

# Working Alone

A health and safety guide on lone working for safety representatives

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## Introduction

Many UNISON members work alone as part of their normal day-to-day work, a trend that has increased in recent years. This is as a result of a number of factors, including cutbacks in funding and resources in the public sector. Working alone can put people in a vulnerable position – it may be more difficult for them to summon help if things go wrong or if their health and safety is at risk. Whatever the reason – UNISON believes that members working alone should not be at greater risk in their jobs than other workers.

This guide has been developed to help safety representatives' and stewards tackle the health and safety issues surrounding lone working. It sets out what employers should do to ensure staff are not put at risk because they work alone. The guide includes steps which safety representatives can take to check what their employer has done to assess and prevent risks to lone workers, and also gives advice on how to raise any problems they find with their employer.



## What is lone working?

In order to address the problem of lone working it is important to have a clear understanding of what it is. Lone working does not mean that the person has to be working in complete isolation all the time. For example, a cleaner may enter a building while it is still very busy, but may be left alone to finish their shift; a medical secretary may work in a department which is busy during the day, but quiet and isolated at other times. In addition there are those working in the community for whom lone working has become the norm.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines lone working as: “those who work by themselves without close or direct supervision”. UNISON prefers the definition set out in Croner’s Health and Safety, which is: “a worker whose activities involve a large percentage of their working time operating in situations without the benefit of interaction with other workers or without supervision”.

Examples of UNISON members who may work alone include maintenance staff, planning officers, ambulance staff, rent collectors, home care workers, community nurses, career and personal advisers, librarians - particularly those who work in mobile libraries - water technicians and grounds maintenance staff. This list is not exhaustive as there are many other occupations where UNISON members work alone for some or all of the time.

### Hazards of lone working

People who work alone face the same hazards in their daily work as other workers. However, for lone workers the potential for harm is often greater. So it is essential that the risks of lone working are taken into account when risk assessments are carried out.

Hazards which lone workers may face include:

- accidents or emergencies arising out of their work and the lack of immediate access to first aid equipment or assistance

- fire
- inadequate provision of rest, hygiene, and welfare facilities
- violence and abuse from members of the public
- theft
- intruders
- manual handling incidents
- sudden illness.

### Employers’ legal duties

There is no general legal prohibition on working alone. However, under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, employers have legal duties to assess all risks to health and safety, including the risk of lone working. If the risk assessment shows that it is not possible for the work to be done safely by a lone worker, then other arrangements must be put in place. Where there are more than five employees the risk assessment must be kept as a permanent record.

Employers are also under a duty to provide:

- facilities for first aid under the Health and Safety (First Aid) Regulations
- welfare provisions under the Workplace (Health Safety and Welfare) Regulations
- suitable equipment and training in their use under the Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations and the Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations.

Employers must also report certain accidents suffered by employees, including violent incidents, under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations – RIDDOR. (This is separate from the duty to record all accidents in the accident book).

In addition, there are specific legal requirements in some high risk occupations, for example, fumigation

work, work in confined spaces, and electrical work near live conductors.

Employers must ensure that, in complying with their general legal duties to carry out risk assessments, they take full account of the risks of work carried out alone and make sure that these risks are eliminated, reduced or minimised.

## Assessing and preventing the risks of working alone – what does it involve?

To address the problems of lone working a risk assessment must be carried out. Risk assessment is a process of identifying what hazards exist in the workplace and how likely it is that they will cause harm to employees and others. It is the first step in deciding what prevention or control measures employers need to take to protect their employees from harm.

When carrying out risk assessments for lone workers, it is usual for employers to use a standard checklist and assess the physical environment, but not the actual work.

The risk assessment must be based on real risks, by using all available information including details from the accident book and consulting with safety representatives.

Where the risk assessment shows that the work cannot be carried out safely by a lone worker, arrangements for providing help or back up must be put in place. UNISON has published detailed guidance on risk assessment. It explains what safety representatives should look out for when checking that their employers' have complied with their responsibilities in this area (see further information at the end of this booklet).

