

Corporate Health & Safety Procedure

Personal Safety Guide 2
Loneworking

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1. Who is a lone worker? It is the nature of many jobs in the County Council that staff will work alone. Lone workers are those who work by themselves without close or direct supervision and may include:

- Employees working outside of normal office hours
- Employees who are the first or last person on the premises
- Employees who drive during the course of their duties
- Employees providing reception facilities
- Employees working from home
- Employees involved in securing a building
- Employees making home or site visits
- Employees working alone in premises or who work separately from others in the same premises

Most staff will be a loneworker at some point in their working lives and it is important that if staff fall into one or more of these categories adequate arrangements are made to ensure they are safe at all times.

2. Legal duties and responsibilities of employers

There is no general prohibition on working alone, and for most circumstances, there are no specific legal duties on employers in relation to lone working, however, employers are under a general duty under Section 2 of the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 to maintain safe working arrangements and under Section 3 of the Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999 to carry out a risk assessment of the hazards to which their employees are exposed. 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 and welfare and to report accidents, including assaults.

It is the County Council's policy, through managers, to undertake risk assessments, which involves identifying any hazards, assessing the risks and implementing adequate control measures to eliminate or reduce the risks of loneworking to the lowest reasonably practicable level.

3. Hazards of loneworking

Although working alone may not introduce any new hazards, the level of risk could increase significantly when a task is carried out unaccompanied. This may require additional control measures to be implemented to ensure that staff are not exposed to greater risks than those who work together. The main hazards faced by loneworkers are:

- Accidents or emergencies arising out of the work including inadequate provision of first aid
- Sudden illness
- Inadequate provision of rest, hygiene and welfare facilities
- Violence from members of the public
- Road rage

4. Factors to consider during risk assessment

The process of conducting a risk assessment for loneworking is no different to that followed when assessing any other activity. The risk assessment must be signed and dated, kept up to date and reviewed at least annually or if changed circumstances suggest that it is no longer valid, for example following an incident.

Model assessments could be created as a guidance template, rather than developing a specific risk assessment for every task carried out by every team member, which can then be tailored to different tasks and environments.

Risk assessments for loneworker must consider the following factors:

- The length of time staff may be working alone
- The time of day or night staff may be working alone
- The location and type of workplace and if travel is involved
- The nature of the work, the equipment to be used and whether both can be carried out/used safely by one person
- The risk of violence both verbal and physical – can tasks be redesigned to minimise the risk of violence for example the elimination or reduction of the amount of cash handling; constant changes of route if transporting valuables
- Whether particular staff may be more at risk eg new and inexperienced staff
- Any medical conditions of the loneworker, which may increase the risks of working alone - does the job impose any extra demands on the lone worker's physical or mental stamina? Does the lone worker suffer from any illness that might increase the risks of the job?
- Ensuring staff know what action to take in an emergency and who to contact
- Ensuring precautions are in place for normal work and foreseeable emergencies such as a fire, equipment failure, illness or accident/incident
- Ensuring staff have had the relevant training, information, instruction, supervision and possible protective equipment
- Maintaining regular contact between staff and supervisor or 'buddy', and the relevant use of telecommunications systems, radios, mobile phones, pagers, personal alarms, and the Voiceconnect system.
- Arrangements for monitoring lone workers to ensure they remain safe including ensuring that the loneworker has returned to base or home on completion of the task

Remoteness and isolation - for a loneworker at a particularly remote location the following factors must be considered:

- How long should the work take and how frequently should the worker report in?
- Has the worker a safe means of travel to and from the location?
- Is there access to adequate rest, hygiene, refreshment, welfare and first aid facilities?
- Could emergency services approach the location without hindrance?
- Procedures for responding to "worst case" emergency scenarios should be in place

On the next page are two checklists to enable staff to assess the status of their own loneworking habits and to adjust these to develop safer working practices

WORKING ALONE CHECKLIST

- Am I alone and without back-up if I had an accident requiring first aid or emergency treatment?
- Are my colleagues unaware of my whereabouts?
- Am I without means of raising an alarm if I get into difficulties or am attacked?
- Am I aware of how I would react in such situations?
- Have I ever considered what I would do if I were attacked? Thinking about this in advance may give you the edge if you are ever the victim of an attack.

RECORDING YOUR WHEREABOUTS CHECKLIST

- Your schedule and route should be identified before you go out and available to other staff at the office
- Up to date details of your car and mobile phone – should be held at the office
- Staff should understand the timetable for calling in – at which points in their schedule – for example – before **and** after each visit/appointment/meeting
- Staff back at the office need know your contact arrangements
- Staff are aware that any deviations from the planned schedule or route must be notified back to the office
- If you have been provided with a County Council (orange contract) mobile phone to use during the course of your work - this should be available and switched on at all times you are on duty.

