

Tool Box Talk

Isolated Work Environment

Working Alone and in Remote Areas

Working alone and in remote areas without immediate access to emergency services is not always avoidable. Employers have a duty to eliminate or reduce the risks associated with tasks where working alone is required.

Situations where workers should generally not work alone include: working at heights, around high voltage power, and where heavy machinery is in use. Caution must also be taken when driving long distances is required, and where there is a significant risk of injury from the work being performed, if the risks cannot be eliminated or effectively controlled.

Reducing The Risks

Some of the ways to reduce risks associated with isolated work include:

1. **Communication Systems:** Implement effective personal security and communication systems through radio and satellite devices.
2. **Buddy System:** Ensure workers have a colleague to escort them when undertaking a job and to be readily available if an incident were to occur.
3. **Workplace Layout and Design:** Conduct an assessment of the workplace to identify any potential hazards the worker needs to be aware of and develop control measures to mitigate the risks.
4. **Movement Records:** Keep and maintain a record of all worker movements outside the workplace.
5. **Training, Information and Instruction:** Ensure workers are prepared and understand the nature of work to be carried out as well as all associated risks and control measures.
6. **Emergency Plans:** Create a comprehensive emergency plan based on the type of work, location and size of the workplace for emergency situations, including medical assistance and treatment protocols.

Legislation

According to section 3-24(2), Working alone or at an isolated place of employment, of the *Occupational Health and Safety Regulations, 2020*:

Where a worker is required to work alone or at an isolated place of employment, the risks arising from the conditions and circumstances of the worker's work or the isolation of the place of employment must be identified by an employer or contractor. This should happen in consultation with the Occupational Health and Safety committee, the worker representative, or, where there is no committee or representative, the workers shall identify the risks arising from the conditions and circumstances of the worker's work or the isolation of the place of employment.

An employer or contractor also needs to take all reasonably practicable steps to eliminate or reduce the risks identified.

The steps to be taken to eliminate or reduce the risks must include the establishment of an effective communication system that consists of radio communication, phone or cellular phone communication, or any other means that provides effective communication in view of the risks involved. It may include any of the following:

- regular contact by the employer or contractor with the worker working alone or at an isolated place of employment;
- limitations on, or prohibitions of, specified activities;
- establishment of minimum training requirements and/or experience, or other standards of competency;
- provision of personal protective equipment;
- establishment of safe work practices or procedures;
- provision of emergency supplies for use in travelling under conditions of extreme cold or other inclement weather conditions.