## Risk assessment

### What your employer must do

Employer's main risk assessment duties under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 are to:

make a suitable and sufficient assessment of:

- the risk to the health and safety of the employer's staff and
- the risk to others who may be affected
- identify the preventative and protective measures needed (as far as is reasonably practical)
- review the assessment if there is reason to believe that it is no longer valid
- keep a written record, where there are five or more employees, of the findings of the assessment and any groups of employee particularly at risk
- have arrangements for the effective planning, organisation, control, monitoring and review of the preventative and protective measures
- provide any health surveillance identified in the risk assessment
- appoint competent people to assist them
- establish procedures to be followed in the event of serious and imminent danger
- provide health and safety information, instruction and training for all employees
- consult with safety representatives.

A satisfactory risk assessment should contain the following features:

- 1** What arrangements are required to ensure the lone worker is no more at risk than employees working together
- 2** Whether the work can be done safely by a lone worker

Many people's perception is that, for lone workers, violence is the only hazard or the most significant risk that they face. This is not necessarily the case, as a proper risk assessment can show. Of course, violence is a very serious health and safety issue that must be taken into account. However, lone workers face the same broad range of health and safety hazards as any other workers, but the risk can be considerably higher.

### Case study

*At a local school one member of the school meals staff is required to come into school early, before normal school opening, to set up the kitchen for the day and start the early preparations. The safe system of work devised for her requires her to lock the outer door behind her as a security measure, as she will be alone in the canteen area until normal working hours. While she is locked inside, a provision order, which includes sacks of vegetables and crates of foodstuffs, is delivered and left outside the door. As pupils and staff start to come into school the school meals worker unlocks the canteen and begins to bring in the food deliveries on her own before her colleagues arrive. There is a general risk assessment for manual handling in the canteen and staff have been given information about carrying pots and pans safely. However, the safe system of work for the early lone worker has failed to take specific account of the risks of lifting and handling food deliveries alone. The school meals worker has not been instructed not to lift, push, or pull heavy loads on her own and is therefore at serious risk of back injury.*

As this example shows, it is crucial that any risk assessment for lone working is thorough and takes account of all the potential risks a lone worker may face when carrying out their activities.

## Dynamic risk assessments

It is not always possible to identify all the hazards relating to a role, especially where the work place or area is in the community or otherwise outside of the employer's immediate control. In such situations workers and especially lone workers should be trained to undertake "dynamic" risk assessments at the work location on arrival.

This would cover situations where the actual presence of hazards cannot necessarily be detected in advance such as the influence of alcohol, drugs or the threat posed by animals or other hostile elements. It is vital that in such circumstances workers are empowered to make the decision as to whether or not it is safe to work.

## Working in a clients' home

Where work is carried out in a client's home employers must include, within the risk assessment, knowledge of any hazardous historical information on the client or relatives who are regularly on the premises at the time that the worker arrives. This may include issues relating to drugs or alcohol misuse, and/or mental health conditions that have led to previous violent incidents or other hazards.

Some employers have refused to include this information in risk assessments citing breaches of the Data Protection Act as their reason for this refusal. However, if these issues are not included in the risk assessment it will lead to workers facing unnecessary risks and it is likely that any prevention measures introduced will be insufficient. Information for employers on the details that can be included in risk assessments is available on the Information Commission website. See further information on page 16.

### Case study

*Mark, a 44 year old paramedic was working alone. He was sent to deal with an emergency, which on the information available, was probably*

*an unconscious drug addict in a derelict building at a location where crime was rife. No back up was provided and despite Mark expressing misgivings about the situation he was instructed to proceed. He was attacked and suffered post traumatic stress disorder and was unable to continue working as a result. With UNISON's assistance he was awarded substantial damages from his employer. The court judgment included the following statement: “.. the final decision on whether to ‘go in’ must rest with the paramedic who is after all the one who has to take the risk with his or her own safety.”*

## Some common hazards

A few of the common issues which are of concern to UNISON members working alone are discussed below. There are many others and safety representatives and stewards should make sure that issues which are of particular concern in their own workplace are taken into account when the risk assessments are carried out. The HSE has produced guidance on lone working which includes a useful checklist for carrying out a lone working risk assessment (see further information).