Note - it is important that where staff's personal details are left with admin support teams or managers back in the office for personal safety purposes – for example personal mobile phone numbers - that these details should not be abused, given out to clients or used to contact staff for operational reasons.

5. Homeworking

Homeworkers should be subject to the same rules and conditions as colleagues working in office bases including the carrying out of risk assessments of their job and their workplace ie the home. This must cover the provision of supervision, education and training and result in sufficient controls to be in place so as to protect the homeworker. The employer should accept liability for accident or injury as for other employees.

General guidance for the Homeworker:

- Use only initials and surname on your doorbell and in the phone book. You may even decide to remain ex-directory.
- Consider a second phone line so that you can keep your home number private.
- Get a PO Box Number for all your work-related mail so that you do not have to give out your home address.
- Fit a deadlock to British Standard 3621 to your door and consider buying a spy hole for a door chain and use them each time you have a caller at the door.
- Never leave your keys where they can be seen by anyone looking in from outside.
- Ensure that any callers you do not know identify themselves.
- Do you have to meet people in your own home? Could you meet in public places or larger office bases instead?
- Get registered to use the Voiceconnect system so your movements whilst at work in your home, travelling to meetings, visiting clients in their homes etc can be monitored.
- If you return to your home and see signs of a break-in, like a smashed window or open door – don't go in alone – go to a neighbour and phone the Police.
- Remain alert - because you are in a familiar environment where you feel safe, you may develop a degree of complacency.
- Follow the guidelines for Lone workers at all times.
- Carry out Risk Assessments where appropriate.
- Think about how you would get out if there was a fire.

If you receive an abusive or threatening phone call whilst working at home:

- Put the receiver down and walk away.
- Return a few minutes later and replace the receiver without listening to see if the caller is there and without saying anything.
- This allows the caller to say what they want without causing distress to you. The caller is trying to get an emotional reaction out of you so don't give them one.
- If the calls continue report it to the Operator, the Police, and keep a record of the date, time and content of each phone call. This may help the authorities to trace the caller.

6. Available equipment to aid personal safety when loneworking

There is a vast range of telecommunication equipment and products on the market including mobile phones, two-way radios or walkie-talkies, and pagers, all with differing advantages and disadvantages which need to be considered. Solutions may require some imaginative thinking, for example –

- Two-way radios may be more effective in areas where mobile phone network coverage is poor.
- A particular problem with one mobile network in a particular black-spot area where the loneworker must visit could be resolved by provision of a second basic handset or second sim card with a different network.
- Personal alarms designed to be carried about the person, can also be successfully deployed in buildings and activated to warn all occupants of an unauthorised intruder.

Here is some guidance on the use of mobile phones and personal alarms:

Mobile Phones

Mobile phones are extremely useful as a personal safety tool if used properly as part of a whole plan to keep staff safer. It should be remembered however that mobile phones are prone to signal issues and can run out of battery therefore cannot be depended on entirely.

When assessing the risks – include consideration of what staff will do if the mobile phone isn't working!

Mobile phones enable staff to:

- Dial 999 in an emergency without having to search for another phone
- Keep in contact with their supervisor
- Phone their supervisor or base to check in/out, inform of alterations to schedules
- Give "situation ok/not ok" codes in case of a threatening situation

Think ahead:

- Remember to put the handset on charge before you need it
- Pre-programming of key telephone numbers into a mobile phone enabling use of the speed dial option means staff only have to press one button in an emergency
- Colleagues can be asked to call staff to check that they are ok
- The mobile phone can be made ready to play a ring tone and used by a member of staff to pretend that there is someone who needs their presence immediately to help them get away from potentially difficult situations
- A mobile phone can be pre-programmed with an emergency text message
- Blue tooth units can be used hands free and enable the phone to be utilised by voice commands eliminating the need to locate the unit in a pocket or handbag to use it

Personal Alarms

A common misconception is that a personal alarm is used to attract the attention of passersby. However, it's very likely that there won't be anyone else within earshot, and that even if there is, they will just ignore the sound thinking it's just another car alarm going off. The prime purpose of a personal attack alarm is to shock and disorientate an attacker, by thrusting it as close to their ear as you can, giving you vital seconds in which to get away.

