Lone Worker: Risk Assessment

Lone workers are isolated from others by time, distance or area configuration. They aren't closely or directly supervised and may not be able to get immediate assistance. It's CRITICAL that lone workers think about the things that can go wrong and plan accordingly.

Risk Assessment
Risk assessments:
- Identify hazards and how likely they are to cause harm
- Are the first step in deciding how to prevent or control hazards
- Should account for normal work and foreseeable emergencies
- Are both formal and dynamic
- Consider tasks, locations and personnel
- May be digital or on paper

Formal risk assessments document what we know about the hazards, risks and precautions typically associated with the work. They use insight, history and experience to predict potential hazards.

Work situations are dynamic; they constantly change. When new risks occur to us, we need to assess them to determine if we need new precautions. **Dynamic risk assessment** refers to the assessment of risks as they occur to us. Lone workers should account for any new information about hazards and controls when they arrive at the site and update the risk assessment before, during and after the work.

Employers may require lone workers to talk to a supervisor when plans change. All employees have the authority and responsibility to stop work if unacceptable risks are present or if they have concerns or questions about safety.

Lone workers should update risk assessments after the work is complete. Note any concerns, near-misses or incidents. To improve future risk assessments, supervisors may ask follow-up questions

Task, Tool and Resource Considerations
Lone workers must think about the tasks they will perform, the tools they will use and the materials with which they will work when they consider possible hazards. Lone workers may need tools, equipment and materials; personal protective equipment (PPE); and safe transportation.

Consider any historic data or reports and the experience of others when assessing risks associated with tasks, tools and resources. This includes personal experience and the collective experience of the company or industry. Even experienced lone workers can benefit from the perspectives of others!

Resources for information may include near-miss and incident reports; safety procedures; chemical safety data sheets (SDSs); and input from safety representatives; supervisors; and site experts and owners.

Location Considerations

Lone workers should consider hazards where they are going and hazards along the way, such as ice walkways, traffic and fog, dense vegetation and rough terrain. Check the weather forecast to plan for storms, temperature extremes and other adverse conditions. Consider communication quality including if lone workers may charge devices and how weak signals may be in some areas.

Consider how to access and secure facilities and how to describe the location, using an address or coordinates, in an emergency.

Are animals, insects or plants present? Are there any disease outbreaks, crime patterns or civil unrest in the area?

Personal Considerations

All lone workers should have appropriate training regarding tasks, hazards and emergency procedures. Inexperienced lone workers should have access to advice or guidance.

Lone workers may need to accommodate impairments such as to their vision or hearing. Consider the health conditions that may affect the lone workers, such as asthma, allergies or family histories of heart attack or stroke.

Using Check-Ins to Monitor Lone Worker Safety

Employers must monitor the safety of lone workers. The risk assessment should identify the safety monitoring plan, methods and frequency. The risk assessment should also identify emergency procedures.

Before they leave, lone workers should submit details of their itinerary including routes, contacts and times to their supervisors or personnel who will monitor their safety. Keep records of detailed vehicle descriptions. If lone workers are traveling over great distances or long periods of time, ensure safe and adequate accommodations.

Lone workers should notify their supervisors any time they deviate from a planned itinerary.

Monitoring the safety of lone workers often involves a lone worker "checking in" with a supervisor or designated person using an audio or video call, a radio, an email or a mobile application. Employers may also monitor the safety of lone workers using technology such as motion sensors or a global positioning system (GPS).

Monitoring communication devices may include an emergency alert option that lone workers can quickly press to get help.

ALL these methods of monitoring for safety require power and connectivity of some kind. Test them and plan backup methods of checking in, as needed.

Employers may require check-ins from lone workers at certain frequencies or milestones. Safety monitoring devices may transmit status in real-time.

Failure to check-in will trigger emergency procedures. Lone workers should keep their emergency contact information up to date with their employers.