### Manual handling

The most common accidental injury at work is manual handling, with one in three accidents occurring as a direct result of this hazard. For many lone workers, the risk is higher and the figure is more likely to be one in two. Good prevention methods are therefore essential to reduce the risk of injury to lone workers.

It is important that the risk assessment identifies those lifting and handling tasks that cannot be carried out safely by a lone worker. A safe system of work which prohibits these tasks from being undertaken unless more than one staff member is available can then be identified. There should be established procedures for lone workers to request additional staff to assist in certain tasks.

An example of how a safe system for manual handling work can be achieved when working alone is set out in the Health and Safety Executive guidance on manual handling in the health services (see further information). It includes the following:

- assessing and controlling risks
- safe working arrangements for lone workers
- who lone workers are likely to be and the jobs they do.

Staff should be told who to contact for help when a manual handling problem arises. The general principles of carrying out risk assessments before work begins (eg provision of mechanical aids, reviewing staffing levels, providing information and training – including how to make instant evaluations – and providing means of communication in the event of an emergency and back-up), applies to all lone workers.

### Fire

Lone workers are particularly at risk if a fire occurs in the place or area of their work. This is because some lone workers are less likely to be aware of a fire until they themselves see or smell it. In work areas where multiple workers are present early hazard identification is more likely but the lone worker has only their own set of senses to rely on and the need for them to be vigilant at all times should never be understated.

Under the Fire Regulations (see further information) employers must carry out risk assessments to identify fire risks in the workplace. They will therefore need to ensure that any risk of fire is taken into account when risk assessments for lone working are carried out. The fire risk assessment must be carried out by trained assessors. It is good practice to develop and implement contingency plans in case of any emergency such as a fire.

Under the Fire Regulations employers must:

- assess the risks from fire
- check that fires can be detected in a reasonable

time and allow workers to be warned

- check that staff can leave the building safely
- provide fire fighting equipment
- check that workers know what to do if there is a fire.

### Case study

*Mr B is a security guard in a large office. Once an hour he makes an inspection of each of the 12 floors. This takes approximately 10 minutes. He has to clock in on each floor. At other times he is expected to watch the CCTV monitors in the basement. In practice, in between inspections he studies for an Open University course and listens to an iPod. The fire alarm goes off. He does not hear it because of the music. The fire brigade arrives four minutes later. He only becomes aware of their presence when he notices movement on the screen.*

*Naturally the security guard was blamed for listening to his personal stereo. However, the issue is not his individual actions, but whether the employer considered the position of the security guard when developing their fire procedures.*

*Security staff often listen to a radio, or watch T.V. etc. His employer should have ensured that the fire alarm was loud enough to cope with that. The alarm's volume should have been measured in the control room. The nearest bell was almost 50 meters away and was not particularly loud anyway.*

*A risk assessment would have seen these dangers and considered introducing either a bell in the control room, a light, or both.*

*Incidentally, in this case, the guard worked for a private contractor and had been given no information or training on any aspect of fire safety, including evacuation procedures.*

In addition, employers will need to ensure that they take account of lone workers when carrying out fire instructions and drills.

## Hazardous chemicals and other substances

Some lone workers may be required to work with and handle hazardous chemicals. Employers must carry out a risk assessment under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations (COSHH), before any workers use hazardous substances. They should take account of any special risks that may be faced by people working alone and set out a safe system of work which will protect them from exposure.

It is essential that lone workers know what substances or infectious agents they are working with, what the hazards are, what precautions are needed and what to do in an emergency such as accidental spillage. They should be trained in the correct use of any personal protective equipment (PPE) needed and there should be clear procedures for identifying and reporting any defects in PPE and for exchanging it immediately. In addition, lone workers should have access to adequate first aid facilities and mobile workers should carry a first aid kit for treating minor injuries.

## Violence

Violence at work is an increasing problem for many UNISON members. However, staff working alone are potentially more vulnerable. The threat of violence is greatly increased when alcohol or drugs are involved. This should be factored in to any dynamic risk assessment training.

