of staffing hours being dramatically reduced. Consequently, more convenience sector staff are working in isolation, which can have an impact not only on their health and safety in the workplace but also on their mental wellbeing.

Usdaw knows the impact lone working can have on members, and understands their concerns. We are aware that lone working makes members feel vulnerable at times, and employers should put measures in place to alleviate such anxieties.

Feeling unsafe in the workplace is not something any employee should have to tolerate. The Union will continue to campaign to make work safer for all retail workers.

Many employers that operate in the convenience sector are aware of the risks associated with lone working. However, all too often, members' health and safety is jeopardised by companies not adopting a robust lone working policy and reviewing it on a regular basis to ensure all risks are identified and minimised.

Usdaw does not encourage lone working; however, we recognise that on occasions, it may be unavoidable. This guide is designed to help Usdaw members understand the following:

- The relevant legislation applicable to lone working.
- The risks associated with lone working.
- The role of the employer in mitigating the risk to lone workers.
- How Usdaw can support, advise and represent members who have concerns on lone working practices in the workplace.

The Legal Position

Lone working is not illegal per se; however, employers have a legal duty to ensure the health and safety of their employees whilst at work.

Under the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, employers have a duty to assess all risks to health and safety, including those risks associated with lone working.

Under these regulations, employers must also provide facilities for first aid and welfare provisions.

Like most other workers, lone workers are entitled to rest periods under The Working Time Regulations 1998. Unfortunately, this is one aspect of lone working that is sometimes overlooked by employers.

Other regulations that are of particular importance when considering lone working arrangements include the following:

- The Health and Safety (First Aid) Regulations 1981 – employers are required to provide provisions for first aid.
- The Workplace (Health and Safety Welfare) Regulations 1992 – covering issues such as access to toilets, water and other welfare issues.
- The Reporting of Injuries, Disease and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 – employers are required to report to the enforcing authority an accident at work to any employee that results in death, major injury or incapacity for normal work for seven or more days.

Employees also have responsibilities regarding personal safety. The law states that they should:

- Take reasonable care of their own safety and that of others.
- Follow any personal safety practices outlined by the employer.
- Report any shortcomings or failings in safety practice.
- Report any incidents of violence or aggression and near misses (ie when a situation could have escalated into actual violence).

Some employers believe that lone workers are covered by the same policies that apply to other employees. There is a perception that the only threat to lone workers is the risk of violent attack; however, there are other factors that need to be considered.

A robust risk assessment should be conducted by your employer; this will help to highlight all the risks associated with lone working in your store.

The Hazards of Lone Working

The hazards of lone working are not always obvious to employers. There is a widely held belief that the only risk of lone working is being attacked.

Lone working, however, creates many health and safety hazards for members. The following risks are associated with lone working:

- Accidents or emergencies arising in the workplace, and the lack of immediate access to first aid equipment or assistance.
- Fire.
- Inadequate provision of rest, hygiene, and welfare facilities.
- Violence and abuse from customers.
- Theft.
- Intruders.
- Manual handling incidents.
- Sudden illness.

Some of these risks can be exacerbated due to the trading hours within the convenience sector.

Whilst violence and abuse are clearly risks of lone working, there is little evidence to suggest that lone working increases the physical risk of being assaulted or abused. However, being alone and isolated leaves workers feeling more vulnerable and creates additional stress.

So a big problem is that workers who feel isolated are more at risk of developing health problems. Having a colleague on the shop floor with them may not deter or prevent abuse and violence, but it does mean they feel more comfortable having someone there to support them when needed.

To fully understand the extent of the risks involved, your employer must look at the people involved, the environment in which you are working and the tasks you are required to do. This should be done during the risk assessment.

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The Risk Assessment

The development of a detailed risk assessment is the first step to understanding the risks associated with lone working and how best to mitigate these risks.

A risk assessment is a process of identifying what hazards exist in a workplace or a specific task, and how likely these hazards are to cause harm to employees and others.

It is recognised that the risks will vary from store to store, depending on location, the layout of the store, the customer base and many other factors.

This means that risk assessments must be developed on a store-by-store basis, taking account of local conditions. Should you have any concerns in relation to the risk assessment in your workplace, please contact your Usdaw rep or your local Usdaw office on **0800 030 80 30**.

One of the most important aspects of a risk assessment is accurately identifying the potential hazards in your workplace.

As a general guide, the following points should be considered during the risk assessment for lone working in a convenience store; however, this list is not definitive and there may be other risks to consider depending on your workplace and the tasks involved.

1. Does the work involve lifting or handling of loads which are too heavy or awkward for one person to lift?
2. Does the work involve handling cash?
3. Does the work involve contact with the public where there is the potential for an increased risk of violence?
4. Are there clear processes in place for dealing with an emergency situation, eg fire, medical emergency, theft or violent attack?
5. Are any lone workers medically fit to be able to work alone?
6. Is there clear guidance on what work can and cannot be performed when working alone?
7. Have members of staff received adequate training on the processes and procedures that are in place to reduce the identified risks?
8. Is there a system in place for periodic supervision?
9. Do colleagues have access to toilet and washing facilities?
10. Have systems been implemented to allow access to rest breaks?

