

Safeguarding Lone Workers

Lone working has always played a major role in mineral product operations and, whilst it may be desirable to have a second person involved in the task, it is often unavoidable to have someone working on their own.

What is it?

There is nothing in general health and safety legislation that prohibits an employee from working alone, but as employers and managers must consider the welfare and safety of all workers there must be proper systems and processes in place to safeguard their wellbeing.

General duty of care

Lone working is not covered by any specific piece of legislation. However a wide range of legislation may apply depending on the nature of the work involved.

There is a general duty on the employer to safeguard the health, safety and welfare at work of all employees, as far as is reasonably practicable. The employer's duty of care extends beyond their own employees to include other persons on site such as contractors and visitors.

Employees also have responsibilities to take reasonable care of their own health and safety and that of others affected by their work. They must co-operate with their employer in relation to health and safety matters.

Risk assessments

Risk assessments should be routinely undertaken to identify potential hazards in the workplace. Where work is undertaken by a lone worker then this must be taken into account because working alone introduces a level risk that would not otherwise be present.

The types of issues that you need to consider before allowing lone working include:

- ✓ Does the work situation present a special risk? For example is there a chance to fall from height?
- ✓ What is the length of time that the person will be working alone and the frequency?
- ✓ Would a second person be able to substantially contribute to preventing the risk of injury?
- ✓ Is the individual a suitable person to work alone, not only in terms of competence but also temperament and health?
- ✓ What effect might the environment have? For example are there severe weather conditions or does the environment present different challenges between day and night?
- ✓ What level of supervision is required or is possible?
- ✓ What instruction and training is needed to ensure that the person is competent?
- ✓ What contingency measures (i.e. evacuation procedures) are needed in the event of an emergency?
- ✓ In the event of accident or illness what safety provisions are required? What are the first aid requirements? Could anyone in the vicinity take over his or her duties?
- ✓ How remote is the workplace? Can help arrive quickly?
- ✓ Are there difficulties in providing communication? For example there are restrictions placed on the use of mobile phones by those using explosives.
- ✓ If reviewing a contractors role on site, how familiar are they with the site and its facilities?

This list is not exhaustive and if you are undertaking a risk assessment, chances are you will come up with other factors to consider.

If after considering all the necessary factors it is decided that lone work can be carried out with minimal risk, then formal procedures must be documented to set out how safety is being maintained. These procedures are specific to the nature of the work and the environment in which it is completed.

Safe working arrangements

When planning safe working arrangements, take time to consider the following:

- ✓ Lone workers should not be exposed to significantly greater risk than employees who work together.
- ✓ All the plant, substances and goods involved in the work must be capable of being handled safely by one person. The work must not involve lifting objects too large for one person or require more than one person to operate essential controls for the safe running of equipment.
- ✓ The need for safe access and exit for one person. Where temporary access equipment is necessary, such as portable ladders, one person must be able to safely handle and secure the ladder.
- ✓ Remote locations may need designated routes established and marked for emergency service access in an emergency.
- ✓ Access to adequate rest, hygiene and refreshment facilities.
- ✓ The level of supervision required. This is a management decision based on the nature of the work being carried out and its associated risks. Supervision could be set up to include personal visits, regular check-in points, CCTV, the use of panic buttons, signing in and out of the workplace or any combination of these.
- ✓ The person's suitability to carry out the task. This will require a check of their medical history to ensure that they have no conditions making them unsuitable.
- ✓ The need for the lone workers to have sufficient experience to understand any risks that may arise and the precautions they need to take. It is the employer's responsibility to ensure that all employees working alone receive the necessary information, instruction and training to enable them to work safely and it is the responsibility of the employee to adhere to this system of work and to report any difficulties, failure of equipment or general concerns on health and safety issues to the line manager.

Why is it important to me?

The mineral products industry is a prime example of an industry where lone working is considered almost a normal activity. However, due to the hazardous nature of the work that takes place, it is essential that managers consider carefully every aspect of lone working to ensure there is the minimum of risk involved.

IQ believes that anyone working alone should not be placed at any additional risks whilst completing their duties. Employers deploying lone working should have the necessary risk assessments and safe working practices in place that are a sign of a well-managed site operating within in the quarrying and minerals products industry.

It features on our **Skills Wheel** which captures all the key skill and knowledge areas we believe are vital to successful career development in the industry.

Where Next?

Please refer to relevant UK Legislation affecting lone working:

- Confined Spaces Regulations 1997 and ACOP
- The Electricity at Work Regulations 1989, the ACOP to Regulation 14, relating to working on or near live conductors
- The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
- The Quarries Regulations 1999

The Health and Safety Executive has good advice and further reading on lone working. You can download HSE pdf documents free of charge or purchase books online.

Have a look at **Working Alone in Safety:**

www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg73.htm

Institute of Quarrying

IQ supports professionals working within the quarrying and minerals products industry through membership and training. These factsheets are produced across a range of topics to share ideas and best practice. Further information can be found via the resources section on the IQ website www.quarrying.org.