Developing a Lone Worker Policy

Note: Every workplace and worker is unique, so it's important to develop a policy that fits your specific needs. Start with a hazard assessment to identify risks, then tailor your policy to address them. To help, we've included standard check-in procedures that can be adapted to your situation. A customized approach ensures safety and supports a productive work environment.

What is a Lone Worker?

Working Alone-Per OSHA: A person is "alone" at work when they are on their own, such as when they cannot be seen or heard by another person. It is essential to consider all situations carefully. Working alone includes all employees who may go for a period where they work in isolated locations or isolation.

High-Risk Activities: Work that places an individual at an increased risk of physical harm, uses potentially dangerous machinery, or exposes the individual to a hazardous location or material.

What are examples in local government?

- Water and wastewater employees who work at a remote treatment plant or pump station by themselves.
- Equipment operators for county road departments
- Environmental inspectors working on remote inspections
- Home health care aides/Public health
- Parks, golf courses, cemeteries, and conservation employees working in remote areas
- Vehicle mechanics
- Hazardous materials technicians working at storage facilities

Why is a Policy Necessary?

Employees who work alone can be exposed to risks such as falling, chemical exposures, personal attacks or equipment/facility malfunction that could render them unable to call for help.

The purpose of a lone worker policy is to:

1. Try to reduce or eliminate potential hazards that workers may face while performing their tasks in isolated locations or isolation.
2. Develop a check-in system for the employee to ensure everything is OK.

Prohibited Activities for Lone Workers: *(includes but not limited to)*

- Permit-required confined space entries
- Working on energized electrical conductors or equipment
- Power line hazards: Using a vehicle, crane, or similar equipment near a live power line where any part of the equipment or its load can contact the live power line
- Use of supplied air respiratory equipment or self-contained breathing apparatus
- Risk of drowning
- Welding operation where a fire watcher is required
- Tree felling or bucking logs
- Based on the risk assessment conducted by the supervisor, tasks are deemed to require more than one person

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Check-in Procedures

It is crucial to account for individuals who are working alone. Medium- and high-risk working-alone activities should require a check-in procedure to be established. Consider the following factors when developing a check-in procedure:

Step 1
Determine who will be the primary contact person and a backup individual. Ensure the designated contact person is willing to participate and knows the procedure if they cannot contact you.

Step 2
Determine if a verbal check-in is adequate or if the employee is accounted for by a visual check.

Step 3
Define under what circumstances the lone employee will check in and how often. The frequency of the communication increases as the risk of the activity increases. The schedule must be determined and communicated to the lone worker and the contact person.

Step 4
Have the lone worker call the designated contact individual at the beginning and completion of the activity. If using time-sensitive codes, make sure they punch in and out.

Step 5
Have the contact person call or visit the lone employee periodically to ensure everything is okay. You should have a written log of contact.

Step 6
Develop an emergency action plan if contact with the lone worker is not achieved within a specific timeframe.

Hazard Assessment

The employer should work with employees who perform tasks in isolation or isolated locations to determine the significant risks associated with that task. Once all exposures are identified, the employer and employee can develop a mitigation plan to reduce or eliminate the risk. For example, if an employee will be checking a water plant by themselves on the weekend during the winter when a risk of ice and snow can result in a serious fall, has the employee been provided with slip-resistant footwear?

In some cases, the risk may be high enough to prohibit carrying out the activity by a lone worker. See the section entitled, Prohibited Activities for Lone Workers.

Common hazards include gas or chemical exposure, slips and falls, electrocution, and equipment accidents.

Communications/Tracking

Depending on the location, strength of signal, and resources, the plan should identify the most effective means of communication that can be used for each situation. Some examples include:

- Cell phones
- Radios
- Texting or email
- GPS time tracking
- Time-sensitive code entries

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