DORSET County Council

Lone Working

Policy & Procedure

Improving the quality of life for
people in Dorset, now and for the future

INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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This policy and procedure applies to all Dorset County Council employees. All school governing bodies will be encouraged to adopt this or a similar policy by which their staff may also be protected and supported. This recognises the joint responsibility of Governors and the County Council for the health, safety and welfare of all staff employed in schools.

Lone Working

1. Introduction

While most hazards at work are easy to identify and control, other areas of work place health and safety are more difficult to define.

One of these aspects relates to the possible risks presented by working alone.

The Health and Safety Executive definition of a 'lone worker' is:

'Someone who works by themselves without close or direct supervision'

Lone workers include those who:

- Work from a fixed base, such as one person working alone on a premises (e.g. library)
- Work away from a fixed base (e.g. community support workers, parking attendants)
- Work at home (e.g. flexible working arrangements)
- Mobile workers (e.g. drivers, travelling officers)

In most cases, working alone is relatively straightforward and acceptable from a legal perspective. However, a particular activity being undertaken such as working with hazardous substances or visiting a member of the public with a history of violence, may well increase the risk to that employee.

In these circumstances, it is imperative that managers address these issues, to ensure employees are not exposed to unacceptable risk and that all reasonably practicable measures are taken to safeguard their health and safety.

2. Legal Framework

There is no specific health and safety legislation addressing lone working. However, the following general framework applies:

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 places duties on both employers and employees, which can be applied to lone working.

- Section 2: It shall be the duty of every employer to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all his employees
- Section 2: Employers must provide adequate information, instruction, training and supervision to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of their employees.
- Section 7: Employees must take reasonable care for their own and others safety and must co-operate with employers so far as is necessary to enable them to meet their own obligations

Management of Health and Safety Regulations 1999

Regulation 3 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 requires risk assessments to be undertaken. Any working practice (including lone working) must be taken into consideration when conducting such assessments and action identified to minimise the potential risk to its lowest, reasonably practicable, level.

3. Policy

The County Council will ensure, in so far as is reasonably practicable, that it provides a safe and healthy working environment for all its employees and for the purposes of this policy, those who work alone or without close supervision.

The County Council will ensure that:-

- Managers conduct suitable and sufficient assessment of risks to the health, safety and welfare of their employees who work alone or without close supervision (lone workers)
- All significant findings of the risk assessments are recorded and made available to the relevant staff who undertake 'lone working'
- Written arrangements are in place to plan, organise, control, monitor and review any measures needed to deal with the significant findings resulting from the risk assessments undertaken
- Appropriate levels of information, instruction, training and supervision are provided as is necessary to ensure the health, safety and welfare at work of all employees who are 'lone workers'.
- Competent persons are available to assist managers in fulfilling health, safety and welfare obligations to their staff, including those staff that are 'lone workers'
- Emergency action procedures are in place to deal with serious and imminent danger should the need arise

The practical arrangements for ensuring the health, safety and welfare of employees who are 'lone workers' and work on behalf of the County Council are detailed later in this document and associated appendices.

4. Safety Arrangements for the Lone Worker

Directorate Management Teams, Heads of Service and School Governing Bodies are to ensure that suitable and sufficient risk assessments are carried out as required by legislation.

For more information about risk assessment for lone working, see Appendix A

The risk assessment process should confirm whether the work should actually be carried out safely by one unaccompanied person.

Particular consideration should be given to:

- the remoteness or isolation of workplaces
- any problems of communication
- the possibility of unwanted behaviour, such as violence
- criminal activity from other persons
- the potential for injury or damage to health
- anticipated 'Worst Case' scenario and must also include:
- means of access and/or egress
- plant, machinery and work equipment
- hazardous substances and working environment
- confined spaces and/or permits to work

5. Communication

Directorates may wish to consider the provision of back up communication support systems for staff identified as being at risk.

Communication systems come in many forms and include an audible alarm / radio link, mobile phones and in certain circumstances, specific technology that tracks workers via telephone call in or satellite.

6. Monitoring

Managers should ensure that systems are in place to monitor the effectiveness of the control measures implemented as a result of the risk assessment process to find out how successful they have been.

