Policy

Title: LONE WORKING

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Summary
Risk assessments must be carried out to devise safe working arrangements for all lone workers. Special attention is needed when assessing lone working because the risks inherent in such work are exacerbated by the lack of normal channels of support. Training is particularly important as there will be no direct supervision of work. Monitoring procedures need to be established to ensure that safe working arrangements are being followed by lone workers.

A summary flowchart of actions is also included.

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1. Introduction
Lone work is work which is specifically intended to be carried out unaccompanied or without immediate access to another person for assistance. It is not the same as the chance occurrence of finding oneself on one’s own; for example, in every workplace there is somebody who arrives first and somebody who leaves last, or an individual may need to go to an unoccupied storeroom. An individual who has either visual or audible communication with another person would not be considered as working alone.

Lone working can occur:
- during normal working hours at a remote location either within the normal workplace or off site,
- when working outside normal working hours.

Departmental procedures need to take account of the possibility of both situations arising and should define what constitutes ‘normal working hours’. Flexible working hours are a valuable and necessary component of the research environment. However, the argument for working outside normal working hours should not be used to justify poor planning and undisciplined working arrangements. Wherever reasonably practicable work
should be contained within recognised working hours. This guidance document does not deal specifically with field work, advice on which can be found in a number of the publications listed in the 'Further Reading' section at the end of this document.

Working alone is specifically prohibited by law in a small number of well-established dangerous situations such as working with live electrical conductors and entry into confined spaces. However, there is no general legal prohibition on working alone and the University's responsibility to ensure the health and safety of staff, students and others affected by its activities applies to anyone working alone. This responsibility cannot be transferred to those who work unaccompanied.

The University Safety Policy requires health and safety to be proactively managed by carrying out assessments of activities and adopting safe working arrangements to control risks. The same principles apply when considering those who might be required to work alone. However, special attention is needed when assessing lone working because the risks inherent in such work are exacerbated by the lack of normal channels of support. Working alone by definition means there will be no direct supervision. The training provided to those working alone, and the level of competence that they will need to demonstrate before being allowed to do so are therefore especially important.

The process of conducting a risk assessment for lone working is no different to that followed when assessing more conventional activities. The important point is to carry out the assessment systematically in the following way:

- Identify the hazards associated with the work and carrying it out unaccompanied
- Assess the risks associated with the work and decide on the safe working arrangements to control these risks
- Record the findings of the assessment
- Implement the safe working arrangements
- Monitor and review the safe working arrangements

The remainder of this guidance document discusses these steps in more detail.

2. **Identify the hazards associated with the work and carrying it out unaccompanied**

The hazards associated with a task are likely to be the same whether it is carried out alone or accompanied although the possibility of violence towards the lone worker, particularly if cash handling is involved, should always be considered. Those carrying out assessments should therefore use the techniques they normally employ for hazard identification when considering the hazards of lone working.

3. **Assess the risks associated with the work and decide on the safe working arrangements to control these risks**

Although working alone may not introduce any new hazards, the risks may differ significantly when a task is carried out unaccompanied.

Assessments may be conducted:

- generically, for example to consider all office based work within a department conducted outside normal hours OR
- individually, for example to consider a specific request from an individual who wishes to conduct an experiment in the field.

Should an assessment already exist for a task which is routinely conducted with others present, this assessment must be reviewed before permitting the same task to be conducted unaccompanied.

The reasons for assessing the risks of working alone are to establish:

- Whether the work can be done safely by an unaccompanied person;
- The arrangements necessary to ensure that an individual working alone is not exposed to greater risks than employees who work together.
Some of the issues which need special attention when evaluating the risks and planning safe working arrangements are as follows:

4. **Can the risks be adequately controlled by one person?**
   Lone workers should not be at more risk than other employees and extra risk control measures may be required. Precautions should take account of normal work and foreseeable emergencies such as fire, equipment failure, illness and accidents. Those with responsibility for carrying out risk assessments should ask questions such as:

   **Does the workplace present a special risk to the lone worker?**
   **Is there a safe way in and out for one person?**

   If working outside of normal hours, checks should be made to ensure that all exits from a building can be used as means of escape in case of an emergency. Lone workers should not be expected to leave their workplace by way of dark corridors or stairways. Special arrangements may need to be made to ensure that lights are kept on in buildings when people are working outside normal hours.

   **Can any necessary temporary access equipment, such as portable ladders or trestles, be safely handled by one person?**
   **Are the welfare facilities adequate?**

   For example, there should be adequate heating and access to drinking water and toilets outside normal hours.

   **Can all the plant, substances and goods involved in the work be safely handled by one person?**

   Consider whether the work involves lifting objects too large or heavy for one person or whether more than one person is needed to operate essential controls for the safe running of equipment. It is generally unacceptable for people to work alone with powered workshop machinery because of the possibility of contact with dangerous parts. Particularly careful consideration needs to be given to working alone with laboratory chemicals as the action in the event of an emergency may require the immediate assistance of a second person, for example if a chemical is splashed in the eye. In no circumstances should lone workers carry out techniques that are new or unfamiliar to them.