Employers should ensure that they assess the risk of violence and implement measures which will prevent or reduce this risk. Alternative arrangements, additional staff or the use of other security agencies such as the police to deal with high-risk situations should be available.

In general, employers will need to look at all aspects of the work activities including working practices and systems of work, the workplace, staffing levels, the information and training provided and reporting procedures.



They should also consider:

- avoiding the need for lone working as far as possible
- ensuring lone workers receive ongoing conflict resolution training
- changing the way a job is done eg by eliminating handling cash, or reducing the need to carry visibly expensive equipment
- improving information gathering and sharing about patients or clients with a history of violence
- have arrangements in place for meeting clients and service users away from the workplace - where home visits are essential
- identifying visits which should not be carried out in the evening or night by lone workers
- ensuring that staff who work in the community, away from base, leave details of their itinerary and report back to base, at regular intervals
- establishing procedures and communications with the relevant emergency services.

A useful checklist that can be used for staff who work in the community is set out below.

In buildings, procedures should exist:

- to prevent members of the public wandering round the building unchecked
- so that interview rooms give staff a means of easy retreat and of communicating with colleagues, whilst also ensuring privacy for the client
- to move staff working in isolated offices or work areas to safer work locations, if necessary.

Employers should also ensure that there are enough staff at all times to deal with any foreseeable violence. They should have written procedures for safe working practices, specifying the staff needed to implement them and have sufficient flexibility to adjust staffing levels to meet actual needs. They should also ensure that young or inexperienced

staff do not work in isolation. In general, young workers are more likely to be injured at work than more experienced workers. This is because they are inexperienced and may lack awareness of the risks. To prevent or reduce the risk, inexperienced staff should not be expected or instructed to work alone.

### **Personal alarms, mobile phones, pagers, walkie talkies etc**

Personal alarms, and other systems designed to summon help are useful, but are not a replacement for a well-planned and systematic preventive approach. At best these offer only part of a solution. They do not prevent violence, however, in some circumstances they may reduce the level of violence or summon help quickly. But it is worth noting that the type of equipment and the area they are used in may also attract violence as workers are sometimes attacked for such equipment. Where an employer provides these systems to staff they should also provide appropriate training, including refresher training and a clear and regular procedure for checking that the equipment is in good working order. In addition:

- a reporting system should be in place which is regularly monitored and account taken of any incidences experienced by those who are using the equipment
- cover should be arranged if the person designated to receive calls from a lone worker is absent
- instructions should be given to lone workers on what they should do if the system fails.

### **Case study**

*Gina is a librarian in a college library. One evening, while she was working alone, a group of students became very noisy and started throwing things at each other. When she tried to intervene they became rude and abusive. She attempted to call the security guard on a walkie talkie but could not get it to work. She had received no training on its use. Because of*

*her concerns she left the library to look for the security guard leaving the students unsupervised. She also left some cash that had been collected earlier for late returns. She was reprimanded for doing so and given a verbal warning.*

Following intervention from her UNISON safety representative the warning was withdrawn, a panic button was installed and another worker was recruited to assist on the evening shift.

### Case study

*Gloria, a 48 year old UNISON member, was injured during the course of her employment as a psychiatric nurse when she was assaulted by a patient. She tried to activate her personal alarm device but this failed to operate. As a result, Gloria was subjected to a prolonged attack by the patient, causing head injuries, tinnitus and severe post traumatic stress disorder. She was unable to return to work and took retirement on ill health grounds.*

*As a result of legal action through UNISON, Gloria won substantial damages.*

*In this case the employer had obviously identified that there was a risk and this had resulted in the issuing of personal alarms. However they had failed to ensure the alarms were in good working order, and provide adequate back-up.*

The Suzy Lamplugh Trust has produced guidance on the purpose and safe use of personal alarms. See further information.

UNISON and the HSE have produced detailed guidance on work-related violence (see further information).

