



CIEEM

Risk Assessment for Lone Workers

Professional Guidance Series
PGS7

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Background

The Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) is often approached by Members for advice in this important area. Much has already been done by others so it is not the intention of CIEEM to produce detailed guidance on Health and Safety; expert advice and guidance is readily available from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE, www.hse.gov.uk). More related specifically to CIEEM, the following is provided as information on the main risks to consider whilst undertaking fieldwork in lone working and remote conditions. Members should be aware that they, whether an employer, self employed or an employee, have a responsibility to assess the risks involved in undertaking fieldwork and minimise those risks (to an acceptable level), both to themselves and to others.

CIEEM hopes that by observing the simple precautions outlined in this guidance, some risks and injuries can be avoided.

Assessing Risk

Before undertaking any form of fieldwork it is necessary to undertake a risk assessment: a careful examination of potential harm from an accident or incident. The assessment should consider the risks of lone working, fieldwork conditions and personal safety, including where work necessitates entering property. In most situations there will be health and safety requirements set out by the client of the lone worker, which must also be taken into account. The findings of the risk assessment should be clearly written down and explained to all relevant parties, understood and signed off before any site visits are made.

What is a Risk?

The likelihood of the potential for injury or harm being realised and causing an accident or incident.

What is a Hazard?

Anything with the potential to cause harm e.g. difficult terrain, particular plant species, severe weather and surveying for bats in old building containing asbestos.

What is the Extent of Risk?

Taking account of how serious injuries or outcomes are likely to be e.g. falls, injury, allergic reaction, hypothermia.

Who is Responsible for Risk Assessment?

In all cases employers and self-employed people are responsible for assessing risk and ensuring that it is adequately addressed. Assessment of risk must be either 'adequate' or 'suitable and sufficient'; these mean the same thing, but also mean that they do not have to be overcomplicated; though employers and contractors of lone workers need to ensure that their systems and procedures are robust.

In deciding the amount of effort to be put into assessing risks, it is necessary to judge whether the likelihood or severity of harm resulting from an incident is significant and whether they are covered by satisfactory precautions so that the risks are minimised and small.

Every individual has a responsibility to neither take unnecessary risks nor to put others that are working with/for them at risk, and to co-operate in observing health and safety measures.

The HSE has produced a document entitled '*Five Steps to Risk Assessment*' to assist in the assessment of risk. The five steps provide the framework for evaluating risk in any situation and are outlined below:

- Step 1: Look for the hazards.
- Step 2: Decide who may be harmed and how.
- Step 3: Evaluate the risks and decide whether the existing precautions are adequate or more should be done.
- Step 4: Record your findings.
- Step 5: Review your assessment and revise it if necessary

Control Measures to Ensure Adequate Risk Assessment

It is the duty of care of all employers and contractors to ensure, as far as practicable, that the lone workers for whom they are responsible are: competent to assess risk adequately on an 'on-going' basis, equipped to deal with

foreseeable situations and, perhaps most importantly, will apply the precautionary principal to situations.

Relevant control measures that will assist lone workers to competently assess and minimise risk may include instruction, training, supervision, personal protective equipment (PPE), etc. Employers should take steps to check that control measures are used and review the risk assessment from time to time to ensure it is still adequate.

Restrictions on Working Alone

There is no general legal prohibition on working alone; it will though depend on the findings of a risk assessment. The broad duties of two main pieces of legislation apply in the case of lone working:

- The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, Section 2 sets out a duty of care on employers to ensure the health, safety and welfare of their employees whilst they are at work
- The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, Regulation 3 states 'that every employer shall make a suitable and sufficient assessment of:
 - the risks to the health and safety of his employees to which they are exposed whilst they are at work, and
 - the risks to the health and safety of persons not in his employment arising out of or in connection with the conduct by him of his undertaking'.

There are some high-risk activities where lone working is not appropriate e.g. working near water, surveys in underground caves, and in certain situations where there may be a requirement for someone dedicated to the rescue role e.g. habitat surveys along railway lines.

When a risk assessment shows that it is not possible for the work to be done safely by a lone worker, arrangements for providing help or back-up should be put in place. Where a lone worker is working at another employer's workplace, that employer should inform the lone worker's employer of any risks and the control measures that should be taken. This helps the lone worker's employer to assess the risks.

