Lone Working Risk Assessment Guidance Notes

This note provides guidance for those completing the Lone Working Risk Assessment Form. This guidance note should be read in conjunction with Notes to General Risk Assessment, a guidance document which outlines the general principles of risk assessment. In addition, reference should be made to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) Guidance Leaflet 'Working Alone in Safety - Controlling the Risks of Solitary Work' (INDG73 (rev)).

Lone working is not covered by any specific piece of legislation, however a wide range of legislation may apply depending on the nature of the work involved. The Health and Safety at Work etc Act and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations will apply in all instances.

What is lone working:

Lone workers are those who work by themselves without close or direct supervision. This may include those who work alone in a specific area or building (e.g. shop-workers, home-workers, cleaners, security, library workers, etc) or may include mobile workers, who work alone but in a number of locations (e.g. maintenance, tradespersons, cleaning supervisors, drivers, Staff / Students carrying out research surveys, those who visit external organisations, i.e. home visitors, school liaison personnel)

Hazard Identification:

Identify all the hazards specific to the lone working activity; evaluate the risks (low / medium / high); describe all existing control measures and identify any further measures required.

Specific hazards should be assessed on a separate risk assessment form and cross-referenced with this document where appropriate. Specific assessments are available for hazardous substances, biological agents, display screen equipment, manual handling operations and fieldwork. Refer to the Risk Assessments section of the website.

Some hazards to consider may include:

Workplace: Identify hazards specific to the workplace / environment, which may create particular risks for lone workers, e.g. remote areas, laboratories, workshops, confined spaces. Consider access requirements, transport and parking arrangements, etc.

- Process: Identify hazards specific to the work process, which may create particular risks for lone workers, e.g. work on electrical systems, cryogenic gases, work in the community.

- Equipment: Identify hazards specific to the work equipment, which may create particular risks for lone workers, e.g. manual handling, operation of essential / emergency controls.

- Violence: Identify the potential risk of violence. Is there a history of violence or threats to Staff?

- Individual: Identify hazards specific to the individual, which may create particular risks for lone workers e.g. medical conditions, disabilities, gender, expectant mothers, age, inexperienced, etc.

- Work Pattern: Consider the lone worker's work pattern and how it relates to those of other workers, in terms of both time and geography.

- Other: Specify any additional hazards particular to the lone work.

Control measures:

Identify existing control methods, assess their effectiveness and specify any additional controls that may be necessary. Consider alternative work methods, training, supervision, protective equipment / devices, etc.

Some measures to consider may include:

- specific information, instruction and training (e.g. emergency procedures, out-of-hours procedures, personal safety training, etc).

- increased communication systems / procedures (e.g. regular pre-arranged contact by e.g. mobile phone)

- increased supervision

- increased security (e.g. cctv, secure access, personal alarms)

- increased lighting at entrances, exits, car parks

Persons at Risk:

Identify all those who may be at risk. It is important that these individuals are made aware of the outcome of the risk assessment and informed of all necessary control measures.

Training:

Identify the level and extent of training required, taking into account the nature of the lone working activity. Consider the knowledge and experience of individuals, particularly young and new workers. Lone workers should be given information to deal with normal everyday situations but should also understand when and where to seek guidance or assistance from others, i.e. unusual or threatening situations, etc.

Supervision:

The extent of supervision required will depend upon the level of risks involved and the ability and experience of the lone worker. A few examples of supervisory measures which may be useful in some circumstances, include:

- Periodic telephone contact with lone workers,

- Periodic site visits to lone workers,

- Regular contact (telephone, radio, etc),

- Automatic warning devices, e.g., motion sensors, etc.,

- Manual warning devices, e.g., panic alarms, etc.,

- End of task / shift contact (i.e. returning keys)

Additional information:

Identify any additional information relevant to the lone worker, including emergency procedures, out-of-hours contact details, first aid provisions, etc.

Recording of assessment details:

It is important that schools maintain records of risk assessments for inspection. Obtaining a signature from individuals to confirm that they have read and understood the information contained in the risk assessment is advised and should be implemented at the discretion of each school.

Example:

The following example is taken from the Education Service Advisory Committee (ESAC) / Health and Safety Executive (HSE) publication 'Managing health and safety aspects of research in higher and further education'.

A psychology school conducts interviews with members of the public who are paid for their time. Researchers interview the subjects alone, sometimes in sound-proofed rooms. If a researcher came to any harm it could be several days before his/her absence was noted. Action taken includes:

- The supervisor assesses the risks involved in the project. Although there has never been an incident affecting personal safety, the supervisor consults with researchers and safety representatives and identifies a number of possible improvements.

- The head of school sanctions changes to the way subjects are selected for interview, introducing a 'registered participant panel' which involves obtaining more detailed information from the participant.

- The university Council provides financial support to allow the school to provide a waiting room, which would prevent people from having general access to the premises, and to integrate the school's office and interview facilities. This means that there would always be somebody in the vicinity of the interview rooms to help in an emergency. In the

longer term the university is to consider further security measures for the school.

Sources of guidance and advice:

- Working Alone in Safety, Ref: IND G 73 (rev), Health and Safety Executive.

- The Suzy Lamplugh Trust offers a range of free and priced publications providing guidance on various aspects of personal safety in the workplace including lone working.

- Safety Guidelines, Committee for the Study and Prevention of Violence Against Social Workers. National Association of Social Workers, USA.

- Violence at Work, Ref: IND G 69, Health and Safety Executive.