



Guide to Working Alone Regulations



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Purpose

This guide is intended for employers who have workers that work alone. It provides the definition of working alone, outlines the legislation around working alone, discusses risk assessments and assists in developing written procedures for safe work practices. Working alone can result in dangerous, hazardous and sometimes even violent situations. Employers and workers need to understand the inherent risks of working alone and develop solutions to decrease or eliminate these risks.

This guide is published by the Workers Compensation Board to assist with the interpretation of the working alone regulations of Prince Edward Island. The regulations set a minimum standard and employers are encouraged to go beyond the regulatory requirements. We recommend that users consult the resources listed at the end of the guide for further assistance with the development of procedures for their particular needs.

Legislation

On Prince Edward Island, the *Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Act* and its General Regulations describe the standards for occupational health and safety and the general safety principles for Island workplaces. Please refer to our website, www.wcb.pe.ca, for current legislation and regulations.

Part 53 of the OHS Regulations sets out the requirements related to working alone.

Occupational Health and Safety Regulations, Part 53

53.1 *In this Part, “working alone” means a worker working at a workplace who is the only worker of the employer at that workplace, in circumstances where assistance is not readily available to the worker in the event of injury, ill health or emergency.*

53.2 (1) *Where a worker is working alone, the employer shall develop and implement written procedures to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of the worker from risks arising out of, or in connection with, the work assigned.*

(2) Written procedures developed under subsection (1) shall include the following information:

- (a) the name, address, location and telephone number of the workplace;*
- (b) the name, address, location and telephone number of the employer;*
- (c) the nature of the business conducted at the workplace;*

- (d) identification of the possible risks to each worker working alone that arise from or in connection with the work assigned;*
 - (e) the steps to be followed to minimize the risks identified in clause (d);*
 - (f) details of the means by which a worker who is working alone can secure, and the employer can provide, assistance in the event of injury or other circumstances that may endanger the health or safety of the worker.*
- (3) The steps referred to in clause (2)(e) shall*
- (a) specify the time intervals for checking on the worker;*
 - (b) specify the person responsible for contacting the worker and recording the results of the contact;*
 - (c) outline the process to be followed if the worker cannot be contacted, including provisions for an emergency rescue; and*
 - (d) provide for checking with the worker at the end of the worker's shift.*

53.3 *The employer and the worker who is working alone shall comply with the procedures developed under section 53.2.*

53.4 *The employer shall implement a training program in respect of the procedures established under Section 53.2 for each worker who is working alone and for each supervisor who is responsible for a worker working alone.*

53.5 *The employer shall ensure that a copy of the procedures established under Section 53.2 is available to an officer on request.*

Working Alone Definition

53.1 *In this Part, “**working alone**” means a worker working at a workplace who is the only worker of the employer at that workplace, in circumstances where assistance is not readily available to the worker in the event of injury, ill health or emergency.*

A worker can be considered to be working alone if there is a reasonable expectation that a call for assistance will not or cannot be responded to and the worker's absence may not be noticed for some time. Risks to workers may be higher when they are working alone. A fall, exposure to dangerous chemicals or an assault can have very different consequences if a worker is alone than if the victim has co-workers or capable assistants in the immediate vicinity.

The intent of the working alone regulations is to set a minimum standard for the safety of workers who work alone, particularly those who have a high degree of risk inherent in their work. The requirements for the safety of an office worker working alone will be very different from the requirements for a late night convenience store worker or a home care worker working alone with a client with a history of unpredictable behavior. ***The degree of risk will determine the level of protection the worker needs.***

The best work alone practices include worker training on recognizing risks and an effective communication plan.

Common Work Alone Situations Where Workers Are At Risk

Workers who :

- **handle cash** (such as convenience store clerks, retail and food outlet workers and taxi drivers)
- **meet clients out of office** (such as home care workers, social service workers and bylaw officers)
- **work outside of normal working hours** (such as convenience store clerks, cleaners, security, special production)
- **do hazardous work with no regular interaction** with other people (such as forestry workers or night cleaners in a plant)
- **are at risk of violent attack because they are isolated from worker or public view** (such as security guards, custodians)
- **work away from their fixed base** (such as construction workers, forestry workers, postal staff, engineers)

The potential for violence or serious consequences from assault is higher when workers are alone.

For this reason many of the procedures developed for violence prevention will apply to working alone situations. The Guide to the Prevention of Workplace Violence on the WCB website (www.wcb.pe.ca) will provide more details.

Procedures for Safe Work - Section 53.2(1)

Section 53.2 (1) requires that procedures be developed. 53.2 (2) (d) requires that risks be identified in those procedures. To identify risks, a risk assessment must be done. This will clarify the potential for an accident and the level and type of precautions necessary.