There are many different alarms on the market so choosing the right alarm can be difficult but here are some tips on how to find the right one for you.

What kind of noise should it make? The most important feature of an alarm is the sound it emits. If an attacker is to be shocked enough to pull away from you, this sound needs to be as loud and as shrill as possible. It also needs to be different from commonly heard sounds such as car alarms. The most effective sound is a continuous shriek and over 130 decibels.

How big should it be? The alarm needs to be easy to carry but consider whether a very lightweight tiny alarm will be as loud as you need it to be and it also might get lost at the bottom of your bag. Some small alarms can still be very loud – although the sound may not last for very long – and can be easier to handle. The best alarm is one which can fit easily into the palm of your hand but is still very loud.

Is it easy to use? How do you operate the alarm in an emergency? There are different ways to activate alarms – pull out pins, push buttons and caps. How fiddly is it? Do you have problems using your hands or fingers? Perhaps you might need to use both hands. Could it be operated by pushing it up against something – a wall or your thigh for instance?

Types of alarm on the market –

- Gas alarms – these are usually easy to operate – especially for people with hand/finger difficulties. They don't usually pulsate but have a long loud shrill sound which is most effective. Easy to check if they still have gas in them.
- Battery alarms – usually smaller and easier to carry. Usually make a pulsating noise which needs to be both different and loud enough to have the desired effect. Some can be attached to a belt which is useful for people who might need to keep their hands free. Sometimes might also be a small torch light. Need to check regularly if the batteries still work.

Advice on using an alarm

Once you have decided on and purchased your alarm

- Keep it on your person – hold it in your hand in your pocket whilst walking - not in your bag!
- If you have to activate your alarm in a real situation don't wait to check that it has worked – don't look back - just leave the situation as quickly as you can – and move to a busy area if possible.

7. Monitoring staff whilst working away from their fixed bases

There is no doubt that the most important aspect of safety for lone working is to ensure that other people know where staff are, who they are meeting, when, and how long they are expected to.

If a manager can establish robust call in/call back arrangements for their team and instruct that these are used regularly and properly by all, this will go a long way to ensuring the safety of the staff they are responsible for.

This can be effected in several ways. Simple “buddy” systems and/or signing in/out whiteboards can be utilised, or modern technology employed, like the Voiceconnect Loneworker Tracking system.

Staff have a responsibility to use any such system where it has been provided, understanding that these measures are to ensure personal safety and are not to check up on them.

Buddying systems

Buddy systems can be effective – although they rely on people remembering to tell their “buddy” they have arrived or are ok. Below is a list of the issues to be considered when setting such a system up.

Who everyone’s buddy/buddies are (name and tell)

What are the contact arrangements to be used on a daily basis/ad hoc basis

What are the trigger points to be used to contact a friend/relative/Colleague?

Who are the contacts to be used – list them?

What are the plans for after hours contacts when the office is closed?

What will the buddy do if they are unable to contact the friend/relative/colleague?

At what point will the buddy phone the Police?

The agreement should be drawn up in writing, dated and signed by all team members and reviewed regularly to ensure it is still working.

Use of Signing in/Out Whiteboards

This is by far the simplest way of keeping track of staff but it must be used properly if it is to be relied on. The following rules should be agreed upon

- If staff are in the building they should enter “IN” on the board. This provides useful information in the event of a fire.
- If staff are going out – they should fill the board in with as much relevant information as possible – where they are going, who they are going to visit/ be with, what time they expect to return - entries like “Visits NB (meaning **not back**)” or “Lunch 1.15” are not very helpful.
- If staff are not able to keep to the timings on the board – they should ring in and get a member of admin or a colleague to adjust the entry for them.
- If staff are seeing a client on the premises – they should fill in details of which meeting room they are using and when they expect to be back in the office.
- Staff should wipe the previous entry off when they come in again.

8. The Voiceconnect Loneworker Tracking system

North Yorkshire County Council has purchased the Voiceconnect Lone Worker tracking system to provide a more secure environment for staff who are loneworkers. The system has been purchased outright so there is no cost involved for staff to join the scheme.

How does the system work?

The system works by telephony. The idea is that staff login to the system when they are going to be loneworking, using any touch telephone – a landline, a callbox or a mobile. They set an expiry time they expect to be finished and therefore “safe” again by. They also record a message on the system saying where they are working or going, who they are going to meet with, and details of their route if applicable. If they complete the task/visit/journey safely, they ring the system again to cancel the job, but if something prevented them from cancelling it off, for instance if they had an accident or were taken hostage, the system will set off an emergency alert, delivering the recorded message to a designated point, where other staff will follow a set procedure to primarily locate the member of staff, and/or pass the call onto the police if they cannot be safely located.