Where a risk assessment shows it is not possible to safely mitigate a certain risk to a lone worker, employers should consider increasing staffing levels to reduce the risk.

Your employer should review any risk assessment annually or when there is a change to working practices. This will ensure that any new risks are identified and appropriate procedures established to minimise the risk to staff as much as is reasonably practicable.

It is important that the risk assessment recognises and takes the appropriate measures to ensure that those working in isolation get the necessary rest breaks. In some circumstances, it may be necessary to shut the store to allow workers to take their breaks.

A risk assessment is a useful tool for helping to assess and identify ways to minimise these risks; however, it is also important that colleagues are adequately trained in the company's policies and procedures.

Training

For lone workers, training is particularly important as there is limited supervision and support during an emergency.

Extra training for colleagues who work alone should be considered. It is important that members feel safe in their working environment, and additional training may help with this. It is also important that any training includes details of the employer's emergency procedures and who to report incidents to following an emergency. Workers need to fully understand these procedures as this will help to reduce panic in such situations.

Members should be clear on what can and what cannot be done when working alone. Only fully trained members of staff are eligible to work alone. Where staff are not fully trained, support should be provided until the colleague is confident in the company's lone working policy and procedures.

As a minimum a robust company training schedule should include training on the following:

- Lone working procedures.
- Fire and emergency procedures.
- Safe and correct use of the work equipment being used.
- Accident and first aid procedures.
- First aid training.

- Dealing with violent or aggressive people and incidents.
- Safe practice in the unloading of deliveries.
- Reporting procedures.

One measure retailers are employing in an attempt to protect lone workers is the installation of a remote alarm system. Whilst this is effective in helping protect those working in isolation, it is important that workers receive training on how to operate the technology so that they are not left vulnerable.

Where members believe training is inadequate, this should be raised with their line manager in the first instance.

Should members continue to have concerns around the level of training they have received, they should contact their in-store Usdaw rep, or alternatively, contact their local Usdaw office on **0800 030 80 30.**

Supervision and Reporting

Lone working, by its very nature, will mean that members have very limited supervision; therefore, employers have a duty to ensure standards of health and safety are adhered to by putting other systems in place.

In the convenience sector, it is unlikely that colleagues would be working in the store in complete isolation. The larger employers would have a duty manager who would be responsible for the store, yet, despite this, members may find themselves working alone for large parts of their shift.

It would be considered unacceptable for certain members of staff to work alone – these could include the following:

- New or expectant mothers.
- Disabled colleagues.
- Those who are ill or have been injured.
- Those under the age of 18.

The risk assessment should identify the level of supervision required and the means of providing it.

Employers are increasingly adopting remote monitoring systems whereby both visual and audio surveillance are used to monitor lone workers. Typically, monitoring occurs though a third-party surveillance centre. While there is a cost associated with this type of surveillance, it has numerous benefits. Firstly, it removes the need for direct supervision, yet at the same time provides continuous supervision. Secondly, the additional surveillance provided means every incident is recorded. Finally, all incidents of abuse and violence are automatically reported to the police via the surveillance centre, thereby taking the onus of reporting the incident away from the worker at a time when they would be feeling anxious and stressed.

For workplaces without remote monitoring, following an emergency situation, staff need to know how to report an incident and who to report it to.

Staff should be encouraged to report all incidents including incidents of verbal abuse, intimidation or harassment. The record of staff reports is an essential piece of information for the development of the local risk assessment. Should you need support on reporting an incident at work, please speak to your in-store Usdaw rep or contact your local Usdaw office.

The support of the store manager and the Usdaw rep(s) is essential to get this message across.

Staff must be trained in the use of the reporting system – particularly at induction. Staff must have confidence that reports will be treated with sensitivity and taken seriously.

Where reports reveal a serious or persistent problem, prompt action must be taken to provide the staff involved with suitable support.

Support Following an Incident

Following the guidance in this booklet will help to reduce the risk associated with lone working as far as is reasonably practicable; however, there may be incidents which occur that have a significant effect on members' physical and mental wellbeing.

Usdaw provides support and advice for members affected by such incidents at work.

After an accident at work or violent attack, members may require assistance with:

- Reporting the incident to management or the police.
- Arranging time off work.

Should Usdaw members require advice and support following an incident at work, please contact your in-store Usdaw rep or local Usdaw Office on **0800 030 80 30.**

In the immediate aftermath of an incident, your employer should provide reasonable support to staff. Staff should be given the opportunity to talk about the incident in a supportive manner.

Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) are employer-paid schemes that allow employees to contact an independent adviser (by telephone and/or by making an appointment for a meeting) on a confidential basis to discuss any issue that is troubling them, causing stress or interfering with effective job performance or attendance.

Many of the major retailers now have an EAP provider. Your in-store Usdaw rep or your employer's HR Department will be able to provide further details on your company's EAP.

More Information

Usdaw Nationwide

Wherever you work, an Usdaw rep or official (Area Organiser) is not far away. For further information or assistance, contact your Usdaw rep or local Usdaw office. Alternatively, you can phone our Freephone Helpline **0800 030 80 30** to connect you to your regional office, or visit our website: **www.usdaw.org.uk**
You can also write to the Union's Head Office. Just write **FREEPOST USDAW** on the envelope and put it in the post.

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