

Devon County Council Health and Safety

Policy on Lone Working

Links: This policy forms part of the Devon County Council Health and Safety Policy

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1. Introduction

Many Devon County Council employees are required to work alone or unsupervised as part of their normal day-to-day work. While this is generally accepted as appropriate, working alone can put people in a vulnerable position, therefore it is essential that systems are put in place to reduce any increased risk due to lone working. It should be emphasised however, that although Lone Workers may face higher risks, it is important that these risks are not over-exaggerated, as this can have a detrimental effect, by engendering an unnecessary perception of fear amongst staff that is disproportionate to the reality.

1.1 Definition of Lone Working

In line with The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) a Lone Worker is defined as:

“Any person who works by themselves without close or direct supervision”.

In effect this describes a wide variety of staff who work, either regularly or only occasionally, on their own, and without access to immediate support from managers or other colleagues. To be classed as working alone does not mean that the person has to be working in complete isolation all of the time i.e., a cleaner may be working in one section of the building, whilst other staff may be elsewhere. (See also Appendix 1 – *Persons who may be classified as Lone Workers*)

Most people at sometime during their normal work role will be engaged in a solo activity out of sight or sound of others, such as being the last to leave an office. Although due caution is required in such situations, more steps are needed for increasing the safety of staff such as receptionists, peripatetic teachers, social workers, domiciliary care workers, care standards officers and environment inspectors in fact all staff who by necessity work alone to carry out their duties.

2. Policy Aim and Principles

The Council will, so far as is reasonably practicable, ensure that:

- Employees who are required to work alone or unsupervised are protected from risks to their health and safety
- The risk to employee's health and safety are identified by suitable and sufficient risk assessment and where appropriate by the introduction of control measures to eliminate the risk or reduce the risk to an acceptable level or within statutory requirements
- Employees who believe themselves to be in serious or imminent danger and for reason of their own or other person's safety, remove themselves to a place of safety, will be supported by the Council
- Employees should be suitably trained before being expected to work alone

Therefore the aim of this policy is to reduce the risks towards Devon County Council staff, when working alone. This policy is designed to be as comprehensive as possible, but inevitably it cannot cater for every situation that may occur within a working environment. With this in mind, it should be used as a template from which local procedures and systems to protect Lone Workers should be developed, revised or enhanced – but which, in addition, reflects the local needs of staff and environments within which they have to work.

For this to happen, there are three guiding principles within this policy:

1. The Lone Worker has the full knowledge of the hazards to which he or she is being exposed.
2. The Lone Worker knows what to do if something untoward goes wrong.

3. Someone else knows the whereabouts of the Lone Worker and what he or she is doing, and there will be support or follow-up if needed.

For these three principles to be sustained, managers need to formally assess the safety needs of their staff and put in place a control strategy commensurate with the risk (action plan). Support for the strategy needs to include having established 'reporting in' systems, having a way to determine if a person has not finished work safely, and a well established follow-up procedure if it is needed.

3. Background and Context

3.1. Legislative Framework

Regulation 3 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (MHSWR), places a duty on the Council to make an assessment of the risks involved with all work activities. This policy forms part of the Devon County Council Health and Safety Policy, and is intended to complement and support local, service or directorate lone working policies or procedures.

In some cases the law requires that at least two people must be involved in some of the work, and specifies the safe system to be followed, e.g., working in confined spaces, working on live electrical systems, working at heights and some moving and handling tasks etc. The risk assessment carried out on all lone working tasks may also identify the need for two workers to ensure a safe system of work. The law may also stipulate supervision to be provided e.g., for young people, trainees, and new staff.

4. Eligibility and Scope

4.1 Defined Working Limits

Managers and supervisors, with input from frontline staff and the lone workers, are to establish clear procedures to set limits of what can and cannot be done whilst working alone. Clearly this is impossible to define in general terms, but the general precautions principle of – "if in doubt, ask your manager or supervisor" must be advocated.

4.2 Application

This policy applies to all staff working for Devon County Council including those on temporary or honorary contracts, those working mainly for other organisations but on Council premises, and visitors on the Council's behalf.

5. Operational Requirements

5.1 Responsibilities

As stated earlier it is not practicable to produce an all encompassing procedure which will cover each directorate, department or employment task. Therefore departments and directorates when producing their own policies or procedures accounting for their working patterns and practices must include the following minimum requirements:

- i. A requirement to maintain a log of those who are working alone. This may take any suitable form of record, electrical or manual, but should include the following;
 - Name they use or prefer to be called
 - Working itinerary or location
 - Contact number where they can be reached during the working time

Duration of Lone Working time, e.g. time of departure and expected time of return

- ii. Method of monitoring the log through the working day and the action to be taken for those still out working at the end of the working day.
- iii. A contingency plan for action to be taken in the event of staff not returning at the due time or summons/requests assistance.
- iv. The procedure for those working from home and also outside normal hours and at weekends and public holidays.
- v. Guidance on arranging and making a visit and any follow-up action that may be required.

