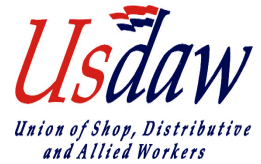




Guide To Lone Working – Working alone in Safety



There can be many situations where workers are expected to work on their own without close supervision or without anyone working alongside them to keep an eye on them. Examples of concern to Usdaw members include mobile workers such as insurance agents, funeral undertakers and delivery drivers; staff in petrol stations and members in a variety of industrial settings. An obvious concern for members faced with this situation is that no one else is around if they were to have an accident or be taken ill. These concerns are particularly important where there is a risk of violent attack or work with dangerous machinery.

There is no general prohibition on lone working even where there are foreseeable risks. However employers do have a duty to ensure the health and safety and welfare of any employee so far as is reasonably practicable. Where workers are required to work on their own, either in the workplace or outside, the employer should take account of the extra risks involved and make sure that they have systems in place to deal with these extra risks.

The Legal Position

There are a few specified circumstances where particular regulations require that either a second person is present or there is close supervision. Examples include:-

- Work in confined spaces
- Supervision of vehicles carrying explosives
- Work on ladders that cannot be securely footed
- Certain types of construction work
- Work on live electrical equipment
- Supervision of untrained people, particularly young people, operating certain types of dangerous machinery

However, for most situations that Usdaw members encounter there will be no specific regulation. This does not mean that there is no protection. General legal duties still require employers to protect against the risks.

The general duties in Section 2 of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 require employers to provide healthy and safe working conditions for all employees including those who work alone. In addition the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992 require employers to assess all significant risks including those which may affect lone workers.

Assessing and controlling the risks of lone working:

The exact solutions required in any particular situation will vary depending on the level of risk. For example an office worker staying on late to catch up on paperwork is less likely to need specific help than someone operating a potentially dangerous machine or someone collecting money from peoples' houses.

The key to the problem is to establish safe-working arrangements that are appropriate for the risks involved. The following check list will help identify some of the issues, which need to be considered.

Risks of the job

- Does the work involve special risks to a solitary worker examples include dangerous machinery (fork lifts etc), chemical fumes, fire hazards etc?
- Is there safe access and exit for one person e.g. if working inside a cold store is there a trapped person alarm or means of escape if the door is shut?
- If temporary access equipment such as ladders or trestles are used can they be used safely by one person, what would happen if they fall?
- Can all plant, equipment and substances used, be safely worked with by one person? In particular can one person safely operate essential controls including emergency stop controls for equipment used?
- Does the work involve lifting or handling of loads which are too heavy or awkward for one person to handle on their own?
- Does the work involve handling cash/contact with the public where there is an increased risk of violence?
- Are there particular problems with the workplace, which could lead to an accident e.g. slippery floors, poor lighting etc?
- Are the physical and mental demands on the lone worker within reasonable limits e.g. not being expected to run too many lines at once or monitor too many processes?

Emergency situations

- Do lone workers have access to first aid facilities or do mobile workers need to carry an emergency first aid kit?
- Can solitary workers hear evacuation alarm if sounded? Are particular procedures needed for them to shut down and escape to place of safety? Are there arrangements to make sure that they have been evacuated safely if there is an emergency?
- Is there a check to make sure that lone workers are fit to work on their own? Do they have any medical conditions (epilepsy etc), which could increase risks?
- What would happen if a lone worker was to fall ill or collapse while at work?
- Where outside contractors or maintenance/repair staff are doing non-routine repair work on their own, are extra precautions taken to make sure that equipment is isolated and maintenance staff and other workers are not at extra risk?

Training

- Have clear procedures been established to identify what work can and cannot be done when working alone? Are lone workers advised about when to stop work and seek assistance?
- Do these procedures extend to foreseeable circumstances e.g. machinery, breakdown, blockage of a line?
- Have the lone workers been given special training to make sure that they understand what is and is not expected of them when working alone?
- Does the training explain how to contact assistance when they need it?
- Is there a system to monitor that the training has been effective and the worker knows how to respond to normal work and to foreseeable emergencies
- If the lone worker is provided with specialist equipment such as an emergency alarm are they given training in using it?

Supervision

- Is there a system for periodic supervision of lone workers e.g. visual inspection by supervisor at regular intervals, regular contact by telephone or radio, automatic warning device if specific signals are not received periodically from the lone worker?
- If appropriate is the lone worker provided with an alarm, which can be used to summon help?
- If appropriate is the lone worker provided with an alarm which activates automatically in the absence of activity?
- Are staff that are expected to respond to alarms given training and monitoring to make sure that they can and do respond promptly?
- For staff who work away from the workplace is there an itinerary for their expected route, is there a system for them to call in at regular intervals or at least at the end of their shift, are they provided with radios, mobile phones or other systems so they can contact their base in an emergency?

Welfare

- Do lone workers have access to toilet and washing facilities?
- Are there arrangements to make sure that they have access to rest breaks/toilet breaks when they need them?
- Do they have access to the same kind of canteen facilities or meal breaks as other workers?

The checklist above is not an exhaustive list of all the questions, which may need to be considered. It should also be obvious that some questions will only apply to particular circumstances where there is a particular risk.

Essentially however the basic position should be that workers who are required to work on their own are no more at risk than their colleagues and have access to the same facilities as their colleagues for rest breaks, meals etc.

These issues can be particularly difficult where lone workers work away from the workplace, but it does not mean that the employer can ignore them. They still have a duty to do whatever is reasonably practicable to look after the health, safety and welfare of their employees.

Even within the workplace, if lone working is being introduced, the employer needs to give extra thought to the particular problems which may arise and make sure that they are addressed. Once they have devised safe working procedures for solitary workers they must also, by law, continue to monitor and review to make sure that the procedures are being followed and are effective.

Further Information:

“Working Alone in Safety – Controlling the Risks of Solitary Work”

IND (G) 73(L) HSE BOOKS 1992 - <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg73.pdf>

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