For security reasons, each worker has their own unique loneworker number and PIN so that they are the only people capable of setting up or cancelling their own message.

Unfortunately accidents do happen and things often don't go as planned. If a worker has no way to call for help or is not likely to be missed for a number of hours then even a minor problem can become serious, even life threatening. By using Voice Connect, when a worker enters into a potentially dangerous situation they are effectively setting up a series of measures to ensure that help will always be on its way should it be needed.

Use of the system provides greater peace of mind for both employees and employers alike.

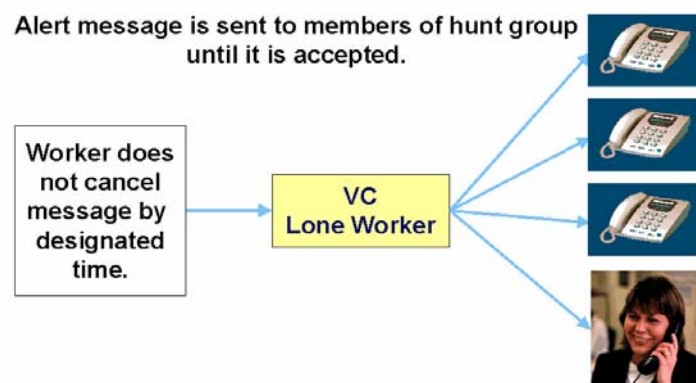
An example of VC Lone Worker in Action

8.30am A Trading Standards Inspector has two inspections to carry out at remote fuel stations scheduled that day at 10.00am and 2.00pm.

They dial into the Lone Worker system using their personal pincode and follow the prompts to firstly leave a voice message detailing the time and location of their morning appointment. Expecting to have left that by 11am, they pre-set this message's emergency timed delivery for 12pm.

11.15am Having completed their morning task, they re-dial into the network and cancel the emergency alert. They also use the same call to record the details for their 2pm job (pre-setting the delivery time for 4.30).

3.20pm The lone worker's afternoon's also passes without mishap. However, having embarked upon their journey home, a worst case scenario happens: the front tyre on their car blows out and their spare is also flat. Naturally, they use their mobile phone to call for assistance but are unable to obtain a signal. They are now stranded on a remote country road. It will soon be getting dark and they are 8-9 miles from the nearest main road with no way to call for assistance.



If a worker does not cancel a message within the designated time, the supervisor's phone will be rung with the pre-recorded warning message. Should they be unavailable to take the call, an escalation process will begin.

4.30pm This is where VC Lone Worker comes to the rescue. Because the last message has not been cancelled, the time-delivered alert is automatically relayed to base. Indeed, once an alert message has been delivered, it must be acknowledged within a pre-determined period of time. If not, the message will automatically divert to a designated network of people capable of assisting. This eliminates the possibility of an alert being ignored.

4.31pm Learning from the worker's message that they expected to be back by 3.45 at the latest, HQ first of all attempt to contact them by phone but again cannot be connected. This, along with having received the alert message, confirms to them that something could be seriously wrong. They are then able to quickly put emergency procedures in place.

5.40pm The stranded worker is located and returned safely, albeit somewhat later and colder than they expected. However, thanks to Lone Worker, a potentially hazardous situation was averted.

Emergency Distress Signal

Another feature incorporated within VC Lone Worker is the ability for an early release of the distress message. This means that if the worker gets into trouble **before** their message is due for release, and they have access to a telephone, they can call into the system, and by dialling in *any* PIN number other than their correct one, the system will activate the warning.

This will set off all the other warnings that a standard elapsed time delivered message would do, but by setting off the message early, the supervisor will know that this is almost certainly a real emergency situation.

If the worker uses a mobile phone, they can have the distress number programmed into their phone using a speed dial. That way a help message can be sent at the touch of a button. The warning will also be activated if the number is called, but no PIN number is entered with 5 seconds of calling.