Answer the questions below in this sample risk assessment to determine where your risks are and what you can do to minimize them. ***Remember to consult with workers when looking for solutions. Their contributions will make solutions workable. When workers have input into their working alone procedures, they take ownership and this will increase the likelihood that the procedures will be followed.***

Risk Assessment

1. The first step is to review your work history.

- Have there been incidents with workers working alone?
- How serious were they?
- Is there a pattern to the incidents? (location, time of day, type of work?)
- Have your safety committee or safety representative or a supervisor speak to all the workers who work alone to ask if they have had any near misses and what they see as a potential risk.
- Ask everybody and document the responses. Be positive in your approach and remember the workplace will benefit from this information.
- Are there policies in place?
- Are all workers aware of the policies? Are they followed and monitored?

2. Look at workplaces similar to yours and determine what incidents have occurred there:

- If you have a head office or an association, find out if there is any information available on incidents and what is recommended.
- Where there is a risk of violence or robbery, local police or security companies may have information on areas or times of high risk as well as solutions.

3. Consider your physical work environment and tasks being performed.

Answer the following questions:

- Is the worker working in or around potentially dangerous machinery or areas? Examples would include lathes, saws, mobile equipment, or confined spaces.

- How great is the risk of injury from the machinery or equipment?
- Are there workers who work in remote locations in your workplace such as cold storage, maintenance room, boiler room? How long would it be before someone noticed their absence if they were injured?
- Is there a risk of violence or robbery? Review the Guide to Workplace Violence for suggestions of a risk assessment in this situation.
 - Does their geographic location create a potential for assault?
 - Does the worker handle cash? Do you have surveillance in place for these workers?
 - Do you have policies or practices that minimize their risk?
 - Does the work involve clients who may be intoxicated?
 - Does the work involve unpredictable clients or clients who may be confused?
- Is the work done late at night? Do workers leave alone?
- Does the worker work with the general public while alone?
- Will workers be handling controlled products while they are alone?
- Is there a requirement for personal protective equipment such as respiratory protection for these substances that would indicate a higher risk?
- Is access to the work site controlled? This can help or create challenges.
- Is there a risk of a fall? Will workers be climbing or working from heights?

4. Next consider the administrative practices around your work. This is the way the work is managed to reduce risk.

- How long are workers alone?
- Is there a means of communication available now such as a portable phone, personal alarm system, or emergency call button?
- Will the communication system work in all circumstances?
- Will a call-in be adequate?
- What will be done if there is no response?
- Would a buddy system work in your work environment where lone workers could call each other?
- How familiar are the workers with the workplace?
- How experienced are your workers?
- How well trained are they to handle an emergency?
- Were recommendations made from any previous incidents around working alone? Were they implemented? Did they work?
- Do workers need to work alone? Can things be rescheduled to reduce the need for lone workers?
- Can a list of higher risk tasks that are not to be done while worker is alone be created, e.g. not to work at heights, with power lines or hazardous materials?

- Is cash kept to a minimum and is money locked in a safe or taken away while workers are alone?
- Are there medications on site that would attract a robber, and if so are the medications locked up?
- In the service sector can you lock the doors and just use a service window or drive through while you have a lone worker?
- Are there temporary risks that may require back up only for the duration of the task or while a particular client is being cared for?
- Do all your workers know all the relevant procedures?
- Is there a system in place to ensure working alone procedures are being followed?
- Ask workers what they do now - formally or informally - to reduce hazards.

Your risk assessment information will determine what procedures you need to develop.

- Look at the risk areas you have identified.
- Consider ways to eliminate or minimize risks where possible. Identify tasks that can be done while others are present. Inform staff on tasks to avoid while alone.
- Find a way to reduce the risk where possible, e.g. lock the doors and limit access.
- Develop a written work procedure for each risk area. Remember to use information on risks from workers to develop procedures.
- Train all workers including supervisors, part time and casual workers on working alone procedures.
- Check to be sure working alone procedures are working and are being followed.

Procedure Summary:

Procedures Must Include:

- The name, address, location and telephone number of the workplace
- The name, address, location, and telephone number of the employer
- The nature of the business conducted at the workplace
- Identification of the possible risks to each worker working alone that arise from or in connection with the work assigned
- The steps to be followed to minimize these risks identified
- Details of the means by which a worker who is working alone can secure, and the employer can provide, assistance in the event of injury or other circumstances that may endanger the health and safety of the worker

A sample procedure to a lone convenience store worker can be found in Appendix B .

Examples of training on how to react to a robbery can be found in the document, *Working Alone Safely: A Guide for Employers and Employees*, by Alberta Employment and Immigration, at www.alberta.ca.

Workers doing high risk processes or working off site with clients may need a detailed call-in procedure. This will vary according to the risk and task.