   **Is there a risk of violence?**
   **Are women or young workers especially at risk if they work alone?**

5. **What training is required to ensure competency in safety matters?**

   Training is particularly important where there is limited supervision to control, guide and help in situations of uncertainty. Training may be critical to avoid panic reactions in unusual situations. Lone workers need to be sufficiently experienced and to understand the risks and precautions fully. Departments should establish clear procedures and set the limits to what can and cannot be done while working alone. There should be agreement as to the circumstances in which it is correct to stop work and seek advice. It is a management responsibility to ensure employees are competent to carry out the work unaccompanied and competent to deal with circumstances which are new, unusual or beyond the scope of training, for example when to stop work and seek advice from a supervisor. Part of the training given to lone workers must be to impress upon them the need to report any incidents which could affect their safety as such information is essential to the review of the adequacy of the working arrangements. Where training is required as part of the control strategy, this should be recorded as part of the risk assessment. An indication of the frequency with which refresher training should be given should also be noted.

6. **How will the person be supervised?**

   Although lone workers cannot be subject to constant supervision, there is still a duty on the University to provide appropriate control of the work. Supervision complements the information, instruction and training
provided and helps to ensure that staff and students understand the risks associated with their work and that necessary safety precautions are carried out. It also provides guidance in situations of uncertainty.

The extent of supervision required depends on the risks involved and the ability of the lone worker to identify and handle health and safety issues. Those new to a task, undergoing training, doing a task which presents special risks, or dealing with new situations may need to be accompanied at first. The level of supervision required is a management decision which should be based on the findings of risk assessment. The higher the risk, the greater the level of supervision required. It should not be left to individuals to decide whether they require assistance.

 Procedures will need to be put in place to monitor lone workers to see they remain safe. These may include:

- Supervisors periodically visiting and observing people working alone.
- Supervisors maintaining contact with lone workers using either a telephone or radio. Contact arrangements should be documented as part of the risk assessment. Contact arrangements should ideally be between the supervisor and the lone worker, or with another member of the department. If this is not possible and the contact is by arrangement with a personal friend or family member, it is essential that the latter be briefed on the procedure to follow if contact cannot be made.
- The use of signing-in systems. These are only useful for monitoring the safety of lone workers if there is a procedure for actively checking the safety of those who have recorded their presence in a building. For example, signing-in systems can be used as part of a monitoring system in buildings which are regularly patrolled by Security staff outside normal hours. However, in such situations there must be an agreement with the Security staff about their monitoring role; it cannot be assumed that they will carry out this function. Signing-in books can also be useful in the event of a fire or similar emergency as they provide an indication of where people are working in a building.
- Automatic warning devices which operate if specific signals are not received periodically from the lone worker.
- Other devices designed to raise the alarm in the event of an emergency and which are operated manually or automatically by the absence of activity.
- Checks that a lone worker has returned to their base or home on completion of a task.

Contingency plans specifying the action to be taken should a pre-arranged contact not be made, or an alarm device operate, should be included as part of the risk assessment.

**Is the person medically fit and suitable to work alone?**

Medical fitness should not be a significant factor when considering typical office activities conducted outside normal hours. However, in other situations it may be necessary to check that lone workers have no medical conditions which make them unsuitable for working alone. Both routine work and foreseeable emergencies may impose additional physical and mental burdens on the individual. When medical advice is necessary, the Occupational Health Service should be consulted.

**7. What happens if a person becomes ill, has an accident, or there is an emergency?**

The assessment should take account of the fact that a lone worker is more vulnerable when the unexpected happens. Risk assessment should identify foreseeable events and emergency procedures should be established and employees trained in them. Lone workers should be capable of responding correctly to emergencies and should have access to adequate first-aid facilities. Occasionally risk assessment may indicate that lone workers need training in first aid.

**8. Record the findings of the assessment**

A generic assessment is most usefully recorded as part of the arrangements in the Departmental Safety Policy. Specific assessments need to be recorded individually. The aim should be to record the findings in a way that provides a useful working document for supervisors and staff. They will then understand the action they need to take and will find it easier to decide when the assessment needs to be reviewed or where further preventative measures are necessary.

All records of risk assessments should include information on:

- the hazards identified
• the safe working arrangements that are necessary, including physical controls, training, supervision and monitoring/contact arrangements
• the contingency plan should the monitoring/contact arrangements fail to operate
• the limits to what can and cannot be done while working alone
• in the case of work outside normal hours, the definition of the term 'normal hours'
• in the case of individual assessments, the date of the assessment and the latest date for review.

9. **Implement the safe working arrangements**
The risk assessment will have identified the physical controls, systems of work, training and supervision necessary to ensure the safety of the lone worker. If not all of these arrangements are already in place, they will need to be implemented in a structured way before the lone working can be permitted to commence. An Action Plan with target dates for completion of the outstanding work is often the most appropriate way of ensuring that the necessary arrangements are put into place effectively.

10. **Monitor and review the safe working arrangements**
Once the safe working arrangements have been implemented they need to be regularly monitored and reviewed to ensure they remain effective. Monitoring the way in which people are working is a routine day-to-day management function. More formal monitoring of the arrangements should also take place during departmental safety inspections. Lone workers must be actively encouraged to report any incidents which could affect their safety to allow a proper review of the adequacy of the working arrangements.

All risk assessments should be reviewed at regular intervals, at least once a year, or whenever there is any reason to believe that the existing assessment is no longer valid. A record should be made of every review carried out.

11. **Further reading**
Further guidance on lone working can be found in the following references which are available on loan from the Safety Office.

• Guidance Note; Safety in Fieldwork, the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) 1997.
• Guidance on Working Alone, Medical Research Council (MRC) 1997. Amongst more general guidance, this contains specific guidance for projects involving working alone in the community.

12. **Summary Flowchart for Ensuring the Safety of Lone Workers**