Alarm Response

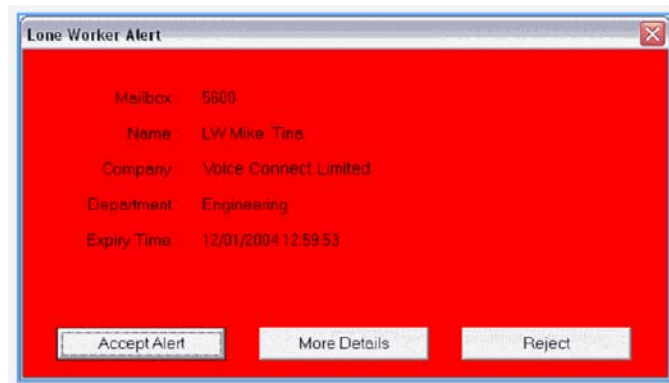
Alarms can be received in two ways – either via the telephone or by the installation of some simple software on a group of PCs manned by staff who are always there ie admin support teams.

The PC Alert

For the PC Alert, the distress message will appear on the supervisor's or admin support's screen.

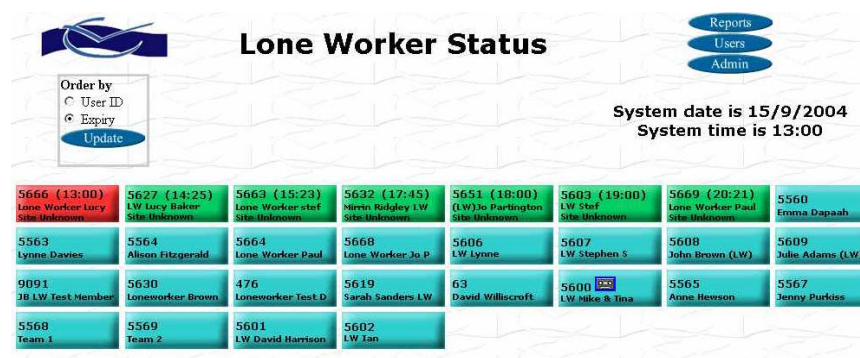
The supervisor/admin worker can see on their screen the identity of the person whose message has expired and the location of their distress message.

Should they be away from their PC, or for any other reason not to react to the distress message an escalation process begins, with the message appearing on other workers PC screens until somebody acts upon the warning.



If the supervisor does not act within a designated period of time, a message escalation process begins. The warning will continue to appear on all the screens until somebody reacts to the situation.

VC Lone Worker – Web Browser – anyone who may monitor staff or receive alarms will be given access to this part of the system via the intranet



Anyone accessing the system is presented with a clear picture of their lone working staff. They can easily see the status of each worker and quickly access information about a particular worker from this screen.

The screen shot shows the status of their Lone workers browsing via the intranet/internet.

There are three indicators:-

- Blue blocks show lone workers registered on the system but not active
- Green blocks show lone workers with active “jobs”
- Red blocks show an alarm being generated due to time being exceeded

Details of your Lone Workers can be held on the system and viewed on the web version of VC Lone Worker at speed whenever necessary. The supervisor can click on 'details' which will bring up a screen featuring a host of personal information including a photograph and car registration details of the missing person. This personal data is kept secure and accessed only with the correct password for a particular team.

Lone Worker Details 5603

Name	LW Stef	
Department	(None)	
Car Registration	TAYLOR1	
Car Type	Mini	
Car Colour	Green	
Car Model	BMW	
Notes	<input type="text"/>	
Update Picture		
More Information	Personal Details	Next of Kin
Manager	Date of Birth	Name
Mgr Contact	Address	Address
Userdef1		
Userdef2		
	Postcode	Postcode
	Home Number	Relationship
	Mobile Number	Contact
<input type="button" value="Update"/> <input type="button" value="Back"/>		

How to get registered to use the Voiceconnect system - if you are interested in taking up the system there is a 3 step process to becoming registered:

1st step – contact the Voiceconnect system administrator to arrange a more detailed presentation on the system for your team or service. Whilst staff can be registered on the system singly, it has been shown to work better if it's a whole team or service commitment, and staff can gain a better understanding of how the system works and what they are signing up to if they have had the presentation at the outset.

2nd step – once the presentation has taken place, the administrator will need providing with certain information to enable set up on the system. Paperwork will be left with the team for completion and submission. On receipt of this the administrator will do the actual work on the system then get back in touch with you to arrange issue of the loneworker ID numbers and PINs and user training.

3rd step – training – this can either be done via an E-learning tutorial on the Learning Zone by individuals at their computers which takes approx 20 minutes or delivered face to face by the administrator in a clinic type approach where staff can have a 20 minute 1:1 training session or in pairs, including programming of the mobile phone for speed dialling into the system.

However, it is possible to respond to emergency situations and fast track staff through this process. Please contact the system administrator Wendy Parkin via e-mail wendy.parkin@northyorks.gov.uk or tel: 01609 534021 or mobile: 07817 229887.