

## Protecting Workers Who Work Alone

*This PSHSA Fast Fact is intended to help supervisors, managers, employers and JHSC members become more aware of the possible safety implications for workers who work alone and the measures needed to make these work situations safer.*

Health care workers in community and home services face special risks when working alone in patients' homes. Even in many health care facilities, staff working some shifts or in low traffic areas may find themselves on their own.

### Legislative Requirement

In Ontario, as in most other Canadian provinces and territories, the law does not discuss working alone as a distinct issue. However, all employers, managers and supervisors must do “everything that is reasonable under the circumstances” (Occupational Health and Safety Act, Sec. 25) to ensure that their workers have a healthy and safe workplace. Ensuring that workers working alone are safe is within the scope of the intent of the law.

### Tips for Working Alone

#### Have Written Policies

Ensure you have a written policy that commits your organization to safeguarding workers who work alone. The purpose is to protect employees in situations that could result in injury or health problems or expose them to possible criminal violence or other adverse conditions. Working alone has been identified as a significant risk factor in regard to workplace violence.

### Consult the JHSC

Consult the JHSC or worker representative, as well as the workers involved to:

- Identify all situations in which a worker must work alone.
- Assess the conditions under which that work takes place.
- Develop a plan tailored to the individual work situation, outlining steps to ensure, as far as possible, the worker's safety.

### Gather Appropriate Information

Make sure the plan includes:

- The name, address and location of the workplace.
- The nature of the work being done there.
- Recognize the potential risks to each worker who may be working alone.
- Assess the risks identified

### Control Measures that will Minimize Each Risk

Details of how workers can get help if they are in situations that could endanger their safety, or in the event that they are injured.

### Choose Appropriate Control Measures

Possible control methods include:

- A “buddy” system.
- Regular personal checks by another person (visits/walkthroughs by the employer, supervisor, security guard, another worker or police).
- Periodic telephone contact.
- Mechanical or electronic surveillance (e.g., pagers or walkie-talkies).
- Central monitoring of staff working alone.

In some circumstances, it may be appropriate to use a work permit for working alone. This permit should indicate when (start and end dates), where and for whom the worker will be working. The supervisor and the worker should sign this permit.

## Train Staff in Ways to Work Alone Safely

This includes:

- The requirement to report suspicious client behaviour and incidents. How to determine the risk of specific work situations on a daily basis.
- How to leave a risky situation safely.
- How to identify, prevent, and manage aggressive behaviour.

The employer should create an environment in which concerns can be expressed without fear of reprisal or judgement.

When problems have occurred:

- Provide necessary counseling or help for staff.
- Investigate the incident thoroughly to identify ways to prevent future problems.
- Make the plan discussed above available to a provincial inspector upon request.