## SCC_logo_75pxWorking alone safely

This document forms part of Somerset County Council’s corporate health and safety policy [manual](http://extranet.somerset.gov.uk/health-and-safety/policies-forms/), which is available on the [CHSU website](http://extranet.somerset.gov.uk/health-and-safety/) and iPost.

Services may supplement this policy with their own specific guidance. Please check Section 5 (Links) for details.

1. [Purpose of Policy](#Policy)
2. [Responsibilities](#TWO)
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7. Purpose of Policy

Many SCC employees work alone for a proportion of their working time. When working alone could put their health or safety at risk, we must assess and control these risks. This document sets out how this should be done.

It explains what must be done to ensure that workable local arrangements are implemented that allow employees to carry out their functions in a safe manner, while working alone.

It gives guidelines to managers on carrying out these responsibilities, including a checklist for doing a risk assessment. There are factsheets on some of the possible control measures, e.g. communication with employees, personal safety measures.

Please note that the related subject of work-related violence is covered in policy [HS 011](http://extranet.somerset.gov.uk/health-and-safety/policies-forms/).

2 Responsibilities

* 1. Somerset County Council will:
* offer training courses in risk assessment
* provide suitable guidance in assessing the risk of lone working situations

2.2 Service Directors will:

* ensure that all potentially hazardous lone working situations are identified, appropriate risk assessments undertaken, safe systems of work introduced and employees are provided with the necessary information, instruction and training
* identify any work activities where regulations prohibit lone working
* ensure that risk assessments are undertaken by people competent in risk assessment (training is provided by the Corporate Health and Safety Unit)

2.3 Managers will:

* make written assessments of the risks from working alone, using the SCC risk assessment form ([HS F04](http://extranet.somerset.gov.uk/health-and-safety/policies-forms/)), noting all current and proposed control measures
* if the risk is identified as **high** (and therefore normally unsuitable for lone working)
* pass the assessment to their Director
* provide alternative arrangements for backup or support
* if the risk is identified as **medium**
* pass the assessment to their Strategic Manager / Headteacher for approval
* establish, supervise and regularly review the effectiveness of, written safe systems of work
* ensure that any equipment and communications systems designed to protect the lone worker or provide effective supervision, eg mobile phones, personal alarms or CCTV, are:
* correctly installed and used
* maintained in good working order
* regularly tested to ensure they are working properly.
* develop an appropriate system so they can ensure they can locate and communicate with their employees while working alone in a potentially risky situation
* ensure that workers who work alone:
* have full knowledge of the hazards and risks to which he or she is being exposed
* know what to do if something goes wrong
* understand and observe the procedures or safe systems of work
* receive any training (as indicated in the risk assessment), e.g. in the the relevant aspects of personal safety, in the safe use of any equipment

2.4 Workers will:

* take reasonable care of their own safety and that of others and not put themselves in danger
* follow any personal safety practices outlined by management
* co-operate with managers in implementing the safe systems of work identified in lone working risk assessments
* comply with all relevant policies and attend training as appropriate
* use any safety/communication equipment at the appropriate time and in the appropriate manner and follow the procedures for the use of this equipment
* report unsafe activities or faulty equipment to their manager
* report new or previously unidentified lone working situations to their manager
* report any accidents, incidents of violence, aggression or near misses (e.g. where a situation may have escalated into an actual violent incident) using the guidance in policy [HS 003](http://extranet.somerset.gov.uk/health-and-safety/policies-forms/) .
1. Managers’ guide to Working Alone Safely
	1. [What is ‘lone working’?](#THREEONE)
	2. [An audit of lone working](#THREETWO)
	3. [When do I need to assess the risks?](#THREETHREE)
	4. [Who can carry out a lone working risk assessment?](#THREEFOUR)
	5. [How do I assess the risks?](#THREEFIVE)
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3.1 What is lone working?

