



Lone Working Guidance

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Introduction

Aston University acknowledges its duty to make sufficient provision for the management of health and safety in the workplace. This guidance document summarises the University's requirements for the management of lone working.

For each of the University's Schools and Support Departments, the primary operational responsibility for discharging health and safety matters lies with the Executive Dean/Head of Department. In addition, a key role in implementing this guidance document lies with line managers who must ensure all of the following requirements are addressed and implemented.

Duties of implementation for both these areas may be delegated to individuals in a manner that accurately reflects their existing levels of competence and responsibility. These individuals must plan, organise, control, monitor and review their health and safety management systems. However, in certain circumstances, the advice and assistance of specialist advisors may be required.

Definition of Lone Workers[†]

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) define lone workers as those who work by themselves without close or direct supervision.

Within the University, this definition is wide-ranging and may be applicable to a number of individuals, either as a regular or infrequent part of their role. As a guide, the following persons may be classed as lone workers:

- Persons working alone within a laboratory or workshop;
- Persons working alone within a remote office, reception or classroom;
- People working outside of normal operating hours including work at weekends;
- Mobile workers who work away from the University on their own e.g. Researchers;
- Home workers;
- Manual staff such as Electricians, Plant Operators, Porters and Gardeners;
- Security staff.

Rather than undertaking the onerous task of identifying all circumstances in which individuals could become lone workers, Schools and Departments should assume that lone working may take place at some point in all of their areas and in these instances, should consider the production of a generic lone working risk assessment. A person specific risk assessment will be required if an individual involved in a specific task presents a higher-risk than others (refer to page 6).

[†] For each instance of 'lone worker' within this guidance, read 'those who may work alone'.

Risk Assessment

As required by The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, a suitable and sufficient risk assessment must be carried out to identify the hazards and level of risk that lone workers are exposed to.

Control measures adequate to control the risks should be identified within the risk assessment. Depending on the level of risk identified, the assessor may conclude that lone working is not permitted for a particular task or process.

To assist those persons undertaking the risk assessment, the following table identifies questions which need to be answered and the relevant consideration for each question:

Question	Consideration
Does the workplace present a special risk to a lone worker?	Due to the environment, location, contents, unfamiliarity etc.
Does the activity present a special risk to a lone worker?	Equipment, process, substances, location, time, members of public, handling cash etc.
Is there a safe way in and out for one person?	In the course of normal work and in the event of an emergency etc.
Can the equipment be adequately controlled and handled by one person?	Manual handling, operation of essential/emergency controls etc.
Can all goods, substances and materials be safely handled by one person?	Flammables, toxins, pathogens etc.
Is the working environment appropriate?	Heating, lighting, ventilation etc.
Are the welfare facilities adequate and accessible?	Toilet, washing, drinking water etc.
Does the lone worker have first aid facilities or access to them?	First aid kit, first aider, eye wash station, etc.
Does the lone worker have access to a suitable means of communication, or other means of summoning assistance if required?	Telephone, mobile, radio, inactivity alarm etc.
Is there a risk of violence associated with the work activity or location?	Previous history of verbal threats, violence, interaction with public etc.
Is the lone worker more at risk due to their gender or inexperience?	Maturity, familiarity with procedures, knowledge and experience, particularly young and new workers.
Has the employee received sufficient information, instruction and training to enable the work to be undertaken safely whilst alone?	Is the employee competent? Is the emergency plan appropriate?
Has the employee received specific training in how to respond to foreseeable emergencies that may arise in the course of their work alone?	Fire safety, spills, electrical shut down etc.
Is the worker medically fit to undertake the work alone?	Health checks, health monitoring?
What arrangements are in place to provide adequate supervision?	Periodic visits, use of local security staff, signing in/out, periodic contact arrangements, open diaries, CCTV,

Question	Consideration
	inactivity alarms, "permits to work".
Are there contingency plans in place should an alert of alarm be raised by a lone worker? Are these plans well known and rehearsed?	Would you or your colleagues know what to do, who to contact?
Are clear written procedures established by schools and departments? (Limits set as to what can and cannot be done whilst working alone, when to stop work and seek advice etc.)	What activities should be prohibited?