## Working in isolation and remoteness

Many UNISON members, such as ambulance workers, home care workers, traffic wardens and district nurses, work in remote and isolated areas. The following should be considered when risk assessments are carried out for staff who work in remote locations:

1. a safe means of travel to and from the workplace/ premises – including when working out of hours
2. the time it will take to do the work and how frequently the employee should report in and what will happen if they don't
3. access to toilets, rest, refreshment, and first aid equipment
4. policy and procedures for reporting and responding to emergencies
5. the ease with which emergency services are able to reach the isolated area easily and safely without hindrance.

## Homeworking

Many UNISON members are now being given the option of working from home. However, there are legal issues surrounding employees who are allowed to work from home that must be considered. Employers must be aware of health and safety issues such as the need to carry out a risk assessment on the employee's home. Failure to do this means that they could be held responsible for any medical problems as a result of unsafe working practices. It is important to remember that home workers are still employees and that the fact that they're working from home makes no difference to the rights or responsibilities that apply in the office. Formal home-working policies, as well as changing employment contracts and insurance provisions, should be developed in consultation with safety representatives.

UNISON members working from home are likely

to use computers and other forms of information technology. It is therefore likely that the Display Screen Equipment Regulations apply. These regulations cover display screen equipment such as visual display units (VDUs), microfiche, and process control screens. The regulations apply wherever DSE is used. They include the requirement for employers to carry out a risk assessment of the workstation to ensure it meets health and safety standards.

In addition, eye and eyesight tests must be provided (if requested by the worker) and glasses must be provided for VDU work if necessary. Additional training will be needed and should be tailored to the particular needs of home working, covering the risks, the precautions needed and the arrangements in place for reporting hazards, incidents and illness. The training should ensure that the home worker knows the importance of taking regular breaks and to stretch and change position to avoid work related upper limb disorders. Employers are liable for work related accidents or injury to home workers in the same way as they are for other employees. (For more information on the DSE regulations please see UNISON's guide "Are you sitting comfortably" and "Eye tests and VDUs information sheet").

### Case study

*Sarah is a keyboard operator who works from home. Her work is delivered by post and she e-mails it back. A computer was issued to her by her employers, but they did not provide any seating, a desk or health and safety information. She usually works in the kitchen and has been getting backache and pains in her shoulders for some time.*

*In this case, the employer should have done an ergonomic assessment as required by the Display Screen Equipment Regulations. In fact, not only did they not check Sarah's house before the equipment was delivered, they did not give her advice on how to set it up, the importance of taking breaks or changes of activities or details of her right to eye and eyesight tests. Nor was advice on sitting and posture given.*

Because of the growth in caring for people in the community, the number of members who work alone with clients in the client's own home has increased. Below is a checklist for managers originally contained within HSE guidance for health service workers. Although the guidance is no longer current it does provide useful information on what managers need to take into account when their own workers are involved in home visits.

Are your staff who visit:

1. Fully trained in strategies for the prevention of violence?
2. Briefed about the areas where they work?
3. Aware of attitudes, traits or mannerisms that are likely to increase the risk of violence and abuse from clients?
4. Given all available information about the client from all relevant agencies?

### Have they:

5. Understood the importance of previewing cases?
6. Left an itinerary?
7. Made plans to keep in contact with colleagues?
8. The means to contact you – even when the switchboard may not be in use?
9. Got all of your contact numbers (and you theirs)?
10. A sound grasp of your organisation's preventive strategy?
11. Authority to arrange an accompanied visit, security escort, or use of taxis?

### Do they:

12. Carry forms for reporting incidents?
13. Appreciate the need for this procedure?
14. Use them?
15. Know your attitude to premature termination of interviews?

- 16. Know how to control and defuse potentially violent situations?
- 17. Appreciate responsibility for their own safety?
- 18. Understand the provisions available for their support by your organisation?

### What else is needed?

The above checklist is not exhaustive.

## Bullying and harassment

Managers may, from time to time, need to visit home workers to discuss working arrangements and carry out risk assessments, etc. Procedures should be in place so that home workers can request that managers are accompanied by a colleague, safety representative or steward on home visits. This will help to reduce the risk of allegations of bullying and harassment.

## Stress

People who work at home or alone will have a particular problem with isolation. In order to reduce this risk, arrangements should be made for these workers to keep in touch and up to date. Possible methods include regular newsletters, seminars and training sessions, regular staff meetings and a combination of office and lone/home work. These workers should also have the same access to vocational training and personal professional development as other employees.