Senior Management of the business unit, school, home, service or directorate are responsible for ensuring that more specific procedures for lone working are developed where appropriate, that the necessary training is available and attended, and that required safety measures are resourced. When this cannot occur, measures such as 'doubling up' of staff, or delaying visits or tasks, will need to be considered.

Line Managers are responsible for ensuring that:

- Suitable and sufficient risk assessments are carried out to consider the potential hazards and risks to which the Lone Worker may be exposed. This assessment will include the task involved, the working conditions, the environment, equipment, any substances being used, the time, and any members of the public that the employee may encounter or is visiting. (*See Appendix 2 – Possible Hazards*)
- Assessing the physical capability of the staff member to carry out lone working in respect of experience, training, physical state (i.e., being pregnant or suffering from any medical condition that could place themselves or others at risk).
- The person concerned has received sufficient information and training and is provided with all of the necessary tools and protective equipment and clothing, e.g. disposable gloves, head/eye protection, fluorescent and or waterproof clothing and gloves.
- Emergency arrangements are in place and known to all relevant staff.

Employees who work alone need to:

- Ensure that someone knows their location or itinerary including the vehicle being used, and their expected time of return ensuring they use the signing in/out arrangements at their place of work.
- Inform appropriately of unexpected changes of plans.
- Comply with signing in/out arrangements at all sites visited
- Always report any incidents or potential hazards. Report any breakages or damage to protective equipment.
- Comply with safe working practices/procedures developed, giving input to updating risk assessments especially if changes are made which increase the risk.

5.2 Partnership Working

Staff working in partnership organisation premises must have the full back-up and protection of their lone working procedures, in consultation with the Council, to a sufficient standard for there to be emergency contact if the employee requests or requires it or goes missing. If necessary there will be a Council back-up for these staff.

6. Information and Training

Within the Council there is a need to share information about problem locations, dangerous people, and potential or dangerous situations. Therefore an establishment of safety systems where details of these known potential dangerous people and situations are kept for reference by managers and team leaders. This information can be shared under joint protocols with partnership agencies.

Management will need skills in risk assessment, giving support and finding systemic causes of incidents using accident/incident investigation skills. A comprehensive understanding of the manager's/supervisor's role and responsibilities in not only assessing the risk but providing the support systems and post incident activity together with learning from past incidents.

Training for Lone Workers needs to be commensurate with the risk involved, how to work alone safely, and whatever the context, employing the safe systems of work, and a good practical knowledge and understanding in the use of all security technology employed.

7. Safe Working Systems and Back-up Technology

All staff are to carry out their own personal Risk Assessment before and during any activity which involves working alone. They should make themselves aware of any risk assessment and safe system of work or control measure instructed for that particular activity or situation. If during a lone working activity the worker believes themselves to be in serious or imminent danger and, for reasons of their own or another person's safety, remove themselves to a place of safety, will be supported by the Council.

Technology can play a part in helping to protect Lone Workers; however, it is also clear that technology can only be effective if it works alongside clear and robust procedures. Communication needs to be adequate for the risks involved and easily utilised. The following are examples of technology to be considered for the risk assessed: - mobile phone, pager, personal or screech alarm, hand held or vehicle two way radios and the 'Pronto' '38' system. Additional technology could include:- Internal alert systems activated from static panic buttons; internal alert systems activated from fobs; fixed panic buttons linked to Police stations and Lifeline facility activated from a pendant worn round the neck.

There can be agreed 'Code' or 'key words' for each directorate or department and used that will help Lone Workers convey the nature of the 'threat' so that the appropriate response can be provided. Other local systems can be developed to reduce risk. Training in the use of the technology used is essential.

8. Monitoring

Managers are to monitor the effectiveness of measures implemented as a result of the risk assessment process to find out how successful they have been. This will allow managers to identify those control measures and strategies that are not working, or which have unforeseen consequences, and modify them where appropriate. This can be achieved by:-

- Managers checking that systems and procedures are working, without waiting until something goes wrong.
- Managers need to investigate all incidents and near misses so that everyone involved can learn from the experience. However, managers will not be able to investigate unless there is an effective reporting and recording system which is understood and supported by all.

Incidents will be reported to the Directorate Health and Safety Team and annually to the Central Health Safety and Welfare Committee. Effectiveness of this policy can be measured by continuous low prevalence, or increasingly lower prevalence over time, of incidents involving lone workers. The policy will be reviewed every three years by the Corporate Health and Safety Team.

9. Additional Precautions and Procedure Development

The precautions will reflect the degree of risk identified in the assessment. Where the risk is significant such measures are to form a safe working procedure. Different or additional control measures may exist to protect employees working alone during normal working hours to those working outside of these hours e.g. evenings or weekends.