Employers, in assessing situations where people work alone, should ensure precautions take account of normal work and foreseeable emergencies e.g. fire, equipment failure, illness and accidents. In addition, they should ask questions to assess whether extra riskcontrol measures are required such as:

- Does the workplace present a special risk to the lone worker?
- Is there a safe way in and out for one person? Can any temporary access equipment that is necessary, such as portable ladders or trestles, be safely handled by one person?
- Can all the plant, substances and goods involved in the work be safely handled by one person? Consider whether the work involves lifting objects too large for one person or whether more than one person is needed to operate essential controls for the safe running of equipment.
- Is there risk of violence?
- Is there a gender issue i.e. greater risk dependent on whether male or female?
- Is the individual adequately capable?
- Is the person medically fit and suitable to work alone?
- What happens if the person becomes ill and has an accident or there is an emergency?

Factors to Consider when Lone Working at a Remote Location

In particular, when working alone at a remote location the following factors must be considered:

- How long should the work take and how frequently should the worker report in
- Is there a reliable communication system in place for contacting/reporting back (noting there is often no or poor mobile telephone reception in remote areas)?
- Has the individual a safe means of travel to and from the location, especially out of normal hours?
- Has the individual allowed for adequate rest, personal hygiene, refreshment and first aid provisions?
- Can emergency services approach the location without hindrance?
- Are procedures for responding to 'worst-case' emergencies in place?

Location of Fieldwork and Field Conditions

Individuals undertaking fieldwork need to consider their own capability as well as a wide range of other potential risks relating to the location of the fieldwork. Planning is important – e.g. checking the five day forecast so that there is time to reschedule field visits. Evaluation of the extent of remoteness, the prevailing geographical and weather conditions and the type of all activity will help to assess the level of risk to the individuals involved.

Risk Factors to Consider

Many hazards need to be considered when evaluating the potential risk of fieldwork. These include:

- Extreme and variable **climatic conditions** - one of the most important range of factors to consider, in particular: hypothermia can occur if there is rapid loss of body heat and is exacerbated by wind chill and wet conditions; heat stroke/heat exhaustion may occur in hot weather if the body over-heats.
- The risk of **abuse and assault** (see personal safety below).
- **Difficult terrain** increases the chances of falls; the consequences of relatively minor injuries can be more serious.
- **Specific risk associated with dangerous conditions** e.g. surveys on traffic corridors (such as motorways), heights, cliff faces, climbing trees, quarries and underground caves.
- **Specific risk associated with different habitats** (uplands, mountains and moorlands, cliffs and crags, agricultural land, wetlands (bogs, mires, swamps) fen and carr, woodlands and forests, freshwater, seashore and inter-tidal areas, marine); for example on or close to water there is the associated risk of drowning.
- **Animal, insect and plant material injuries** include goring by large animals, dog bites, insect bites, allergic reactions, contact with toxins and microbial infection when working in/near water. Certain plants such as giant hogweed are known to produce skin reactions in some people.
- **Diseases** such as Weil's disease (caused by contact with water containing Leptospira bacteria), Lyme disease (from tick bites), tetanus and rabies can be a risk when carrying out fieldwork. The organism causing tetanus is widespread and can enter your body through cuts, abrasions or puncture wounds made by splinters and thorns. It is potentially fatal and immunisation before infection is the only certain way of dealing with the disease. Make quite sure that your cover is kept up to date. In addition, all those who handle bats should be vaccinated against rabies and care should be taken when handling bats to avoid getting bitten.
- **Health** of the individual is a factor - lone workers should not have any medical conditions which makes it inadvisable for them to work alone. It may be necessary to carry equipment long distances or over awkward terrain, so there is a risk of accidental back injury.
- Contact with some substances can cause **asthma, dermatitis or other allergies**; severe allergic reactions may result in breathing difficulties (anaphylactic shock).
- Use of **tools** and other **equipment** e.g. boats and step ladders.
- During **out of hours work** there may be no access to immediate assistance. The possibility of injury from personal attack may increase. Also the presence of obstructions and traversing unfamiliar or poorly lit premises can lead to injury.
- Surveys undertaken during winter periods, need to consider length of daylight hours for long 'walk-ins' to remote locations.