Working alone (or ‘lone working’) can mean either:

* working in a fixed establishment with nobody else on site, or when others may be elsewhere on the site
* working in a remote location, including outdoors
* work on other employers' premises or working from home
* travelling in the course of work.

Lone working can be a defining characteristic of a job, or simply circumstances in which workers may sometimes find themselves. For instance, in every workplace there will always be somebody who is the first to arrive, and somebody who is the last to leave.

Likewise, a worker may have to go to a storeroom to collect items unaccompanied. In these circumstances, the individual is a ‘lone worker’ in the strict definition of the term, even though the risks involved are very low.

Therefore, when considering this subject, it is important to distinguish between the chance or random occurrence of finding oneself on one’s own, and work which is specifically intended to be carried out in isolation, and may last for some time.

Lone working is often not recognised. If lone workers are out of sight, they may be out of mind when other risk assessments are conducted. They may be forgotten or slip through the safety net. This guidance and accompanying risk assessment form have been designed so this does not happen.

3.2 Lone working audit

Firstly, managers must do a preliminary audit to determine:

* **when** and **where** lone working is taking place
* **who** is working alone
* **what** work lone workers are doing
* where lone working risk assessments are needed.

3.3 When do I need to do lone working risk assessments?

### Lone working risk assessments[[1]](#footnote-1) are needed:

* When working alone introduces significant risks into the activity

**Lone working risk assessments are *not* needed:**

* In the following circumstances, when lone working is not legally permissible.

* Young people undergoing training (high standards for supervision exist, see [www.hse.gov.uk/youngpeople/index.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/youngpeople/index.htm) for further information.)
* Working in confined spaces
* Working on ladders that cannot be secured
* Working near exposed live conductors and some other electrical work
* Working with some hazardous chemicals (as detailed by the relevant COSHH assessment or safety data sheet, see HS 008 for more information).
* When the lone working does not introduce significant extra risks. For example, when in most situations when employees are simply driving for work, and it is predominantly during work hours. (However, managers do have duties here to control the risks from driving, if not necessarily the lone working aspects).

3.4 Who can carry out a lone working risk assessment?

Like with any other risk assessment, the person carrying it should be ‘competent’ to do so. This means that the assessor:

* Has an understanding of the relevant regulations
* Has a knowledge of the work activities, environment and risk factors to be assessed
* Is aware of any relevant individual factors and limitations
* Is able to recognise particular risks
* Is able to recommend reasonably practicable solutions
* Can judge what constitutes an acceptable risk.

The Corporate Health and Safety Unit provides training courses in risk assessment. Contact 01823 355495 for further information.

3.5 How do I do a risk assessment for working alone?

You should complete the Risk Assessment Form for [Working Alone Safely (form HS F09)](http://extranet.somerset.gov.uk/health-and-safety/policies-forms/), consulting with the people who actually carry out the work.

It may not be necessary to answer every question on the form. If a question is not relevant, just leave it blank.

The final column in the form is the ‘risk rating’. You can answer this in either of two ways:

* By answering “high”, “medium” or “low”
* By inputting the risk rating number.[[2]](#footnote-2)

### Table 1 : What does the risk rating mean?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Risk rating  | Risk level | **Can lone working go ahead?** |
| 1-8 | Low risk | Yes |
| 9-12 | Medium risk | **Refer to your local procedures.** You must get your risk assessment approved and signed by your Group or Establishment Manager. |
| 15 or over | High risk | Normally no. If there are special considerations why this activity has to go ahead by a lone worker, you must get approval from your Director. |

3.6 Examples of possible control measures

Where the risk assessment has identified significant risks, control measures need to be introduced that:

1. address risks at the source
2. that reduce risks to the lowest that is reasonably possible, if they cannot be removed completely
3. prevent lone workers being exposed to foreseeable risks, or minimise exposure if the risks cannot be avoided entirely
4. enable lone workers to deal with any problems, eg threats of violence, should they be encountered.

