



Lone working

Guidance for Heads of School/ Service

Doc control no: PRSG21.2

WELLBEING, SAFETY AND HEALTH MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

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Definitions

Lone working is where a person carries out a work-, research- or study-related activity unaccompanied or without access to another person for assistance.

It could include situations such as: working out of normal hours (as defined by the Head of School or Service), working in an isolated location, one-to-one interviews (e.g. with members of the public), work in IT clusters, off-site activities/ travel, driving vehicles (e.g. making deliveries, moving equipment or waste) or working from home alone.

It is not intended to include: a person carrying out office work alone during normal working hours when colleagues are nearby. However, if you have cause for concern and think you may need a lone working assessment, speak to your Health and Safety Manager.

Roles and actions

The health and safety responsibilities of staff, students or visiting personnel are set out in the University Health and Safety Policy (<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/safety/policy.htm>). For the management of lone working the role-holders listed below are proposed to carry out additional specific actions.

Head of School/ Service

- Specify local normal working hours
- Identify who is authorised to permit out-of-hours working
- Check that there are systems in place to test and maintain emergency equipment

Line manager/ academic tutor

- Discuss options to avoid lone working
- Where authorised, grant formal permission (i.e. in writing) to people to work out of hours in line with an approved risk assessment and safe system of work
- Where risks associated with lone working cannot be controlled to an acceptable level, prohibit lone working
- Provide protective equipment for the lone worker where identified in the risk assessment
- Check that the lone worker has been deemed competent to work alone and use equipment/ hazardous substances unsupervised, has received any relevant training and that this has been recorded
- If support from Security is identified as a control measure in the risk assessment, check that this is formally agreed in writing and that Security are aware
- Check that there is a system in place for lone workers to report all accidents, incidents and work-related ill-health

Lone worker

- Identify the need to work out of hours
- Prepare a risk assessment and safe systems of work
- Have the risk assessment approved and formal permission before lone work begins
- Do not carry out lone work if they do not have these permissions
- Only carry out lone work activities agreed in the risk assessment
- Use any protective equipment provided
- If Security is identified as a control measure, check you have written agreement from them
- Test emergency procedures are effective before lone working
- Report all accidents, incidents and work-related ill-health

Guidance

1. Lone working is avoided where possible but where not possible lone workers:

a) Are at no greater risk than those working with colleagues

It is important to consider all the risks associated with lone working and decide whether the work can be done in normal hours and/or by more than one person; sometimes lone working can be avoided with adequate advance planning.

However, as this is not always possible, the following requirements will need to be followed.

b) Have formal permission in place to work alone

You need to make a decision as to who within your school/ service is able to grant permission for lone working in each area. As part of the planning process for lone working, an individual needs to have been given formal (written, e.g. in an email) permission to do so. The person giving approval will need sight of the risk assessment that covers this lone working activity to help them to make an informed decision. Where they do not consider that the risks are controlled to an acceptable level, they must prohibit working alone (see point 2).

c) Have lone working included in the risk assessment.

Depending on the level of risk, this may set a higher level of control to protect lone individuals who will not have the support of colleagues close by. For example: limited activities in a lab, ensuring office suite/ building doors are locked at night for security reasons, or ensuring someone knows that the lone worker is on site alone. As usual, the line manager or academic tutor must sign off and approve the risk assessment. This could be addressed in various ways:

- specific lone working risk assessment – e.g. for members of staff carrying out one-to-one interviews with members of the public in private; some office settings, e.g. EC Stoner with public access until late
- pre-existing activity risk assessment – e.g. office, fieldwork, biological safety or COSHH risk assessment
- individual risk assessment – e.g. for a staff member who is diabetic and has a history of collapsing
- permit-to-work (see the Permit-to-work protocol at www.leeds.ac.uk/safety)

Control measures identified in the risk assessment should be put in place to keep staff and students from harm.

d) Implement a safe system of work

The risk assessment is used to determine if a safe system of work for lone workers is needed, e.g. panic buttons, two-way radios, phoning in processes, prohibition of higher risk tasks etc.

e) Only carry out work identified in the risk assessment

The risk assessment is used to identify boundaries for tasks so that a lone worker does not go outside of the agreed remit and potentially increase the risk. Anyone lone working should know that they can only carry out activities approved within the risk assessment.

f) Have training, are competent to work alone, use equipment and hazardous substances unsupervised and that this is recorded.

If people plan to lone work, you should assure yourself that they have been given any training or induction identified in the risk assessment, and that they are deemed competent. This means that they have the experience and knowledge to be able to work safely alone. This must be recorded. Due to the lack of immediate support that would usually be available, the level of competency required to use equipment and hazardous substances may be much higher for lone workers than that of supervised people. Local arrangements will set out any specific requirements.

Examples would include researchers carrying out home visits who have had conflict resolution training.

2. Lone working is forbidden if risks cannot be controlled to an acceptable level

Some tasks carry an increased level of risk which cannot be managed by a lone worker. In this case a risk assessment, safe system of work or standard operating procedure would identify that the task requires other people to be immediately accessible in case of any issues – therefore, lone working would be automatically unacceptable. Examples could include using a highly toxic substance, radioactive work etc. Some activities might also require two or more people to be involved in a task – e.g. lifting heavy equipment onto a bench – and therefore would also be forbidden.

If you need more advice, support or guidance to consider this, speak to your Health and Safety Manager.

3. Protective equipment is provided

The risk assessment should identify any protective equipment that is required to help manage the risk of carrying out the work activity safely. This must be provided and used. If any protective equipment specified in the risk assessment is not available (as with any lack of a control measure), the work should not be carried out.

4. Support from FD Security Service

You should ensure that your staff know that if a specific control measure is listed identifying that Security Service support is required, then as well as this being included in the risk assessment, it is also formally agreed in writing with them.

For example, in a risk assessment for a staff member who is interviewing members of the public, a key control measure may be a panic button which connects straight to Security. However, if there is no formal arrangement, the response time expected may be unrealistic and may place the staff member/student at risk from physical harm due to a slow response.

5. Emergency processes

These may include: having a mobile phone available because many of the University's telephone lines are not available out of hours; telling someone (a line manager, family member etc.) where the individual is and what time they are expected to be home; being aware of any particular evacuation or other emergency (e.g. spillages etc) plan; checking how to access first aiders; and knowing how to deal with any planned or unplanned visitors.

6. Emergency equipment

You should ensure that systems are in place to maintain and test any emergency equipment – e.g. alarms. Any emergency alarm systems (e.g. panic buttons) should be regularly tested and systems should be in place to respond out of hours. Checks should also be made to ensure that emergency exits are still available and not locked for security purposes.

7. Accident reporting

Your staff and students should know to report any accident or injury whilst lone working using Sentinel, the online accident reporting system and your usual local procedures.

Support and Guidance

For more help and support on lone working please contact your Health and Safety Manager.