

HEALTH AND SAFETY

GUIDANCE & INFORMATION SHEET No. 28



Nottingham
City Council

Corporate Safety Advice
Raising Standards Safely 

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Subject: Working Alone Safely

Introduction

This Guidance and Information Sheet forms part of Nottingham City Council's written safety policy arrangements. Departments may decide to add to this information sheet with specific guidance and systems of work relevant to departmental activities. Where proposals, additional guidance or changes to systems of work will have an impact on health, safety and welfare, there must first be consultation with Trade Union Safety Representatives via Departmental Health Safety and Welfare Committees.

If you have any questions, would like further information or would like this Guidance and Information Sheet in another format please contact Corporate Safety Advice.

Manager Responsibilities

Managers may be responsible for staff who work alone as part of their daily activities. This checklist is aimed to assist line management to understand their responsibilities in relation to lone working.

- Where it is reasonably practicable to avoid potentially hazardous lone working, this must be considered as the principal control measure. If it is not possible to avoid staff lone working, controls must be put in place to reduce the risk to an acceptable level.
- Where a risk exists in relation to lone working, a suitable and sufficient risk assessment must be carried out by a trained and competent person. Risk assessment training is available from Corporate Safety Advice.

A template for the lone worker risk assessment is also available to download from our site.

- The contents of risk assessments must be discussed with and understood by members of staff that are considered by the assessment in order they understand their responsibilities.
- The risk assessment must be reviewed and revised as necessary when changes occur to the demands of the post to ensure that it remains valid.
- Information from Nottingham City Council's (NCC) violence database and/or other reference information can be used to minimise the risks to staff. This can be where a member of staff is expected to work away from NCC controlled premises or where members of the public / service users are invited onto your site.
- This violence database is available to all staff who have intranet access. Managers must ensure that their staff are able to access the information contained within the database. For those without access to the intranet arrangements need to be made for the database to be checked on their behalf.

- Lone working procedures must be formalised and communicated to all affected staff.
- Line managers must know the whereabouts of their employees whilst they are working and must have identified an appropriate system to be able to locate and/or communicate with them.
In the absence of the line manager this duty must be taken on to the person deputising.

Any incident occurring to a member of staff must be reported on the correct reporting form. As the manager you must ensure that you complete the sections detailing the actions taken to prevent re-occurrence and send it promptly to Corporate Safety Advice for inclusion on the database.

Can You Work Alone?

The Health & Safety Executive (HSE) defines lone workers as:

“those who work by themselves without close supervision”.

Lone working covers activities that are specifically intended to be carried out unaccompanied or without immediate access to another person for assistance or supervision. This is not however, the same as a person who finds them self on their own as there is always someone who arrives first or leaves last, or an individual who goes into a storage area.

It is also important to recognise that there is no general prohibition on working alone. However, in certain circumstances, e.g. young people undergoing training, there are legal requirements on the standards of supervision required. In addition, for some specific tasks, there is a legal obligation to ensure that people do not work alone; e.g. working in confined spaces, working on ladders (that cannot be secured), fumigation or works with other hazardous chemicals, erection of scaffolding etc.

Risk Assessments

Whilst there is no specific legal prohibition on working alone, the general duties of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require employers to consider the safety of employees and others. This requires the identification of hazards, assessment of risks and implementation of control measures in relation to lone working and therefore, prior to lone working being accepted as a work practice, where significant risks exist, a suitable risk assessment **must** be completed.

Where the risk assessment process identifies that it is not possible for the work to be carried out safely by one person working alone, alternative arrangements for backup or support **must** be provided that ensure that this does not occur.

Management must ensure that the risk assessor identifies those who are working alone and that they are involved in the assessment process. All risk assessors must have received appropriate training on risk assessments and their completion. This training is available from Corporate Safety Advice.

It is also vital that all documented lone working risk assessments are fed back to the employees that are considered by them, so that they are clear on what is expected of them and the systems that are in place to maintain their safety in relation to lone working whilst undertaking the task.

Who In the City Council Might Work Alone?

Due to the diverse nature of the activities of the City Council, it is expected that a number of employees will work alone at some point e.g.

- Staff who are based in premises alone such as admin staff.
- Staff who may work separately from others such as car park and market attendants., community protection officers
- Staff working outside normal hours such as car park attendants, security and caretaking staff (e.g. responding to intruder alarms).
- Staff that regularly work away from their normal base including surveyors, engineers, architects, social workers and education welfare officers.
- Staff who are not in direct contact with other City Council employees or agencies such as the police but are working with one or more service users who may present a risk.