A number of precautions can be taken to reduce the risks of working alone, as listed below:

a) Ensuring effective management and supervision

* effective risk management arrangements
* monitoring workers’ activities and whereabouts as appropriate when away from base
* appropriate levels of support and assistance and prompt response
* site visits involving two people to locations, homes or people where services are to be delivered
* incident reporting systems and systems for reporting incidents away from base
* co-operating with host employers, employment agencies and contractors
* monitoring incident records and information provided by community safety officers regarding risks of violence
* including homeworkers and lone mobile workers in display screen equipment (DSE), manual handling, fire and COSHH assessments
* periodic site visits and workplace inspections
* consultation with lone workers and their representatives
* ensuring lone workers are included in staff meetings and communications, wherever they are based

b) Ensuring a safe system of work

* extra precautions for lone workers carrying out hazardous activities, or specific controls on when, where and how those activities take place if working alone
* preventive measures to avoid manual handling injuries, such as equipment at outreach sites to enable lifting operations to be carried out by the lone worker
* effective communications systems for lone workers

c) Providing information, instruction, and training for workers and managers

* develop a lone working policy
* permission for lone workers to remove themselves from situations in which they feel unsafe due to threats of violence
* raising awareness of the risks to lone workers of stress-related illness and violence at work and what can be done to prevent them
* training in use of protective equipment or communication systems designed for lone workers’ protection
* information about fire instructions and emergency procedures for lone workers away from base
* explicit instructions to all workers about prohibited lone working activities

d) Ensuring workplace health, safety and welfare

* avoiding or minimising lone working in unoccupied premises
* first aid and welfare provisions for all workers, including lone workers, accessible at all times
* including lone workers in fire drills, emergency procedures and fire risk assessments
* adequate security and monitoring arrangements for lone workers, including protective barriers and communications systems (with responders) if appropriate

e) Ensuring safety for remote working (off site, between sites, in the community)

* effective supervision of lone workers through use of personal protective equipment (PPE), surveillance and communications systems, checks on lone workers’ safe arrival/return, etc if necessary
* effective personal safety plans and back-up systems for lone workers with named responders at all necessary times
* checks on sites, clients, locations and early warning systems to inform managers and lone workers of any known trouble spots and risks of violence, eg violent clients

f) Considering when people are working outside normal office hours

* avoiding the need for lone working at certain times
* adjusting start and finish times when working alone
* relocating the work to avoid it being done in isolation
* limiting or redistributing overtime and emergency duties, including on-call arrangements
* avoiding the need for lone working after hours in empty buildings
* avoiding lone working at hazardous times, eg late at night in places with public access or poor security
* adjusting working times and/or staffing levels or skill mix
* improving lighting and security at times of darkness and in remote areas
* ensuring safe access and exit at all times, including hours of darkness.

3.7 Training for employees on working alone safely

Managers should provide general training and information on the risks of working alone to all employees, since there may be times when they find themselves inadvertently working alone, eg in the unexpected absence of a colleague.

This general training should cover:

* what can and cannot be done when working alone
* how to deal with unusual situations
* when to stop work and seek advice or assistance from a supervisor or emergency service
* how and when to use any communications equipment provided
* procedures for checking back to base
* what to do in the event of an emergency or medical emergency
* where to locate first aid assistance and fire instructions.

4 Frequently asked questions

Q. We have a number of employees who often pay visits alone to clients in their homes. These staff members are issued with a mobile telephone, in case they get into difficulty but concern has been raised that this is not sufficient to ensure their health and safety. Could you suggest other measures that may be taken?

Working alone presents a unique health and safety problem since the workers have to take far more responsibility for ensuring their own health and safety. However, the legal responsibility of the employer to ensure the safety of lone workers does not differ at all from that to ensure the safety of employees working in a group or under close supervision.

The degree of risk encountered needs to be carefully assessed. In assessing it, it is important to look at the activity itself, the environment in which it takes place and the risks that arise from working alone, taking into account the vulnerability of solitary employees should an incident occur.