Existing Control Measures and Further Actions

For each hazard identified, existing controls must be identified. When considering the initial risk rating, an assessment of the effectiveness of existing controls must be made. Where necessary, specify further actions required to reduce the risk.

Consider alternative work methods, engineering controls, training, supervision, and personal protective equipment.

The list of control measures will vary dependent on the individual circumstances, however, the following ways of controlling the risk should be borne in mind:

- Specific information, instruction and training (emergency procedures, out-of-hours procedures, personal safety training);
- Increased communication systems or procedures (regular prearranged contact by mobile phone);
- Increased supervision;
- Increased security (CCTV, secure access, personal alarms);
- Use of safe systems of work ("Permit to Work" to control scope of activities);
- Where lone working activity involves interaction with others, consider meetings on neutral territory;
- Buddy systems;
- Increased lighting at entrances, exits and car parks; and
- Reducing the height of hedges and bushes in car parks and near entrances and exits.

All staff, including those identified as lone workers should be given information, instruction and training to enable them to deal with normal everyday situations but should also understand when and where to seek guidance or assistance from others, such as in an unusual or threatening situation.

Training

The level and extent of training required will depend on the nature of the working activity as well as the knowledge and experience of individuals. Young and new workers will need more training than others.

Give special consideration to the level of competence required for people to work alone in safety. This is normally set at a higher level than that required for those who work with other colleagues.

Managers are advised to contact Staff Development if further information on training is required.

Supervision

The amount of supervision required will depend on the level of risks involved and the ability and experience of the lone worker. A few examples of supervisory measures that may be useful in some circumstances include:

- Periodic telephone contact with lone workers;
- Periodic site visits to lone workers;
- Regular contact (telephone, radio);
- Automatic warning devices (motion sensors);
- Manual warning devices, (panic alarms);
- End of task/shift contact (returning keys).

People at Risk

“People at risk” doesn’t just mean the lone worker - security or other core services could be involved, along with contractors, students and visitors. Identify hazards to all people who may be at risk, as well as hazards faced by the lone worker. The following factors all point to increased risk:

- Medical conditions
- Disabilities
- Gender
- Expectant mothers
- Age
- Inexperience
- Lack of appropriate training

It is important that where these categories apply, individuals are made aware of the outcome of the risk assessment and informed of all necessary control measures. It is a requirement for everyone undertaking lone working activity to be assessed for suitability and fitness for the task. The HSE has identified several vulnerable groups and states that employers must identify vulnerable employees who may be particularly at risk. These vulnerable groups include:

GROUP	ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR LONE WORKERS
New and expectant mothers	<p>The University's duty of care extends to the unborn child as well as risks to the mother herself. Therefore assessments must include the risk to any unborn child or child who is still breast-feeding.</p> <p>Consideration must also be given to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impaired mobility may make the mother more prone to slips, trips and falls (especially in the later stages of pregnancy); • Impaired ability to carry out physically strenuous work; • Increased likelihood of back injuries; • Entitlement to more rest breaks; • Risk of early labour or miscarriage;
Young people aged under 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of experience and immaturity. • Inability to concentrate for long periods. • Entitled to more frequent rest breaks.
People with disabilities or medical conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobility problems and visual impairment may make unassisted evacuation difficult. • Potential difficulties in raising the alarm when assistance is required. • Unable to hear alarms.
Contractors	<p>Contractors must be given the same level of consideration as University employees when carrying out a risk assessment.</p> <p>Contractors are at additional risk because they are unfamiliar with aspects of the University, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Layout and environment • Emergency procedures • Adjacent activities and hazards

These considerations are just a guide and are not exhaustive. Each risk assessment must consider the vulnerabilities of the person involved in the lone working task, and identify controls to reduce risk to an acceptable level.

Summary of actions required

1. Identify lone workers and/or circumstances where lone working may occur;
2. Risk assess lone workers and lone working tasks;
3. Develop Safe Operating Procedures (SOP's) and train out to lone workers;
4. Monitor lone working arrangements; and
5. Review lone working arrangements.