

## Working alone FAQ

### Is this a regulatory requirement?

Yes. Part 9 “Working Alone or in Isolation” of Manitoba’s Workplace Safety and Health Regulation (MR 217/2006) requires it for all MB workplaces which includes the University. To see the regulation please follow this link

<http://safemanitoba.com/uploads/regulations/reg2006consolidated.pdf>

It is also required by the University’s internal Working Alone Procedure adopted in July 2008. [http://umanitoba.ca/admin/governance/governing\\_documents/staff/839.htm](http://umanitoba.ca/admin/governance/governing_documents/staff/839.htm)

### Does this apply to students or just University employees?

Part 9 specifically references workers. However the MB Workplace Safety and Health Act requires all employers to take steps to protect individuals not in his employ, in our case students and visitors, from hazards associated with his workplace

### Who is responsible

#### Employer

The Workplace Safety and Health Act holds the “employer” responsible. The Working Alone Procedure specifically names Deans, Directors and Department Heads as representatives of the employer.

#### Workers

Workers also have duties imposed by the WSHA to:

- take reasonable care to protect themselves and others
- comply with regulations
- cooperate with the employer.

#### Students

The University of Manitoba Safety Policy imposes worker responsibilities on students, ie. they must take reasonable care, comply with regulations, policy and procedure and cooperate with University staff.

### What is “working alone”

Working alone means that an individual is the only employee or student present in a workplace and is not directly supervised.

### What is “working in isolation”

Working in isolation means working in circumstances where assistance is not readily available.

### **Does the working alone plan have to be specific to individual employees?**

There may be instances where a plan does need to be specific to an individual, eg. someone doing unique work that involves work with a hazardous material or workplace hazards. In many cases the plan can be written so that it applies anyone working alone.

### **Is working alone restricted to after-hours or weekends?**

No. An individual could work in a office/room/lab or other location during normal work hours where an emergency would not be obvious to others nearby. However in many instances working alone does occur after hours.

### **Is there a rule of thumb that I can use to determine whether someone is working alone or in isolation?**

Yes. Simply consider how long it would take for anyone to recognize that an individual has had an emergency at work, eg. sudden illness or injury. If an individual's emergency might not be noticed for hours then there is a need to assess the risk associated with a task or work situation.

### **Do I have to plan for every possibility?**

No, the Province expects that you will take reasonable steps to recognize and address potential issues.

### **What are reasonable steps?**

- Comply with legislation
- Respond to identified issues
- Consider applicable guidelines and standards
- Consider practices in similar institutions or workplaces
- Consult with affected workers
- Establish a plan to deal with issues, ie. it may not be possible to deal with some issues immediately, establish a plan so that longer term solutions are tracked and completed
- Make sure that staff and students are aware of the plan
- Review the plan with staff to ensure that it is effective
- Review the plan after an incident

### **Does the Province offer any guidance on developing working alone plans?**

Yes. They have posted a Code of Practice for "Workers Working Alone or in Isolation" (<http://safemanitoba.com/uploads/guidelines/workingalone.pdf>). The document outlines requirements, offers examples and provides additional references to materials on working alone.

### **How can I identify potential risks in my workplace?**

Involve staff and students who have experience of the workplace in identifying possible risks. This is a requirement of Manitoba workplace regulations.

### **How can I decide what to deal with first?**

The first step is to assess the risk associated with an activity that involves working alone. The Province's risk assessment model (see [http://safemanitoba.com/critical\\_job\\_inventory\\_and\\_risk\\_assessment\\_bulletin\\_249\\_part\\_1of\\_3\\_part\\_bulletin.aspx](http://safemanitoba.com/critical_job_inventory_and_risk_assessment_bulletin_249_part_1of_3_part_bulletin.aspx)) takes into account the frequency of the activity, probability that an issue may arise and the severity of that event should it occur.

The risk assessment lets you focus on dealing with the most significant issues first.

### **Does the Province have any examples of what they consider high or low risk?**

Yes. These examples are taken from the Province's Code of Practice for "Workers Working Alone or in Isolation"

(<http://safemanitoba.com/uploads/guidelines/workingalone.pdf>)

Examples of work functions that present high risk hazards may include:

- Entering any confined space
- Working with:
  - high energy materials (radioactive, high temperature)
  - toxic gases, liquids, or solids
  - cryogenic (low temperature) materials/processes
  - high pressure systems (high voltage electrical systems)
  - logging industries
  - moving equipment or machinery
- Working in:
  - extreme weather conditions
  - laboratory functions
- Handling or transferring flammable liquids such as in oil and gas industries
- Industries where the job functions may not be hazardous but the work environment may attract criminal victimization (Eg: where cash or goods are handled as in retail stores, taxis, gas stations, etc.)

Examples of work functions that present low risk may include:

- Maintenance (other than on active processing equipment)
- Security personnel (except in hazardous locations)
- Janitorial or custodial (except in hazardous locations)
- Truck drivers or business people in transit
- Office work

### **What are the basic requirements in Manitoba regulations**

Establish an effective communication system (radio, telephone or cell)

Any of the following:

- Develop a system of regular contact

- Limit or prohibit certain activities
- Consider special training requirements for working alone

Provide emergency supplies for those traveling or working in extreme cold or other inclement weather conditions

### **What kinds of things can be part of a response to hazards associated with working alone?**

Telephones, cell phones and radios are commonly available to staff working alone. These provide the primary method for a worker working alone to notify others if issues arise. While they should be effective in many situations the plan needs to consider alternatives where an individual could not use these devices.

Examples of other steps to consider

- Limit access to a space after hours
- Require those coming in after hours to notify their direct report
- Establish a buddy system where co-workers or students check on each other
- Alarms to security, eg. panic buttons
- Forbid certain activities, eg. working with hazardous materials, for individuals working alone
- Review normal work procedures and increase safety measures associated with a task to compensate for working alone
- Lock entrances to specific work area being used
- Do not investigate unusual activity – contact Security Services
- Incorporate programs and safety initiatives offered by Security Services for personal security (<http://umanitoba.ca/campus/security/> )