What must be Considered?

To ensure that solitary workers are not exposed to significantly more risks than other employees factors to be considered include the following:

- Does the work have to be by someone working alone?
- Who works alone?
- Does the work present risks?
- Does the workplace present risks or is it a new or unknown environment?
- Can one person safely handle any equipment for the job?
- Will cash be handled?
- Will there be a risk of violence?
- Does the person have a medical condition that might impact on their ability to work alone?
- Has the person received adequate training?
- Are there any specific precautions required to deal with an identified disability or condition (e.g. visual impairment / deafness / pregnancy)?
- What supervision is required?
- What happens if a person falls ill or has an accident, or if there is an emergency?

What are the Control Measures that should be Considered?

The information identified below should be used within the risk assessment framework to identify specific controls that should be available to minimise the risks from lone working. Due to the varied nature of the work activities that Nottingham City Council operates, a generic lone working risk assessment that covers all city council activities is not feasible. It is therefore important for the line management of employees to ensure, where appropriate, that a specific lone working risk assessment is undertaken.

Below, is a list of control measures that should be considered by line management before any employee is allowed to work alone.

Training

- Access to adequate and appropriate training;
 - Training on violence to staff is available from Corporate Safety Advice. Course dates are available on our intranet pages. Sessions to accommodate whole teams can be arranged if required.

- Other training such as disengagement skills from a physical attack is available from outside agencies. A suitable and sufficient risk assessment will identify the need for this training to be accessed.

Communication

- Adequate information, instruction, training and supervision for new employees
- Access to means of effective communication
- Access to automatic warning devices or alarms; personal alarms and the more advanced lone monitoring devices, 'Identicom' are available through the City Councils Corporate Contracts section.
- A booking in/out system which includes locations to be visited, times at each location, expected time back in office and starts from home or site finish stated;
- Avoidance of starting and finishing on site and only with the Line Manager's prior agreement;
- Mechanisms to ensure mobile staff contact the office, preferably throughout and at least at the end of each working day
- Designated rotas to ensure cover is available at the office base, to receive calls from mobile staff at least between normal office hours;
- Procedures for staff to contact a designated manager out of hours including at the end of shift to advise they are safe.
- Mechanisms to ensure staff are contacted by designated persons during the day or at home when they have not reported back in;
- Mechanisms to ensure a designated senior officer (team leader or above) has responsibility for contacting relevant authorities (e.g. police, hospitals) and/or visiting site as necessary to check when staff have not reported back as expected / cannot be contacted.

Procedures

- Checking the violence to staff database and preparation for visits and accessing of relevant and up to date information.
- Arrangements for working in pairs when required, (particularly when known assailants with violent history are identified on the database or where statutory requirements exist e.g. working in confined spaces) – for further information on this, contact Corporate Safety Advice directly;
- Clear procedure to abort visits that appear to be dangerous;
- Consideration of appropriate transport arrangements;
- Clear written procedures for all staff;
- Established emergency procedures;
- Adequate preparation for visits and accessing of relevant and up to date information

Clothing/Equipment

Where identified through risk assessment;

- Provision of adequate protective clothing e.g. footwear and hard hats;
- Provision of adequate equipment e.g. torches
- Access to first aid kits

Employee Responsibilities

All employees have a responsibility for personal safety in relation to lone working and ensure the following:

- Take reasonable care of their own safety and that of others and not to put themselves in danger;
- Follow any personal safety practices outlined by their management;

- Report any shortcomings or failings in health and safety practice;
- Report any incidents of violence, aggression or near misses (e.g. where a situation may have escalated into an actual violent incident) using the appropriate NCC forms

Further Information and References

- 'Working Alone In Safety - Controlling the risks of solitary work', HSE, INDG73
www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg73.pdf
- 'Violence at Work, a guide for employers', HSE, INDG66
- 'Personal Safety for people who work in education', Pocket guide by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust
(www.suzylamplugh.org.uk)
- 'Lone Working', produced by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust
- 'Think Safety, Think Personal, Think You', by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust
- 'Working Safely in other peoples homes', produced by the Suzy Lamplugh Trust
- Lone Worker Monitoring Devices <http://www.soloprotect.com/news/>