This will allow managers to identify those control measures and strategies that are not working, or which have unforeseen consequences, and modify or replace them where appropriate.

There are two types of monitoring:

Active Monitoring

Managers should ensure that systems and procedures are working without waiting until something goes wrong.

It will confirm whether any agreed control measures and procedures are actually being followed by employees and whether they are workable in the individual circumstances and have the desired effect of preventing accidents or incidents.

Reactive Monitoring

Managers should investigate all accidents, incidents and near misses so that everyone involved can learn from the experience. Outcomes of investigations should feed back into the risk assessment process and staff must be encouraged and supported in the effective use of reporting procedures.

7. Information and Training

Employees will be given all necessary information, instruction, training and supervision to enable them to recognise the hazards and appreciate the risks involved with working alone.

All employees are required to comply with efforts made to ensure safe working and to report any concerns to their manager / supervisor.

8. Violence, Aggressive and Threatening Behaviour

Where managers are responsible for employees who are identified during the risk assessment process as being exposed to the risk of violence, aggressive or threatening behaviour, serious consideration should be given to employees making alternative arrangements to see the member of public.

Consideration should be given to

- Working in pairs
- Seeing them at a neutral location
- Insisting they come into the office environment
- Ensuring interview arrangements are known to other staff members

Employees must be trained to an appropriate level to deal with any foreseeable situation and will require regular refresher training to keep their skills and knowledge up to date.

9. Serious and Imminent Danger

Employees who believe themselves to be in serious and imminent danger such as using machinery that is unsafe or inadequately guarded or in danger of being physically assaulted, should where possible, remove, themselves to a place of safety. They should then inform their manager / supervisor of this and the reasons for taking such steps.

There may be circumstances such as care staff who may be reluctant to remove themselves for fear of leaving a service user in danger of injury / physical assault. It is impossible to give precise advice for every situation, however a decision taken at the time in the interest of their own or another persons safety, will be supported by the Council.

Employees in these circumstances should ask themselves the following, “Should I be here, is it safe to remain, should I seek assistance? - if in doubt, leave and inform your Manager / Supervisor.

10. Summary

Directorate Management Teams, Heads of Service and School Governing Bodies should ensure that risk assessments have been undertaken, recorded and where necessary control measures put in place for all employees who are required to work alone.

Records of the risk assessments identifying the significant hazards and control measures introduced should be retained and readily available for inspection.

The control measures put in place will depend on the results of the risk assessment and information gained from monitoring, and should be commensurate with the identified risks.

Risk Assessment

Risk Assessment is a structured approach that aids decision making and effective allocation of resources.

In simple terms, risk assessment is thinking about what could go wrong and deciding if enough has been done to prevent it.

The assessment must enable staff and managers to plan, introduce and monitor measures to ensure that particular risks are eliminated or controlled adequately at all times.

Risk assessment should enable staff and managers, as circumstances change, to check and improve the validity of judgements about risk and effectiveness of control measures. This is difficult to accomplish unless the assessment is recorded and the system and logic used in making the assessment is clear and easily repeated.

Risk assessment involves a systematic examination of all aspects of the work activity or tasks undertaken, to consider what could cause harm or injury, what preventative measures are in place to prevent this and whether these are satisfactory and sufficient in principle as well as practice. It is essentially a five -stage process:

- Identification of the hazards
- Identify who might be harmed and how
- Evaluation of the risks / Measures to control the risks
- Record the findings
- Monitor and review

In reality, staff and Managers are making everyday judgements about risk and therefore already carry out risk assessments. However, it is most likely to be done in an ad hoc way as a direct response to issues rather than actively considering the possibility of foreseeable hazardous events happening.

Lone Working Risk Assessment

Identification of the hazards

1. A hazard is anything with the potential to cause harm.
2. Whilst hazard identification should be thorough, it is generally advisable to ignore the trivial and concentrate on the significant hazards.
3. It is essential that employees are consulted as they will often have a clearer idea of the hazards associated with their tasks and/or workplace.
4. Staff perception of hazard and risk is important, particularly in relation to the personal safety elements of lone working.
5. Record each hazard and state how the particular risk associated with the hazard has been identified.

