



# SAFETY DIRECTOR BULLETIN



## LONE WORKER BEST PRACTICES

Working alone is not uncommon in many agencies and may introduce safety and health risks for employees. OSHA does not currently have a standard definition of lone work. We'll define a 'lone worker' as a person working in a potentially hazardous working condition when that individual cannot be seen or heard by another worker and where assistance is not readily available. Lone workers may be at increased risk of exposure to workplace hazards due to a lack of assistance and supervision and the limited means of communication, including receiving help in an emergency. Lone work may be a permanent or temporary arrangement.

Lone workers can occur in many departments. Settings can be fixed, such as a lone mechanic in a shop, or mobile, such as a fire or zoning inspector. Lone workers can encounter the same occupational hazards as individuals in busy workplaces surrounded by co-workers. Some hazards, such as exposure to violence, become more likely when a worker is alone. Hazards to lone workers include:

- Lone cashiers or other cash handlers may appear as easy targets.
- Home healthcare workers or field inspectors are at higher risk of violence because no co-worker is present to assist them.
- Loneliness and social isolation are associated with significant long-term health risks.
- Delay in response to injuries - Studies have shown that timely access to emergency services can improve the probability of surviving a heart attack or traumatic injury.

### What Can Employers Do to Protect Lone Workers?

1. While it is generally not against OSHA standards, specific regulations prohibit lone work in certain circumstances. Those include when workers enter an immediately dangerous to life or health atmosphere ([29 CFR 1910.134](#), [29 CFR 1926.1211](#)) when working in confined spaces ([29 CFR 1910.146](#), [29 CFR 1926.1204](#)) or in hazardous waste and emergency response operations ([29 CFR 1910.120](#), [29 CFR 1926.65](#)), and while performing work near energized parts ([29 CFR 1910.269](#), [29 CFR 1926.960](#)).
2. Controlling workplace hazards is important for all workers, but thoughtful and comprehensive Job Hazard Analysis (JHA) is critical for lone workers. Implementing effective control strategies based on the hierarchy of controls is a sound approach to reducing risks to lone workers.
3. Employees on light, restricted, or transitional duty may be able to act as a monitor within the limitations of their medical clearance.
4. Technology can help:
  - Closed-circuit cameras can monitor a lone worker at a fixed location, such as a lone mechanic in the service bay(s). A nearby office worker can watch monitors.
  - Panic alarms.
  - Body-worn monitoring devices like panic, motion detection, and medical monitoring smartwatch.

Employers should be sensitive that technologies designed to improve lone worker safety may introduce psychosocial stressors for workers who may feel as though they're being constantly monitored by their employer.