

MEMBER LONE WORKER GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE



Increasingly people are working remotely away from their office and are instead working out in the field or from a satellite office, home, or a vehicle. A worker may be considered remote or isolated even if other people may be close by. Work can be remote because of the nature of the work, location, and time, such as visiting clients, attending after hours call outs, working in remote areas, or responding to calls after hours at home. In some situations, a worker may be alone for a short period of time, while in other situations they may be on their own for days or weeks in a remote location. Working remotely can be either a large or small part of the job but it can be hazardous when assistance is not readily available to an employee in the event of an injury, ill health, or an emergency.

Lone workers include all employees who, as part of their duties, undertake isolated or remote work activities. This includes employees who may choose (with relevant approval) or may be required to conduct work outside of their normal contracted working hours (either before or after) in the office or in an alternative location.

In some cases, workers who work remotely are also working alone. Lone workers are those who work by themselves without close or direct supervision; for example, people who work away from their fixed base, or people who service customers. Whether a situation is high or low risk will depend on the location, type of work, interaction with the public, or the consequences of an emergency, accident, injury, etc. Given that there are a wide variety of situations where people can be working alone, it is important to assess each situation individually.

A remote location does not have to be far away, it can be a storage room that is rarely used. Key risk areas that should be considered when working remotely or in isolation are:

- the work environment
- work equipment
- working alone
- travelling
- physical and mental wellbeing, and
- responding to emergencies and natural disasters.

To manage remote and lone work conditions the following factors should be considered:

- the inability to communicate with someone, even though others may be close by, and how contact will be maintained e.g., working alone in an office in an otherwise populated area.
- the time of day at which the work is carried out.
- inaccessibility of the work area, e.g., those visiting remote clients or travelling through remote areas
- the hazard potential at the workplace, e.g., a location known for violence, a stretch of road known for car accidents or collisions with animals.
- the likelihood of others not being aware for some time if an undesirable event occurs.
- the anticipated delay in help being provided if an undesirable event occurs.

While risk must be determined on a case-by-case basis the following are examples of ways that the risks can be mitigated. This responsibility lies with both the employee and their direct manager as appropriate:

- Employees work calendar is up to date with the client's name and meeting details.
- As far as reasonably practicable, ensure access to first aid supplies when working alone.
- A charged mobile phone and emergency numbers are readily accessible.
- Agreement is made with the direct manager on the preferred method and regularity of check-ins, taking into consideration the potential risks faced.
- Advising your manager of the estimated time that you will cease working alone e.g., what time you intend to leave the office after hours or when you expect to arrive at a client's premises.
- Advising your manager of any circumstances that will prevent you from meeting your scheduled check-in.
- Advising a client of the estimated arrival time so they can follow-up if you have not arrived on schedule.
- If employees feel they are going to be entering a potentially hazardous situation they are to discuss the situation with their manager or supervisor to determine if the meeting should proceed.
- Employees undertaking lone work have access to Master Electricians Employee Assistance Programme. – <https://www.masterelectricians.org.nz/support-and-benefits/access-eap/>
- Evaluate what time of the day work is being carried out to ensure reduced risk to the employee.
- An employee working alone has access to the following, plus emergency phone numbers including the roadside assistance:
 - Mobile phone with appropriate network coverage and vehicle charger and/or access to a landline phone.
 - First aid kit and fire extinguisher.

Long distance (i.e., more than 2 hours) work related driving should be performed during the day, not when it is dark, if possible, to reduce the potential for fatigue. Stay at overnight accommodation rather than driving at night.

Evaluate that an employee travelling through remote or otherwise inaccessible area has:

- A vehicle suited to the driving conditions along with any safety equipment that may be required such as snow chains.
- Advised their direct manager and the end client of their intended arrival and departure times and advise when they have arrived safely.
- Investigate known potential hazards and take action to reduce the likelihood of incidents and near misses by:
 - Participating in Health & Safety training, meetings inductions and procedures.
 - Avoiding being alone or being involved in any confrontation in areas known for potential violence, including locking vehicle doors, and having a mobile phone available.
 - Follow all road rules, speed limits, advisory/roadwork signs and line markings and be particularly vigilant on roads known for accidents and collisions with animals.

Arrange regular check-ins when working alone so that other parties will be aware if a check-in is missed and can then alert relevant internal officers and/or emergency services that an undesirable event may have occurred.

Any party aware of a potential incident or near miss must alert their direct manager and/or emergency services (as appropriate) as soon as possible. Any incidents must be documented with an incident report.

ORGANISATIONAL AND INDIVIDUAL RISKS

It is also important to look at the risks from the perspective of both the organisation and the individual worker. The main risk assessment issues that need to be considered from the perspective of the individual worker are:

Security: working remotely in isolated areas may put a worker at increased risk from verbal or physical abuse from other people that they interact with.

Social isolation: workers working remotely, particularly if they are operating alone, are at risk of social isolation. Managers should endeavor to ensure that there are regular opportunities to keep in touch and to bring the person together with the rest of the team (even if this is by email, telephone conferences, video conferences etc.).

Organisation isolation: workers working remotely should receive the same information, level of consultation and training and development opportunities as other workers. Managers should invite these workers to attend when there are events, both social and work-related.

Technological isolation: workers working in remote or isolated areas should have access to the same or more advanced technology as other workers (depending on the job requirements).

Safety: the workers' physical safety will depend on their job tasks. For example, a maintenance/service electrician working in the field may have different risks compared to an administrator working remotely but both situations present risks. However, if something goes wrong or if there is an accident or an emergency etc. assistance should be readily available irrespective of the type of job being undertaken.

Isolate before going Up or Under: Far too many serious shock accidents and fatalities have occurred due to damaged electrical installations in roof spaces and crawl spaces under houses. Consider introducing an *Isolate before going Up or Under Policy*. In Western Australia, it is illegal to enter the ceiling cavity in residential premises if the power has not been isolated.

In most buildings, the ceiling space is where electrical wiring for lights, sockets, air-conditioning and other electrical equipment runs. Any time a person is working in ceiling space they are at risk of being shocked.

The presence of solar panels is another factor that must be considered. As they generate power separate from the mains and are connected to the roof, they can pose a risk of electrocution or shocks.

Similarly, when working in ceiling spaces there is also a risk of falling through ceilings. Heat stress can also be a health concern, as in summer temperatures in ceiling spaces can exceed 50 degrees due to the heat from the roof.

Dust, moulds, and vermin are also common in ceilings and must be considered. For older homes asbestos could also be present.

While isolating power in the ceiling is not yet a legal requirement in New Zealand it should be considered as best practice.

TIPS FOR WORKING IN CEILING SPACE

To avoid electrocution:

- Switch off supply to area before you touch, move or physically disturb any electrical wiring, cable or junction box connection.
- Only attempt electrical work or tasks where you have the required skills or qualifications.

To avoid heat-related illness you must:

- determine the safe entry time by assessing the temperature, through feeling for and/or measuring heat, before entering the space
- ensure all workers are trained in heat-risk awareness and how to recognise heat stress symptoms in themselves and their workmates.

Other safety considerations include:

- eliminating or minimising the danger from vermin or insect activity before entry into the roof / ceiling space
- using crawl boards to walk across ceiling space
- ensuring your entry and exit points are easily accessible
- stabilising and securing ladders to avoid slipping when being used
- using appropriate personal protective equipment.