Evaluation of the risks

There is no prescribed method for evaluating the risks and it could be done by simply categorising a risk as low, medium or high based upon personal judgement and/or experience.

However, a more objective and accurate method of evaluating risk is to consider the severity and likelihood relating to identified risks:

- Severity requires an assessment of the worst outcome in terms of injury or ill health relating to the given hazard and/or risk
- Likelihood requires an assessment of the probability of that injury or ill health actually occurring. Consideration may also have to be given to the number of people exposed to the hazard, and should include non-employees

This will facilitate risk prioritisation, e.g the greater the severity of the harm and the more likely the risk is to occur, then the greater the risk.

The Lone Working risk assessment proforma at Appendix D allows for a numerical approach to severity and likelihood, the scores are then multiplied together to give an overall risk rating.

	Hazard risk severity		Likelihood of occurrence
1	**insignificant** - minor or 1st aid injury	1	**unlikely** to occur – no history
2	**significant** - injury, but unlikely to be serious	2	**possible** - history exists
3	**serious** - injury - > 3 day injury	3	**likely** - has occurred before
4	**major** - major or fatal injury	4	**highly probable** - occurs nearly every time

Measures to control the risks

The outcome of the evaluation of risk should be a prioritised action plan, based on the risk scores, to implement 'risk controls'.

Risk controls should follow the hierarchy of risk control as follows:

- Eliminate – can the hazardous activity/risk be eliminated altogether. Does the activity have to be carried out at all.
- Substitute – can the hazardous activity/risk be substituted with something less hazardous. Can alternative ways of working be found to replace those identified as high risk.
- Reduce – reduction of the risks by control methods. Control methods may be many and various, but should include safe working procedures, supervision, increasing staff levels, improved communication, training etc.
- Personal protective equipment – should be used as a last resort.

Monitor and review

Risk assessments are living documents and must be continually monitored, reviewed and revised as necessary. (see section 6 'Monitoring' for further details)

In particular, they should be reviewed as and when circumstances change or there is reason to suspect that the existing risk assessment is no longer valid. Unchanged risk assessments should be subject to review at least annually and integrated into team meetings, appraisal and other internal management systems as required.

Advice and guidance for "Lone Workers' - employee information

As an employee, you should carry out your own 'Personal Assessment' before undertaking any activity which involves working alone

This should include a consideration of the following:

1. Do you know where your work location is?
2. Do you have enough information on the situation you are going to?
3. Is there a lone working risk assessment for the task?
4. Do you have the protective equipment you may need?
5. Do you require specialist equipment?
6. Are there any specific controls for the task?
7. Does someone know the location you are going to?
8. Do you have a means of communicating with that person or others?
9. Have you booked out and informed someone of any time restrictions or issues?
10. Do you know what to do should an accident/incident occur?

You should make yourself aware of any risk assessments / safe systems of work (procedures) carried out for that particular activity and any control measures in place to minimise the risks identified.

Before starting work, if you have a feeling that something is wrong, rely on your senses / professional judgement. Do not commence the task, but report back to your manager / supervisor to seek clarification or advice.

A Personal Safety booklet will be available to provide detailed advice, guidance and suggested best practice for those employees required to work alone.

Guidance for the management of Lone Workers

Lone working issue	Questions to consider
The Lone Worker	• Have they had sufficient professional training and/or experience for the task? • Have they the ability and qualifications to carry out the task? • Are they medically fit, have suitable personality and attitude?
The Task	• Does the employee understand all hazards and risks associated with the task and the steps to take to reduce risks to the lowest reasonably practicable level? • Have modifications occurred in the task since it was last assessed? • Does the worker carry out the task as it was assessed or use a short cut? • Are time scales realistic for completion of the task? • Is the client / service user known to the local authority?
Working Environment	• Is the environment or terrain of high risk geographical nature or known trouble spot? • Could there be any rapid changes in climatic conditions or association with a severe weather climate. • Does the nature of the environment place any limitations on the task or worker, or does the remoteness or isolation require an experienced worker? • Is criminal activity a consideration or interference or wilful damage a possibility particularly from children? • Does the lone worker's activity impact on those of the premises being visited i.e. for accidents or communications?
Supervision	• How is this achieved, with what frequency, can contact be initiated by the worker or can it be initiated by the Supervisor. • Levels of Supervision should complement information, instruction and training and provide guidance in situations of uncertainty. • Supervision will depend on the risks involved and the proficiency and experience of the employee. • It is important that the supervisor stresses that where the lone worker finds themselves in a situation which is hazardous, to withdraw without fear or prejudice.

