How to develop an effective working alone or in isolation for your staff and students

University of Manitoba
Environmental Health and Safety Office
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Overview:

- Manitoba regulatory requirements
- How to assess the risks in your workplace
- University of Manitoba guidance
- Links to Uof M templates
“WORKING ALONE OR IN ISOLATION” is Part 9 of…

Manitoba Regulation 217/2006
Workplace Safety and Health
Effective February 1, 2007
Application: Applies to every workplace where a worker works alone or works in isolation.

DEFINITION: A person is alone at work or working in isolation when they are on their own; when they cannot be seen or heard by another person; and when they cannot expect a visit from another worker.

Risk identification: when a worker works alone or works in isolation, a supervisor must identify the risks arising from the conditions and circumstances of the worker's work in consultation with the committee at the workplace.
Part 9: Working alone or in isolation

“A employer must, so far as is reasonably practicable, take steps to eliminate or reduce the identified risks to workers working alone or working in isolation.”
A supervisor must:

(a) develop and implement safe work procedures to eliminate or reduce the identified risks to workers working alone or working in isolation;

(b) train workers in the safe work procedures; and

(c) ensure that workers comply with the safe work procedures.
The safe work procedures must include:

(a) the establishment of an effective communication system that consists of
   (i) radio communication,
   (ii) telephone or cellular phone communication, or
   (iii) any other means that provides effective communication given the risks involved;

(b) any of the following:
   (i) a system of regular contact by the employer with the worker working alone or in isolation,
   (ii) limitations on or prohibitions of specified activities,
   (iii) the establishment of training requirements; and

(c) where applicable, the provision of emergency supplies for use in traveling or working under conditions of extreme cold or other inclement weather conditions.
A supervisor must post or make available a copy of the safe work procedures in a conspicuous place at the workplace.
A supervisor must review and revise the procedures:

Not less than every three years or sooner if circumstances at a workplace change in a way that poses a risk to the safety or health of a worker working alone or in isolation.
How to assess the risks in your workplace?
The wide variety of circumstances makes it important to assess each situation individually.

While it is not always hazardous to work alone, it can be when other circumstances are present.

Whether a situation is a high or low risk will depend on the location, type of work, interaction with the public, or the consequences of an emergency, accident, injury, etc.
There are many steps that can be taken to help ensure the safety of the lone worker.
Assess the hazards of the workplace

- Talk to employees about their work. Get their input about the work they do and possible solutions.
- Investigate incidents at your workplace, and those from similar workplaces.
Take corrective action to prevent or minimize the potential risks of working alone.

- Avoid having a lone worker whenever possible, especially for jobs with a recognized risk.
- Schedule higher risk tasks to be done during normal business hours, or when another worker capable of helping in an emergency is present.
- Establish a check-in procedure. Make sure that regular contact is kept with all employees. Establish ways to account for people (visually or verbally) while they are working.
And..

- Provide appropriate training and education.
- Report all situations, incidents or 'near misses' where being alone increased the severity of the situation. Analyze this information and make changes to company policy where necessary.
The following are some points to consider.

- Each circumstance will be different, so be sure to adapt the questions to suit your situation
High risk activities can involve risks from a variety of sources:

- Handling money
- Work off-campus
- High energy materials (radioactive, high temperature)
- Heights
- Toxic gases, liquids, or solids
- Hazardous substances or materials
- Electricity
- Cryogenic (low temperature) materials/processes
- Confined spaces (such as tanks, grain bins or elevators, culverts, etc.)
- Hazardous equipment such as chainsaws or firearms,
- Materials at great pressure,
- The public or patients, where there is a potential for violence.
Consider: Length of time the person will be working alone:

- What is a reasonable length of time for the person to be alone?
- Is it reasonable for the person to be alone at all?
- How long will the person be alone to finish the job?
- Is it legal for the person to be alone while doing certain activities? (For example: at The University of Manitoba there are restrictions on working alone in a confined space, or during lock-out / tag-out operations).
- What time of the day will the person be alone?
- For personal safety, recommend ‘safe walk’.
Consider:

Communication:

- What forms of communication are available?
- Is it necessary to "see" the person, or is voice communication adequate?
- Will emergency communication systems work properly in all situations?
- If the communication systems are located in a vehicle, do you need alternative arrangements to cover the person when they are away from the vehicle?
Consider:

Location of the work:

- Is the work in a remote or isolated location? (Remember that a remote location does not have to be far away. Storage rooms that are rarely used can be considered remote or isolated).
- Is transportation necessary to get there? What kind of transportation is needed?
- Is the vehicle equipped with emergency supplies such as food and drinking water, as well as a first aid kit?
- Will the person need to carry some or all of the emergency supplies with them when they leave the vehicle?
- Does the person need training to be able to use the first aid equipment?
- What are the consequences if the vehicle breaks down?
- Will the person have to leave the vehicle for long periods of time?
Consider:

Type or nature of work:

- Is there adequate training and education provided for the person to be able to work alone safely?
- Is there adequate personal protective equipment available? Is it in good working order?
- What machinery, tools or equipment will be used?
- Is there a high risk activity involved?
- Is fatigue likely to be a factor?
- Are there extremes of temperature?
- Is there risk of an animal attack, insect bite (poisonous, or allergic reaction), etc.?
- If the person is working inside a locked building, how will emergency services be able to get in? (For example: night shift in a secure office building)
- Does the work involve working with money or other valuables?
Consider:
Characteristics required by the individual who is working alone:

- Are there any pre-existing medical conditions that may increase the risk?
- Does the person have adequate levels of experience and training? (For example: first aid, communication systems repair, vehicle breakdowns, relevant administrative procedures, and/or outdoor survival?)
- Review existing safe work procedures
An example of a check-in procedure:

- Prepare a daily work plan so it is known where the lone employee will be and when.
- Identify one main person to be the contact at the office, plus a back up.
- Define under what circumstances the lone employee will check in and how often.
- Stick to the visual check or call-in schedule. You may wish to have a written log of contact.
- Have the contact person call or visit the lone employee periodically to make sure he or she is okay.
- Pick out a code word to be used to identify or confirm that help is needed.
- Develop an emergency action plan to be followed if the lone employee does not check-in when he or she is supposed to.
In all **buddy system situations,** consideration must be given to the buddy's qualifications.

- The buddy must be knowledgeable about the activities of the employee he/she is observing, be properly equipped with emergency equipment, and be capable of putting preplanned rescue or emergency operations into effect.

- With the buddy system, a second person's presence is required at all times. However, where the probability of serious consequence is high, the two employees must not be exposed to the hazard at the same time. The second person should be within sight, but safely removed from the immediate area.
University of Manitoba guidance
Be sure to include students!

Students are considered workers under the legislation.
University of Manitoba: Working alone procedure

- The responsibility for Deans, Directors and Department Heads is to conduct a risk assessment and establish working alone/isolation procedures which are ‘reasonably practicable’ (term used in the Provincial Regulations).
- The staff/students who are affected should have an opportunity to participate in the assessment.
- A Departmental or Local Area Safety and Health Committee is an effective means of consulting on this matter.
The supervisor is required to show that:

- there is an appropriate assessment of the risks,
- suitable procedures have been developed, and
- staff/students are trained in these procedures.
When traveling out of the office, the main contact person should know the following details:

- destination,
- estimated time of arrival,
- return time or date,
- contact information,
- mode of travel (public transit, car, plane, etc.) and,
- alternate plans in the event of bad weather, traffic problems, etc.
OFFICE WORK:

- For staff members attending their offices during non-regular working hours, the supervisor must do an assessment of the risk and establish either a system of regular contact, limitations or prohibitions on specified activities, and/or the establishment of training requirements.

- This is in addition to the ‘establishment of an effective communication system’.

- With the University having UM Security Services on 24/7 basis, it may be sufficient to advise staff that they can contact UM Security Services (24/7) in case of an emergency and how this is to be done.

- In some cases, panic alarms have been installed in office areas where it has been determined that direct access to emergency dispatch at UMSS is required.

- Whatever is determined to be sufficient, it must be documented and communicated to all students/staff.

- Suitable training in the protocol and procedures must also be implemented.
LABORATORIES, WORKSHOPS or other Higher Risk Activities:

Use the risk assessment (appendix A) to identify particular hazards and the associated precautions that must be instituted.
For example,

If the risk assessment may indicate that a student is working in isolation and it is in a ‘high’ risk lab, it would be appropriate to require a second person to be in attendance. This could be another student or staff member who is trained in the procedures.

It must be clear to staff/students who should be contacted in case of an emergency.
It would **not** be sufficient to assume that a friend, spouse, etc. can carry out the employer’s responsibility to provide a safe workplace.

Contact with the staff/student’s supervisor may be required to validate that it is OK to conduct the work and to identify the measures required to be followed for the particular circumstances.
It is important that a check-in procedure be in place.

Decide if a verbal check-in is adequate, or if the employee must be accounted for by a visual check. Make sure your plan is appropriate for both regular business hours as well as after main office hours.
For most lone workers, the telephone will be the main source of contact.

If you work at a desk or station, have a telephone close by.

If you are away from a main office or work station, the use of a cell phone is very helpful.

If a cell phone is unreliable in your area, be sure to have alternative methods of communication available (such as use of public telephones, Code Blue, Red Emergency Call Boxes, site visits or satellite technology).
University of Manitoba Security Services role in plans will be very limited.

- They advise they do not have the resources to do routine follow-ups.
- They would likely only respond if they received calls about an emergency or someone indicating staff/students were missing/unaccounted.
Now you are ready to prepare a working alone safety work procedure for your workplace:

University of Manitoba, Working alone or in isolation:

Appendix A: Risk Assessment template:
http://www.umanitoba.ca/admin/governance/media/workingalone_appendixA.pdf

Appendix B: Safe Work Procedure template:
http://www.umanitoba.ca/admin/governance/media/workingalone_appendixB.pdf
Suggestions or comments:

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