



# Working alone

If you are the owner of a small business or are one of a few employees in a small company, you may sometimes work by yourself. But there are particular hazards involved in working alone that owners and employees need to be able to recognize and control. In some cases, working alone should not even be a consideration.

A person may be working alone in a variety of places and situations. He or she may be an employee of a contractor on a jobsite or may simply be a worker who is not directly supervised. Some people may work alone for just a few minutes a day once in a while. Others may work alone all day, every day.

## Risks and responsibilities

The greatest risk in working alone is that no one would be there to help a worker who becomes injured, trapped, or unconscious. Even if the other workers realize someone is missing, it may be difficult for them to find a worker who has become incapacitated.

If you are an employer and have an employee who is working alone or in relative isolation, it is your responsibility to tell that person about any hazards in the workplace.



Many injuries and illnesses can be prevented before anyone even begins to work alone. It may be difficult or even impossible to eliminate all of the possible dangers on a site for someone who is working alone. But it is always possible to reduce or control them.

## Planning and procedures

The first step is planning. That means inspecting the jobsite for real and possible hazards and taking whatever steps are necessary to safeguard your workers. An essential part of that process is a worksite or jobsite inspection. You can go over each area of your workplace—look for hazards and think about what could possibly go wrong in that specific place or while a particular job is being done.

Look for extreme dangers such as an uncovered floor opening, as well as less obvious dangers such as an untidy worksite. If any personal protective equipment or clothing is required besides a hard hat and safety boots, the employer should provide it, along with instructions for using it. Also, make sure that the workers are prepared to wear all of their personal protective equipment.

The employer or supervisor should ensure that any worker working alone is aware of any hazards in the area. The worker should be trained in hazard recognition and in the procedures and equipment required to do the job safely. The procedures should also be spelled out in the company's health and safety policy.

## Communication and check-in

Communication is crucial when anyone is working alone, whether it is an employee or the owner of the firm. A system must be established where, at regular intervals, someone checks on the worker or the worker reports to a designated person. If the situation is especially dangerous, check-ins should be done more often.

The means of communication between the worker and their contact person should be decided ahead of time and be clearly understood by both persons. If a site telephone will be used, it should be clearly identified, conveniently located, and working properly. The number of the person to be contacted should be posted on or near the phone. Mobile devices can also be used. Test the units on-site to make sure that reception is reliable.

## How IHSA can help

IHSA has several resources to help small companies minimize the hazards of working alone. The *Working Alone* DVD describes the legal issues of working alone, how to prepare for emergencies, and how to recognize hazards and control them. We also have an e-learning course that covers this important topic. Visit the [ihsa.ca](http://ihsa.ca) website for more resources.