The risk assessment must determine what control measures are needed to reduce the risks to acceptable levels. Realistic and appropriate supervisory, monitoring and communication systems need to be developed as a means of checking the health and safety of the lone workers. Monitoring systems for lone workers considered to be at low risk might simply include a check at the end of the working day.

If a significant risk has been identified in the lone working, such monitoring systems should not rely upon the lone worker making contact when a problem arises, as this would be worthless in situations where, for example, the worker is unconscious or is being prevented from using the mobile telephone.

In higher risk scenarios, additional systems could be considered, including the following options:

* periodic visits by a supervisor to monitor lone workers visually
* regular contact being maintained by telephone or radio
* automatic warning devices activated if specific signals are not received periodically from the lone worker
* devices to raise the alarm in the event of an emergency (these can either be manually operated or automatically activated by the absence of activity).

Q. I like working alone. It gives me freedom of how I work. However, it feels like my manager is trying to ‘keep tabs’ on me.

Your manager has a duty to ensure that lone workers such as yourself always tell someone where they are going, who they are meeting and when they are expected to return. This is part of their legal requirement to ensure your safety as far as is reasonably practicable.

Some employees like the autonomy and freedom of how they work and resist attempts to nail down where they are and who they are seeing. However, their managers would be failing in their duty if they didn’t implement systems to find out your whereabouts during work time.

Like all other aspects of health and safety, this is a matter of co-operation between managers and employees. If a system is put in place to protect your safety, you have a duty as an employee to co-operate in its implementation.

Q. Some of my employees drive a fair amount. Are they ‘lone workers’?

The employer has a duty to assess and control the risks from all work activities, including driving for work. However, just because employees drive for work it doesn’t necessarily make them at significant risk due to the fact they are alone. It all depends on the circumstances, e.g. how much they drive, when they drive, where they drive (is it in remote locations, outside mobile phone coverage areas etc?).

It’s an area that should be looked at as part of the preliminary audit of lone working activities, [see section 3.2.](#THREETWO)

Consult document [HS 014 Use of personal vehicles at work](http://extranet.somerset.gov.uk/health-and-safety/policies-forms/) for further information about assessing and controlling the risks from driving at work.

Q. Are generic risk assessments acceptable?

For lone working situations, probably not. That is why we have written a specific risk assessment template for Working Alone Safely (form [HS F09](http://extranet.somerset.gov.uk/health-and-safety/policies-forms/)).

The purpose of a risk assessment is to identify hazards and risks associated with specific tasks carried out in specific work locations.

If all the tasks and all the locations are the same then one generic risk assessment should suffice for all activities. But, if either the task itself or the location differs in any way from place to place, then a “site specific” risk assessment will be needed.

Each remote job is different and the hazards and risk associated with it will vary accordingly, therefore a specific risk assessment should normally be undertaken for each type of job undertaken.

Generic risk assessments are often seen by enforcing authorities as mere “tick box” exercises which do not add much to the management of risk.

Remember, your risk assessment is to help you, as the manager, to prevent the likelihood of injury or ill-health to your employees. So, you really need to review exactly what your employees do and how they do it – not what you think they do!

5 Links

5.1 Internal SCC documents

* SCC Risk assessment form for Working Alone Safely (HS F09) <http://extranet.somerset.gov.uk/health-and-safety/policies-forms/>
* **Economic & Community Infrastructure Operations**: Working Alone risk assessment process: <http://enterprise.somerset.gov.uk/media/B78/71/Working_Alone.pdf>