Checklist for safety representatives:

- do you have members who work from home?
- is there a policy on home working?

Does it include:

- an assessment of workstation, ie desk, chair,

document holder, and any necessary footrest?

- advice on seating and posture?
- a procedure for reporting and recording accidents and ill health, including symptoms of work-related upper limb disorders?
- an agreed system of work, including when to take rest breaks?
- does it include measures to prevent work-related bullying, harassment and stress?
- are other potential risks, eg violence taken into account?
- does training include information on these issues?

## Working on another employer's premises

Some UNISON members are required to work on other employers' premises. Their own employer's risk assessment should identify the risks of their work and any special risks arising from the fact that they work alone. The risk assessment should also identify whether any aspect of their job could be hazardous to the health or safety of other employees.

There is a legal requirement on employers to co-operate and co-ordinate their health and safety arrangements wherever their work activities interact. This is sometimes achieved by including health and safety clauses in contracts, setting out clearly who is responsible for what. Factors that need to be covered include the provision and maintenance of equipment, the provision and maintenance of protective clothing, training and first aid provision, fire and emergency procedures, the procedure for reporting accidents, incidents (including violence, abuse and harassment) and ill-health, and a named competent person to contact if there is a problem.

Employers should also ensure that visiting staff are informed of other relevant health and safety policies such as their policy on harassment. Safety



representatives should try to negotiate a clause in the agreement allowing them to visit the employer's premises where their members work. Where employees visit other employer's premises there should be proper procedures for signing in and out and for ensuring that relevant staff know that there are visitors on site.

## Information, instruction, and training

Where employees work alone, it is particularly important that they have the information and training they need to avoid panic reactions in unusual situations. Information should be adequate to ensure they understand the risks of their work, the precautions that are needed and what they should do in an emergency. Employers should establish clear procedures which set limits on what can and cannot be done while working alone. Training should be comprehensive enough to ensure that employees are competent to deal with circumstances which are new, unusual or beyond the scope of their experience, for example, when to stop working and seek advice from a supervisor. Employees should have the competence to know when it is unsafe to continue work and feel able to stop any work which would put them at risk without fear of reprisal.

In addition to providing information to their own staff who work alone, employers must provide information to other employers' staff who may be visiting their premises. They will also need to know about any risks and health and safety procedures in operation at the site.

## Supervision and reporting

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 requires employers to provide information, instruction, training and supervision to ensure employees' health, safety and welfare at work. The nature of lone working means that employees are not under constant

supervision, so alternative arrangements must be made by the employer. Although proper information, instruction, and training can provide employees with the competence to work on their own, there still needs to be some method of monitoring lone workers to ensure that they remain safe. The risk assessment should identify the level of supervision required and the means of providing it. The risk assessment should also set out the procedures under which the lone worker reports to base.

Where employees work alone away from base, there should be procedures for leaving details of their itinerary and work schedule for the day, their expected arrival and departure times, contact names and telephone numbers. There should be a system for the lone worker to report in at regular intervals and procedures for raising the alarm if this does not occur and the worker cannot be contacted. The provision of mobile phones is a useful way of maintaining contact. However, the possible risks associated with their use needs to be assessed and employees must be given advice about using them safely.

In addition, where employees work alone on site, there should be a means for them to keep in contact, to call for assistance, or raise the alarm if necessary.

## Driving

Some members may have to spend long periods driving alone as part of their work activities. The main risk for drivers working alone is fatigue, long hours and the possibility of breaking down in an isolated area. The risk could be increased by employers expecting staff to use their own vehicles. Low pay in the public sector could mean that some vehicles are poorly maintained, and this should be taken into account when risk assessments are carried out.

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) has published a useful guide to managing road risk, which includes a road risk assessment (see further information).