Section 53.2 (2)&(3) of the Regulations outline specific requirements for the call-in when it is necessary.

The Procedure Must State:

- Which workers must be contacted and at what intervals.
- Who is to call and where the call will be recorded.
- What will happen if the worker misses a call or cannot be contacted. This includes how the workers will be rescued and by whom.
- What time the last call is expected.

See Appendix A for a sample call-in procedure. A call-in procedure will need to fit the circumstances for a particular work situation. Consider a variety of call-in options. Security persons, co-workers or call centres are all options.

Section 53.2(2)(f) requires that the written procedure provide details of exact phone numbers the worker can call to get assistance in the event of an injury or any other circumstance in which the worker is or believes themselves to be in danger.

Remember that the intent is to prevent an incident. This means that workers should be trained in warning signs. If they are aware of suspicious or escalating behavior, they need a person to call for back up for an “on alert” status such as a police drive by or visit from security. A 911 call placed after the fact won’t help with prevention.

Section 53.3 clarifies that the procedures that are developed must be actually used by workers working alone. This is in compliance with the OH&S Act requirement that employers ensure a safe workplace and workers follow safe work practices.

Section 53.4 reiterates that the worker and the supervisor must be trained in working alone procedures. Supervisors are reminded that they have a responsibility to ensure procedures are being followed.

Section 53.5 reinforces the requirement for accessible, written procedures by specifically requiring that they be available to the Occupational Health and Safety officer on request.

It is important to note that the Youth Employment Act states that workers under the age of 16 must be supervised at all times. Therefore, employers complying with the Youth Employment Act must never allow young workers to work alone. (Refer to the Youth Employment Act , available through our website, www.wcb.pe.ca, for more details).

Resources

Workers Compensation Board of Prince Edward Island

For information about safe workplaces, including current occupational health and safety legislation on PEI, and the *Youth Employment Act*, visit www.wcb.pe.ca

Canadian Center for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS)

For publications on working alone in general, off site and working with patients, visit the CCOHS website at www.ccohs.ca

Alberta Labour and Immigration

To download a copy of *Working Alone Safely: A Guide for Employers and Employees*, which describes best practices and checklists for employees working with cash, working off site and at hazardous tasks, visit www.alberta.ca

WorkSafeBC

The publication, *Take Care; How to Develop and Implement a Workplace Violence Prevention Program*, is available at www.worksafebc.com

Appendix A. Call-in Procedure for Lone Workers

Workplace: Name: _____
Address: _____
Phone: _____

Employer: Name: _____
Address: _____
Phone: _____

RISK: _____

Working alone call-in procedures for _____ (position)
For work between _____ and _____, on _____
Time Time Day(s) of the week

Person responsible for checking on the above noted worker _____

Call times (every two hours):

1 am () 3 am () 5 am () 7 am ()

Method of contact:

Phone E-mail Face to face

Response will be logged in Check-in log

If the worker cannot be reached and does not respond within _____ minutes
face to face contact will be made by:

Co-Worker (name) Supervisor Name (s)

Security Police

The person responding will immediately inform the person responsible for face to face contact with the worker of the reason for the delay or any incidents. Responsible person will call supervisor in the event of an accident.

Supervisor to call _____

If the worker encounters an unsafe situation the worker is to immediately contact the designated person for instruction and/or call the police if necessary.
Contact phone number _____ (Also post by phone)

These procedures will be reviewed at orientation and at least annually.
Any change in names or numbers will be made immediately.

Signature of Worker Date

Signature of Supervisor Date

Appendix B. Sample Procedure for Lone Workers

Workplace: Name: _____
Address: _____
Phone: _____

Employer: Name: _____
Address: _____
Phone: _____

RISK: _____

Working alone call-in procedures for _____ (position)

For work between _____ and _____, on _____
Time Time Day(s) of the week

Supervisor _____

Supervisor will:

- Ensure all workers left alone are trained in communication procedures.
- Ensure worker being left alone is aware of procedures for calling for assistance for suspicious behavior and how to behave in the event of a robbery.
- Ensure emergency numbers are posted and worker is aware of location.

Before leaving every shift supervisor will:

- Ensure communication systems are available and working.
- Check that outside lighting is working.
- Ensure cash station is visible from the outside.
- Ensure less than \$50.00 is left in cash.
- Check that video surveillance is on.
- Check that signs for minimal cash and surveillance are in place.

Workers will:

- Follow all procedures.
- Remain alert.
- Keep communication system with them at all times.
- Report suspicious activity as directed in procedure.
- Use drop safe to keep cash below \$50.00.
- Call as per procedure at end of shift.
- Report all incidents immediately.

Worker Signature

Supervisor Signature



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