Lone Working Risk Assessment: How to Protect Staff Who Work Alone

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Who Counts as a Lone Worker?

A lone worker is anyone who carries out their job without close or direct supervision from colleagues. That covers more roles than most managers first think: the engineer on a call-out, the delivery driver, the cleaner in an empty building before everyone else arrives, the shop assistant opening up alone, and the office employee who regularly stays late after the rest of the team has gone home.

Some sectors have lone working built into normal operations. Care workers visiting clients in their own homes are a good example, and anyone managing staff in the care sector needs to think carefully about visits with no colleague nearby. Housing officers carrying out tenancy visits for a housing association or almshouse charity face a similar picture, often entering properties they know little about. A school caretaker opening up before staff and pupils arrive is a lone worker too.

Working alone is not in itself against the law, and many lone working jobs can be done safely with the right arrangements in place. What the law requires is that you identify the risks these roles create and put sensible controls around them, rather than assuming that because someone has always worked alone, it must be fine.

What the Law Actually Requires

There is no single piece of legislation called "the lone working regulations". The duty comes from general law that already applies to every employer. The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 requires employers to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of their employees, and to protect others affected by the work, such as members of the public a lone worker might encounter.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 add the duty that matters most here: employers must carry out a suitable and sufficient assessment of the risks arising from their work, and must take employees' capabilities into account when giving them tasks. In practice, an assessment written for a two-person task cannot simply be reused for someone doing the same job alone. It has to ask what changes when nobody else is present.

Responsibility sits with the employer. Day-to-day it is usually delegated to the lone worker's line manager, with oversight from whoever holds the health and safety brief. Smaller businesses without an in-house manager often benefit from a formally appointed competent person, because someone needs to own the assessment and keep it current.

Why Lone Working Changes the Risk Picture

The hazards of the job usually stay much the same whether one person or several are present. What changes is what happens when something goes wrong.

- **No one to help.** A fall, a machinery incident or a sudden medical episode becomes far more serious when nobody is there to raise the alarm or give first aid.
- **No one to consult.** Lone workers make decisions under pressure without a second opinion, which can push them towards risky improvisation rather than stopping to seek advice.
- **Violence and aggression.** Staff who handle cash, visit people's homes or enforce unpopular decisions are more vulnerable when alone, with no colleague to de-escalate or act as a witness.
- **Delayed discovery.** Without deliberate arrangements, hours can pass before anyone realises a lone worker is in difficulty.

Building a Lone Working Risk Assessment

Approach it like any other risk assessment, but ask one extra question at every step: what difference does being alone make? Consider the following points.

- Can the work be done safely by one person, or do some tasks need two? Work in confined spaces, work at height and live electrical work may need a second person, however experienced the lone worker is.
- Does the individual have a medical condition, known or disclosed, that makes unsupervised work unsuitable for a particular task?
- Is the person trained and experienced enough to recognise when to stop and seek help?

- What is the realistic worst-case outcome, and how would anyone else know it had happened?
- Are there predictable times of higher risk, such as cash handling, evening visits or isolated locations with poor mobile signal?

Review the assessment at regular intervals, such as once a year, and always after an incident, near miss or significant change to the role, the site or the people doing the work. Lone working often creeps in gradually: the occasional late finish becomes routine, a second staff member leaves and is never replaced, and nobody revisits the assessment. A scheduled review, or a regular programme of audits, catches this drift before it becomes normal.

Controls That Work in Practice

Communication and check-ins

The backbone of lone worker safety is knowing where people are and confirming they are all right. Options range from buddy systems and scheduled check-in calls to dedicated devices and apps with GPS tracking, panic buttons and fall detection. The right choice depends on the level of risk: a low-risk office worker may only need a text message protocol, while a care worker visiting unfamiliar addresses in the evening needs something more robust. Whatever you choose, a missed check-in must trigger a defined, named escalation, not an assumption that the person is running late.

Information before the visit

For staff visiting properties or clients, share what is known in advance: previous incidents at the address, dogs on site, individuals known to be aggressive and any access hazards. Encourage staff to keep assessing the situation as they arrive, and give them explicit permission to walk away and reschedule if something does not feel right.

Training and supervision

Lone workers need training that reflects their actual situation, not a generic induction. This includes conflict avoidance where the public or clients are involved, clear instructions on when to stop work and call for support, and refreshers as roles change. Where your lone workers also supervise others, an IOSH Managing Safely course covers the risk assessment basics, and Integral Safety is an IOSH approved training provider. First aid training should come from a dedicated first aid training provider.

Common Mistakes Businesses Make

The most frequent failing is treating the lone working policy as a document written once and never looked at again. Roles change, new sites open, and staff who worked in pairs end up alone without the controls being updated.

- Relying on a personal mobile phone as the only way to raise the alarm, with no plan for poor signal or a flat battery.

- Assuming experience is a substitute for any check-in system.
- Not briefing staff on what is known about a property or client before a visit.
- Not reviewing the arrangements after a near miss, so the same gap stays open.
- Keeping no record of who is working alone and when, so nobody can tell whether controls are being followed.

Records to Keep and How Often to Review

Record the risk assessment, the specific controls for each role or task and the check-in and escalation procedure in writing, then brief everyone involved so they know what is expected of them and of anyone monitoring them. Keep a simple log of check-ins where a formal system is used, since it becomes valuable evidence if an incident is later investigated.

If an incident does occur, a structured accident investigation should look at whether the lone working controls functioned as intended, not just at the immediate cause of the injury. Beyond that, review the arrangements whenever staffing, sites or working hours change.

Integral Safety, based in Coalville, works with businesses across the East Midlands to develop practical, proportionate lone working arrangements as part of a wider health and safety review. If you would like your current arrangements checked, get in touch to talk through what would make a difference for your team.

Talk to Integral Safety Ltd

We are health and safety consultants based in Coalville, Leicestershire, working with businesses across the East Midlands. If anything in this guide applies to your workplace, we can help.

Phone	01530 382 150 or 01664 400 450
Email	info@integralsafetyltd.co.uk
Website	integralsafetyltd.co.uk

This guide is general information about UK health and safety law and practice, correct as at 11 November 2026. It is not advice on your particular circumstances. The latest version is at https://integralsafetyltd.co.uk/blog/lone-working-how-to-protect-staff-who-work-alone.