## Case study

*Carol is a community nurse in Gloucestershire. She visits patients by car, using her own vehicle which is now 10 years old. On two occasions in the last year the car has broken down on country roads.*

*It is quite common within the public sector for employees to have to use their own car for work purposes. Rarely is there any control over the condition of the car or whether it is fit and safe for the purpose. In fact, given the low pay of many of the employees involved, it is hardly surprising that a lot of the vehicles used are old and poorly maintained.*

*Where the work involves travel outside urban areas, there is always the possibility that the vehicle could break down on a rural road with no access to breakdown services, possibly in bad weather or at night. This is particularly the case, where the employee covers a wide geographical area. However, the risk is not confined to rural areas. In urban areas the vehicle could break down in a place where there is the potential for violence.*

Employers have a responsibility to ensure that the car used is suitable, even when the employee uses their own car. They should ask to see the MOT, insurance and licence. They should do a risk assessment and, if necessary, provide mobile phones or other means to allow employees to summon help if they breakdown. Employers could also consider obtaining cover with one of the breakdown organisations' for such workers.

## Other issues

A consistent message from UNISON members, particularly where aspects of their job are unavoidably stressful or traumatic such as dealing with serious injuries, assaults or neglect of vulnerable people, is that the value of sharing experiences with colleagues cannot be understated.

Lone workers have much less opportunity to

network and informally "get things off their chest". Every effort should be made by employers and colleagues to create such opportunities through organising and encouraging informal "get togethers" and facilitating networking eg by providing staff with intranet access and other forms of accessing information such as newsletters .

## Safety representatives

Safety representatives have a legal right to be consulted on any health and safety issue relating to members working alone. Branches will need to ensure that safety reps are involved in any discussion concerning lone workers, and that they are fully consulted before any arrangements for lone working are developed and/or implemented. Branches will also need to ensure that they keep in touch with members who are lone workers and that members know how to contact their UNISON safety representative.

Safety representatives can find out whether UNISON members work alone and whether they are experiencing any problems by talking to members during their regular workplace inspections or by carrying out surveys. You will need to explain what UNISON means by 'working alone' so that members understand that it is not just about working in total isolation or working alone all of the time but includes short periods of lone working and what happens when there are staff shortages. You could also do this by letter or by email. A sample survey is attached as Appendix 1, which can be modified, photocopied, and used to gain members views.

## Safety reps checklist

1. Ensure that a full risk assessment is carried out before lone working arrangements are implemented.
2. Ensure proper provision of education, information, training and adequate supervision.
3. Ensure that discussions and negotiations on the

- necessity of lone working takes place.
4. Provide advice to members on safe working and best workplace practice.
  5. Represent members with complaints or problems relating to lone working
  6. Ensure that lone working practices are not introduced unless specified in the risk assessment.
  7. Monitor and check that all accidents, near misses and dangerous occurrences relating to lone working are entered into the accident book and discussed with employers. (You can download a guide on reporting accidents from the Health and Safety Executive HSE website at [www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk).)

You should also, make sure that you are consulted about the risk assessments that your employer carries out for work in the community, to ensure that members are not sent into potentially risky situations on their own. In some cases it may be possible to get your employer to come to an agreement with other employers, whose sites are visited by your members, so that you can accompany them on a visit.

## Keep in touch with members

Make sure that you keep in touch with your members who are home-workers, and those who work alone, to prevent them from feeling cut off from the union. Always report back the results of your surveys and any action you have taken. Branches also have an important part to play in making sure that lone workers do not feel isolated and ensuring that they know who to contact for advice and help, and where to find them. Holding regular networking days or providing access to a telephone help-line, are two possible examples for maintaining regular contact. Branch secretaries should ensure that home-workers and lone workers, who may not see union notice boards very often, are notified of and invited to attend branch meetings and events.

Although safety representatives have legal rights to inspect any part of the workplace where their members work, this does not extend to sites that are not under the control of their employer. However, you should negotiate with the employer to ensure that you are consulted about the health and safety agreements they make with other employers whose premises your members visit. You should make sure that these are as strong and detailed as possible.

