

## Safety Reps Rights

Unite safety reps are a key part of providing better health and safety for Unite members at work. Safety reps have specific rights enshrined in law, which enable them to:

- Inspect the workplace regularly.
- Investigate employee complaints concerning health and safety issues at work.
- Investigate accidents, dangerous occurrences and potential hazards.
- Represent workers on health, safety, and welfare matters to their employer.
- Inspect health and safety documents.
- Receive information from HSE Inspectors.
- Establish a joint union-management Safety Committee.
- Receive time off to fulfil these rights and receive training.

### Employers are required to consult safety reps, especially about:

- Measures introduced at a workplace that may substantially affect health and safety.
- Arrangements for appointing health & safety competent persons and emergencies.
- Health & safety information required to be provided to employees.
- Health & safety training arrangements for the workforce, such as induction training.
- New technology introduced and planned, regarding consequences to health & safety.

### Employers must provide safety reps with the resources to carry out their role. This should include:

- Room with desk and chairs at work, for carrying out interviews and meetings.
- Secure facilities for storing documents.
- Access to a telephone and other communication media used or permitted in the workplace such as e-mail, intranet and internet.
- Access to printer and photocopier.
- Notice board.

Other facilities should include copies of relevant statutes, Regulations, Approved Codes of Practice and HSE guidance, copies of safety journals, and legal and international standards that are relevant to the workplace.



Looking for Trouble  
on Health & Safety

# Lone Working



[www.unitetheunion.org](http://www.unitetheunion.org)

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## Is it legal to work alone - and is it safe?

This is one of the most common health and safety questions raised by members. Unite's aim is to avoid members being put at greater risk through working alone. The extent of the problem will depend on the risk involved and on the risk assessment that employers are required to make as part of their duties under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. As the risk increases the problems of lone working require greater attention. But in legal terms, no simple answer applies in all circumstances.

## Can people legally work alone?

While there is no specific legal prohibition on working alone, the general legal duties of employers still apply. They should identify the hazards of the work, assess the risks involved, and implement safe working arrangements to ensure the risks are either eliminated or adequately controlled. When it is not possible to devise arrangements for the work to be done safely by one person, alternative arrangements providing help or back-up have to be devised.

## Who are lone workers and what jobs do they do?

According to HSE, lone workers are those who work by themselves without close or direct supervision, for example:

### In fixed establishments

- A person working alone in a small workshop, petrol station, kiosk or shop
- People who work from home other than in low-risk, office-type work
- People working alone for long periods, eg in factories, warehouses, leisure centres or fairgrounds
- People working on their own outside normal hours, eg cleaners and security, maintenance or repair staff

### As mobile workers working away from their fixed base

- Workers involved in construction, maintenance and repair, plant installation and cleaning work
- Agricultural and forestry workers
- Service workers, including postal staff, social and medical workers, engineers, estate agents, and sales or service representatives visiting domestic and commercial premises

It is also worth noting that some of the problems of lone working could also apply to pairs of workers who work in isolated areas.

## Issues to be addressed

These are some of the issues which need special attention when questioning any proposals that are made for lone working. All of these must be addressed satisfactorily by employers. In the vast majority of cases, Unite believes that lone working should be considered unacceptable.

- Can the risks of the job be adequately controlled by one person or are more people necessary? Solitary workers should not be exposed to significantly more risks than employees who work together. Precautions should take account of normal working conditions and foreseeable emergency situations, eg, fire, equipment failure, illness and accidents.
- Does the workplace present any special risks to the solitary worker? Will moving machinery be involved, or chemicals?
- Is there safe access and exit for one person? Can one person safely handle any temporary access equipment, such as portable ladders or trestles?

- Can all the plant, substances and goods involved in the work be safely handled by one person? The work may involve lifting objects too large for one person, and more than one person may be necessary to operate essential controls for the safe running of equipment.
- Are care workers, or others working in people's homes, more at risk?
- Is there an extra risk of violence against a lone worker?
- Could there be a risk of vexatious complaints against lone workers, especially in the case of professional care workers?
- Are women especially at risk if they work alone?
- Are young workers especially at risk if they work alone, due to immaturity, lack of knowledge or lack of experience?
- Will social isolation for long periods increase stress and mental pressures upon individuals?
- Is the person medically fit and suitable to work alone? Employers need to consider both routine work and foreseeable emergencies, which may impose additional physical and mental burdens on the individual.
- What training is needed?
- What supervision will there be?
- What checks will be made to ensure people are safe?
- What happens if there is an accident or an emergency?
- How are basic first aid requirements met? Where injuries are foreseeable, the absence of a colleague to administer or at least organise help could be construed as insufficient first aid cover.

All of these factors need to be considered when the prospect of lone working is raised. Employers have legal duties to provide safe working conditions.

There is a clear onus on them not to create conditions that could put individual workers at risk.



## Action points

1. Oppose lone working in line with Unite policy
2. Use your rights as a safety rep to be consulted in good time in advance of any moves to lone working.
3. Ensure that there is full discussion of all of the points raised above.
4. Contact your regional office if employers seek to push lone working. For further information see HSE leaflet "Working Alone" indg73 <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg73.pdf>

## Further information

[http://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/Documents/SecurityManagement/Lone\\_Working\\_Guidance\\_2013.pdf](http://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/Documents/SecurityManagement/Lone_Working_Guidance_2013.pdf)

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/violence/preventing-workplace-harassment.pdf>