Training, Instruction and Information	• Has the employee been informed and given all necessary and relevant information, instruction, training and supervision to enable them to recognise the hazards and appreciate the risks involved whilst lone working? • Is it recorded?
Communication *Remember: communication can give a false sense of security and may increase risk rather than reducing it in some circumstances*	• Should be commensurate with the risks involved. • Should be easily and readily utilised. • May include mobile phone, pager, personal alarm, hand held or vehicle two way radio. • Is coverage complete i.e. is the phone/radio signal strength adequate ? • Decide on the frequency of communication? • This may range from monitoring checks, regular pattern of calls or an automatic device if period signals aren't received. • Are records kept of where staff are, how long away, when returning, and the contact name and numbers of staff working away from base? • What contingency plans for breakdown of communications is required?
First Aid	• What is the location of the nearest first aid kit and availability of a competent first aider, for treatment of injuries?
Suitability of equipment	• The selection and use of must be in line with the requirements of Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations. • It is imperative that only tools supplied by the employer are used and as instructed. • Standby equipment must be clearly marked as such and only used in emergencies. • Can the equipment safely be handled by one person?
Accident and Emergency Procedures	• Are the physical and mental abilities of the individual capable of responding to the incident correctly and in the specified manner? • What procedures are in place for reporting accidents/incidents. • What action should be taken if an employee fails to call in or report back, who is to be notified? • Who is the contact during out of hours work? • Consider equipment failure, uncontrolled exposure to harmful agents, illness, physical assault or vehicle breakdown.

Personal Protective Equipment	• Determined by the risk assessment, and in line with the requirements of Personal Protective Equipment Regulations. • Supervisory checks are critical to its continued safe use.
Personal Preparedness	• Achieved through work planning and validation of procedures used.
Double Staffing	• Should a particular risk be incapable of being eliminated or reduced so far as is reasonably practicable, double staffing may have to be considered as part of a safe system of work. • Additional advice should be obtained prior to work commencing
Transportation	• Can premises be reached by ordinary vehicles and will weather further affect this? • Maintenance and servicing of vehicles. • Are courses in defensive driving necessary?
Contact with the Public or Animals	• 92% of violent crime is related to direct contact with the public. • Is cash to be handled? • Is it feasible that an animal will be used to provoke an attack?
Permits to work	• Particularly where risk is considered high or where specific legal requirements exist, some or all of the above procedures may be contained in a written permit to work and without which the activity may not take place. • Where time limits are a consideration from exposure or fatigue the permit to work should state the start / stop time or maximum duration of the task.

DORSET County Council

Appendix D

Area of risk: **lone working**

Potential hazards/risk identified	Severity 1, 2, 3, 4	Likelihood 1, 2, 3, 4	Total score	Action taken to minimise identified hazards/risk – RISK CONTROLS	Any further action required? (if yes, give details)

Once a risk has been identified, action must be taken. Rather than attempt to deal with all of the risks identified at once, the assessor should work through the prioritised risks in order to establish risk controls.

Are risk controls sufficient to minimise identified hazards/risks to a reasonably practicable level? **YES / NO** *Line Manager MUST be consulted if identified hazards/risk cannot be reduced enough to enable task to be carried out safely.*	Name: Date of assessment: Date of review:

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Produced by

County Health and Safety Team
and Dorset Design
County Hall Colliton Park
Dorchester Dorset DT1 1XJ

Printed by

Dorset County Council
Printing Services
Unit F3 Marabout Industrial Estate
Dorchester Dorset DT1 1YA

Dorset County Council March 2006

dd02425