5.2 External documents

* *Personal Safety Alone in the Workplace,* Suzy Lamplugh Trust., <http://www.suzylamplugh.org/personal-safety-tips/free-personal-safety-tips/working-alone/>
* *Personal Safety Alarms:* *how to choose and how to use:* Suzy Lamplugh Trust, [http://www.suzylamplugh.org/tips/alarms.shtml.](http://www.suzylamplugh.org/personal-safety-tips/free-personal-safety-tips/personal-alarms/)
* *Working Alone in Safety*, HSE: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg73.pdf>
* *Working Alone: a health and safety guide on lone working for safety representatives,* UNISON: <http://www.unison-uu.org.uk/792133.html>
* Diana Lamplugh/Barbara Pagan - ‘Personal Safety for Schools’ ISBN 1 85742 194 9
* Guidance for Safe Working Practice for the Protection of Children and Staff in Education Settings <http://extranet.somerset.gov.uk/EasysiteWeb/getresource.axd?AssetID=34130&servicetype=Attachment>

*Appendix 1 – Working Alone Safely Fact Sheet*

Staying safe while working alone

The Council has a responsibility to ensure our health and safety while we are working alone, but we all also have a duty to take reasonable care of ourselves. This fact sheet suggests how we can do that.

Know the risks

* Don’t go ahead until you have been informed of the risks and given any special training, support or supervision you may need
* If in doubt, ask your employer, host employer or safety representative

Know the job

* Do you have the experience to do it safely on your own?
* Don’t go ahead if you don’t know how to do the job, or don’t think it can be done safely on your own — talk to your line manager

Know the workplace

* Do you know how to get in and out of the workplace safely?
* Do you know how to call for help if you get into difficulty?
* Always check the fire instructions and know how to get in touch with other people in an emergency or if you need help

Avoid danger

* Put your own personal safety first.
* Avoid putting yourself or other people at risk
* Avoid escalating violence or threats of violence — if you can, walk away
* Always report threats, verbal abuse or other violent incidents — you are not expected to put yourself at risk
* Get help and advice
* Observe security precautions and procedures — don’t allow unauthorised people on site

Be alert to risks

* If something unexpected happens, be aware of any possible risks or threats to your health and safety or that of other people in your care
* If you are concerned about your safety or anyone else’s, seek help and advice
* Know what to do in an emergency

Manual handling

* Assess the load and plan the task — has it been assessed?
* Have you been trained to do the task single-handed, and are you medically fit to do it on your own?
* Are mechanical aids available? Can they be used safely by one person working alone?
* If it can’t be done safely alone, get help.

Dealing with the public

* Be aware of the risks.
* Know how to respond if you are threatened or attacked.
* Try to keep out of trouble by avoiding confrontation.
* Ask for training in handling difficult situations.

Working away from base

* Know how to get to your destination.
* Allow enough time for your journey if you are driving.
* Don’t take risks when driving.
* Don’t drive when tired.
* Report to base as required.
* Let others know you have arrived and returned safely.
* Make sure you know how to get help and what to do in the event of a fire or emergency.
* Report any problems to management.

Communications and protective equipment

* Know how to use communications equipment and alarms.
* Carry out any tests on equipment as required — make sure it is working.
* Ask for management guidance on how and when equipment should be used.
* Use communications systems and protective equipment correctly at all times.

Information

* Has the activity been risk assessed? Have you been informed of the findings?
* Have you got the necessary training and qualifications to do the job?
* Have you been informed of what to do in an emergency?
* Have you informed management of any problems with the job?
* Have you informed management of any health problems, disabilities or condition (ie pregnancy) that might affect the risks to your health and safety when working alone?
* Do you know how to report an accident or violent incident?
1. [F09](http://extranet.somerset.gov.uk/health-and-safety/policies-forms/) is the SCC risk assessment template for Working Alone Safely. See [HS 004](http://extranet.somerset.gov.uk/health-and-safety/policies-forms/) for general guidance about how to perform a risk assessment. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This process is explained in document [HS 004](http://extranet.somerset.gov.uk/health-and-safety/policies-forms/). In brief, it means that you multiply your assessment of the **hazard severity** (between 1 and 5), by the **likelihood of the harm** occurring (also between 1 and 5). This gives you a risk rating of between 1 and 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)