Working Overseas

Risks related to working overseas will depend upon local circumstances and the work being undertaken at the destination. The same principles of assessment should apply and risk assessment undertaken. Medical information should be available from your doctor and the World Health Organization (www.who.int).

Personal Safety

There is nothing that can guarantee safety in every situation, but by taking sensible precautions, many of which are common sense, it is possible to reduce the risks. Being aware of potential risks and taking appropriate action minimises risks. Think ahead about how you would act in different situations – staying and defending yourself (using reasonable force), with the risk of further injury, or giving an attacker what they want, to avoid injury. There is nothing wrong with doing either, but if you are attacked there will be no time to think about the options so it is best to consider the options beforehand.

The Suzy Lamplugh Trust (www.suzylamplugh.org) is a registered charity and the leading authority on personal safety. The HSE and Business Link (www.businesslink.gov.uk) also provide advice for lone working and risk assessments.

Additional services for lone workers are available from companies that provide products and services to support people working in the field. The most basic services use a mobile phone, while more sophisticated proprietary devices are able to track locations using GPS, have a dedicated SOS button and are able to detect a 'man down', if the worker is injured and immobilised. These services will alert the emergency services if a lone worker gets into trouble or if they have not been in contact for a set period of time. More information and details of companies providing lone worker services are available in the Members section of the CIEEM website (www.cieem.net).

First Aid and Hygiene

Who is Responsible for First Aid?

Employers are responsible for meeting the first aid needs of their employees working away from the main site. Employers' assessments of first aid needs should determine whether:

- Those who travel long distances or are continuously mobile should carry a personal first aid box
- Special arrangements need to be made for employees who work in remote areas
- Other means of summoning help, such as a mobile phone, should be provided for employees who work alone.

Assessment of First Aid Needs

Employers are required to carry out an assessment of first aid needs; they need to identify the level of risk to their employees in carrying out their work duties and consider what first aid equipment, personnel and facilities they need to make available. The HSE provides guidance, *'First aid at work – Your questions answered'*, which contains a checklist covering the points that employers should consider when carrying out an assessment.

If you are a self-employed worker, you are required to ensure you have adequate facilities to provide first aid to yourself while at work and on mixed premises with other self-employed or with employed workers. You must make an assessment of the hazards and risks in your workplace and establish an appropriate level of first aid provision. The HSE website has resources and detailed information on first aid.

Hygiene

When working in remote locations where the only access is by foot, hygiene can be an issue with respect to human sanitation especially if an individual is at the location all day. While the subject of where to 'go' may seem superfluous and may be considered somewhat a taboo subject, dealing with sanitation in a hygienic and environmentally-sensitive manner is an important outdoor skill – not only for yourself but for other people and animals, who may come into contact with human waste or water contaminated with excrement. Further information and advice can be found in the Mountaineering Council of Scotland leaflet *'Where to "Go" in the Great Outdoors'*.

Employers Liability Insurance

It is necessary to consider whether you have adequate insurance cover. Under the Employers' Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act 1969 (ELCI), employers are required by law to insure their employees against workplace injury or disease. If you employ people who are lone workers then they must be included in your ELCI cover.

Further Information

- Health and Safety Executive (2006). *Five steps to risk assessment*
www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg163.pdf
- Health and Safety Executive (2009). *First aid at work: Your questions answered*
www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg214.pdf
- Health and Safety Executive (2009). *Working alone: Health and safety guidance on the risks of lone working*
www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg73.pdf
- Health Protection Agency (2007). *Leptospirosis and Weil's disease*
www.hpa.org.uk/web/HPAwebFile/HPAweb_C/1194947413135
- Mountaineering Council of Scotland (1998). *Where to "Go" in the Great Outdoors*
www.mcofs.org.uk/assets/access/where-to-goleaflet.asp.pdf
- Scottish Natural Heritage (2003). *Bats and Human Health*
www.bats.org.uk/publications_download.php/223/SNHbatshumanhealth.pdf

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