## Appendix 1

### Working alone: survey for members

#### 1. As part of your job do you ever have to work:

- |  |                              |                             |
|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| a. on your own in the community?                   | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. on your own visiting other employers' premises? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. in isolation from others at the workplace?      | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. in isolation from others out of doors?          | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e. on your own at home?                            | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |

#### 2. If you answered yes to any of the above, do you work like this:

- |   |                              |                             |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| a. all of the time?                             | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. most of the time?                            | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. some of the time?                            | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. at certain periods of the day/night or week? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |

Or, do you work like this:

- |                                  |                              |                             |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| a. as a normal part of your job? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. because of staff shortages?   | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |

#### 3. If you work alone away from base:

- |   |                              |                             |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| a. is your daily itinerary known at base? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. is there a procedure for reporting in? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |

#### 4. Have you been given information and training about the health and safety risks of your job and the preventative measures in place, for example:

- |   |                              |                             |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| a. how to lift safely?                      | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. how to use equipment safely?             | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. how to use chemicals safely?             | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. how to avoid infection hazards?          | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e. what to do if a violent incident occurs? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| f. other (please specify)                   | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |



**5. Have you been given information and training about what to do in an emergency?**

Yes ☐

No ☐

**6. Is there a policy which ensures you work in pairs if the job involves:**

a. lifting or handling heavy or awkward loads?

Yes ☐

No ☐

b. using hazardous equipment?

Yes ☐

No ☐

c. using ladders or scaffolding?

Yes ☐

No ☐

d. working with live electricity?

Yes ☐

No ☐

e. working in or near water?

Yes ☐

No ☐

f. potential exposure to harmful substances or infectious organisms?

Yes ☐

No ☐

g. providing care or other services to people with a known history of violent or aggressive behaviour?

Yes ☐

No ☐

**7 Do you know how to summon assistance?**

Yes ☐

No ☐

**8 If you work at a fixed location but in isolation from others:**

a. is there a procedure for checking in and out?

Yes ☐

No ☐

b. have you been given information and training about the safety risks of your job and the precautions in place?

Yes ☐

No ☐

c. is there any means of raising the alarm or calling for assistance?

Yes ☐

No ☐

**9. If you work on your own at home:**

a. has your workstation been assessed by your employer and proper equipment provided?

Yes ☐

No ☐

b. have you been given information and training about the health and safety risks of RSI from excessive keyboard work or prolonged awkward postures and the need to take frequent breaks?

Yes ☐

No ☐

c. are there procedures for keeping in regular contact with your work base so that you don't feel isolated and suffer stress?

Yes ☐

No ☐

d. do you know what to do if things go wrong?

Yes ☐

No ☐

*Thank you for completing this survey. The results will be used to help your safety representative improve conditions for staff who work alone.*

**Please return to: Name and address of safety rep**

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For further information  
please see the following  
UNISON publications

### **Five Steps to Risk Assessment**

(IND163)

A guide to risk assessment requirements

### **Risk Assessment: a guide for UNISON safety reps**

Stock no 1351

[www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/1190pdf](http://www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/1190pdf)

### **You are not alone: a UNISON guide to lone working in the health service**

Stock no 2600

[www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/b3238.pdf](http://www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/b3238.pdf)

### **Its Not Part Of The Job: UNISON's guide to tackling violence at work**

Stock number 1346

[www.UNISON.org.uk/file/4096.pdf](http://www.UNISON.org.uk/file/4096.pdf)

### **Are you sitting comfortably: UNISON's Display Screen Equipment guide**

Stock number 2692

[www.UNISON.org.uk/file/4095.pdf](http://www.UNISON.org.uk/file/4095.pdf)

### **The health and safety six pack: information for UNISON branches, stewards and safety reps**

Stock number 1660

[www.UNISON.org.uk/file/10349.pdf](http://www.UNISON.org.uk/file/10349.pdf)

UNISON has produced various information  
sheets which are also available in pdf format  
and includes the following

### **Repetitive strain injury information sheet**

[www.unison.org.uk/file/B179a.pdf](http://www.unison.org.uk/file/B179a.pdf)

### **Health and Safety Executive publications**

#### **Working alone in safety**

(INDG73)

[www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg73.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg73.pdf)

#### **Home working guidance for employers and employees on health and safety**

(INDG226)

[www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg226.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg226.pdf)