A basic log out/in procedure is to be observed to ensure that all lone workers are identified as being away from their base location. Additionally, further rules and instructions may be developed to cover:-

- Selection of, and skills required by, lone workers
- Work equipment and personal protective equipment
- Communications systems
- First aid and emergency and accident procedures
- Regular and appropriate Training and Information
- Supervision and monitoring
- Directorate or service contingency plans (*see Appendix 4*)

10. Summary

It is intended that this overview of the risks associated with Lone Working has been as comprehensive as possible. However it must be used as a template from which local procedures and systems to protect Lone Workers should be developed, revised or enhanced. Therefore it is expected that more specific guidance will be developed in conjunction with all Directorates and their associated agencies, to cater for the wide range and more diverse risks that staff working in those environments face.

The importance of robust Risk Assessment can never be demeaned, together with the appropriate training that supports procedures and systems arising from the risk assessments. Technology can play a part in helping to protect Lone Workers, it is also clear that technology can only be effective if it works alongside those other measures referred to.

The review of policies, procedures and systems has been emphasised and finally the protection of Lone Workers is reliant upon managers, staff, colleagues and Lone Workers knowing, understanding and complying with the local policies.

The following is a contact for Lone Worker Products: <http://www.nomadsecure.com/>

11. Implementation

Implementation of this policy is to be in accordance with the Implementation Guidelines as shown in the Corporate Health and Safety Policy, details of which can be viewed at:-

<http://www4.devon.gov.uk/private/corporate/policy/hr/health/guidline/homepage.shtml>

Appendices

Appendix1 – Persons who may be classified as Lone Workers

(This list is not exhaustive)

Building trades employees
Car Park staff and Inspectors
Caretakers
Care Managers
Cleaners
Client Inspectors
Coast and Countryside staff
Collectors
Community Care Workers
Cooks
Dog Warden
Domiciliary care Workers
Drivers
Engineers
Environmental staff
Grounds Maintenance staff
Housing Advisors/Officers
Leisure Centre Staff
Lifeline staff
Procurement Officers
Receptionists
Re-cycling Officers
Refuse collectors (single manning)
Social Workers
Staff visiting Council premises
Staff visiting domestic/commercial premises as part of their job
Staff working outside normal hours at office locations
Street Cleaner
Teaching staff
Tourism staff
Trading Standards Officers
Waste management officers

Appendix 2 – Possible Hazards

(Not exhaustive)

Animal attack
Drowning
Electrocution
Fire/explosions
Getting lost
Hazardous substances
Highway working (RTA)
Hypothermia
Infection
Manual Handling (MSD)
Noise
Physical attack
Poisoning
Restricted access/egress
Slips, Trips and Falls
Sudden Illness
Tools and machinery
Vehicle operation (including accidents/breakdowns)
Verbal abuse
Vibration
Weather

Appendix 3 – Checklist to Assist with the Assessment of Risk

When making the assessment the following questions should be addressed

1. Does the workplace present a significant risk to the lone worker?
2. Are there satisfactory procedures for dealing with illness, accidents and emergencies involving the lone worker?
Note: Lone workers should be capable of responding correctly in emergency situations. Emergency procedures should be established and employees trained to implement them.
3. Is there safe access and exit for one person? Can one person safely handle necessary temporary access equipment such as portable ladders?
4. Can all plant, substances and goods involved in the work be safely handled by one person? Does the work involve lifting objects too heavy/large for one person etc? (Reference should be made to relevant manual handling assessments).
5. Can the safe system of work be managed by one person?
6. Is there a risk of aggression or violence?
7. Is the person medically fit and suitable to work alone?
Note: Checks should be made to ensure that lone workers have no medical condition which makes them unsuitable for working alone, either routinely or in a foreseeable emergency situation.
8. Has the lone worker received sufficient information, instruction and training to enable them to understand the risks involved in the work, the precautions necessary and when to seek help and advice?
9. What arrangements exist for supervising the lone worker?
Notes: Whilst constant supervision is not practical there should be appropriate control of the work. The extent of the supervision will depend on the risks involved and the competency and experience of the individual employee to identify and handle safety issues.
Employees new to the job, undergoing training or dealing with special risks or new situations may need to be accompanied at first. It must not be left to the individual.

In the case of staff engaged in manual duties, safety supervision can generally be carried out when visits are made to check the progress and quality of the work. A routine check should be made on each member of staff at least once during the day.

Appendix 4 – Directorate or Service Contingency Plans

Contingency plans, depending upon the potential risk, can include arrangements for:

- The notification to the Manager
- Obtaining from records an itinerary, details of the employee's vehicle, and any temporary changes in vehicle
- Making enquiries at last known location
- Visit(s) to last known location(s) if necessary
- Checks at home address
- A search system
- Notification to Senior Management
- Notification to Police
- Notification to health and Safety Advisor/Manager