

What is “Working Alone?”

Working alone can be defined as “the performance of any work function by a worker in circumstances where the worker cannot be seen or heard by another worker in the event of injury, ill health, or emergency.”

Why can it be dangerous?

While it is not always hazardous to work alone, it can be when other circumstances are present. Whether a situation is a high or low risk will depend on the location, type of work, interaction with the public, or the potential consequences of an emergency, accident, injury, etc. This wide variety of circumstances makes it important to assess each situation individually.

Workers are at risk who work alone:

- with the public, where there is a potential for violence if they handle cash, work at night, are vulnerable to robbery, work with clients or patients, whose work has them make decisions that affect others, work in a position of authority
- at heights,
- in confined spaces (such as tanks, grain bins or elevators, culverts, etc.),
- with electricity,
- with hazardous substances or materials,
- with hazardous equipment such as chainsaws or firearms,
- with materials at great pressure, or,
- travel
- work in isolated areas

What does the Law Say?

Unlike most other provinces, Ontario has no specific regulations that address working alone, other than in specific situations such as confined space. Ontario workers rely on the general provision in Ontario’s *Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHS)* that mandates that employers must take “reasonable precautions” to protect workers.

Other provinces, such as British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec, New Brunswick, PEI, Nunavut, and North West Territories, have regulations which specify reasonable precautions that employers must take to protect workers working alone.

What are “Reasonable Precautions” for working alone?

Principles:

- First consideration should be given to eliminate working alone. In BC’s legislation, employers must have 2 people minimum in retail locations between 10 pm and 6 am or a lone worker protected by locked doors or barriers that prevent physical contact.
- Some types of work (or duties) should not be performed alone

What should a “Working Alone Safety Policy” include or deal with?

- Definition of “working alone”
- Avoid working alone whenever possible
- Management commitment to providing a safe workplace and addressing working alone hazards
- Roles and responsibilities of management, supervisors, JHSC and/or H&S rep, workers

- Risk assessment performed to identify hazards with working alone in specific workplace. The risk assessment (or hazard assessment) should be in writing, performed in consultation with the JHSC and/or H&S rep, and communicated to all staff. The risk assessment should:
 - Review incidents, injuries, reports, and near misses
 - Identify locations where workers are required to work alone
 - Identify type of work being done and all possible risks
 - Examine details about how emergency assistance is sought or provided
 - Review established evacuation or emergency procedures
 - Identify and review the provision of any equipment for workers working alone
 - Review control measures and precautions currently being taken
 - Review physical workplace
 - Examine information/training provided to workers
 - Identify and evaluate post incident support to workers
 - Identify and review post-incident investigation, reporting and record-keeping processes
 - Identify gaps or patterns that need to be addressed
- Identify and outline all reasonable precautions taken to eliminate or reduce identified risks
- Involve the establishment of safe work practices, procedures, or equipment
 - These to include the establishment of an effective communication system that consists of radio communication, cellular phone communication, or any other means that provides effective communication in view of the risks involved. May include regular contact with employer, limitations or prohibitions on specified activities, establishment of minimum training, provision of personal protective equipment, and provision of emergency supplies for use in traveling under conditions of extreme cold or other inclement weather conditions.
- Contain and describe training provisions for workers that are developed in consultation with JHSC and/or health and safety representative
- Investigation and reporting section
- JHSC evaluation and regular review of working alone precautions, policies, program, equipment, and training

Sample Collective Agreement Language

The employer shall, where reasonable, avoid situations requiring workers to work alone.

Working alone is the performance of any work function by a worker in circumstances where the worker cannot be seen or heard by another worker in the event of injury, ill health, or emergency.

In cases where a worker is required to work alone, the employer shall, before assigning the worker to work alone, identify hazards to that worker, take measures to eliminate the hazard if possible, or to minimize the risk of the hazard to the lowest reasonable level using engineering controls, administrative controls, or a combination of engineering and administrative controls through measures, policies, and procedures, developed in consultation with and regularly reviewed by the joint health and safety committee and/or health and safety representative.

In cases where a worker is required to work alone, the employer shall, before assigning the worker to work alone, provide training, developed in consultation with the joint health and safety committee and/or health and safety representative, to the worker regarding actual or potential hazards arising from the work, and regarding measures, policies, equipment, and procedures that exist to prevent harm to that worker.