

Part 28 Working Alone

Application

- 393(1)** This Part applies if
- (a) a worker is working alone at a work site, and
 - (b) assistance is not readily available if there is an emergency or the worker is injured or ill.
- 393(2)** Working alone is considered a hazard for the purposes of Part 2.

Precautions required

- 394(1)** An employer must, for any worker working alone, provide an effective communication system consisting of
- (a) radio communication,
 - (b) landline or cellular telephone communication, or
 - (c) some other effective means of electronic communication
- that includes regular contact by the employer or designate at intervals appropriate to the nature of the hazard associated with the worker's work.
- 394(1.1)** Despite subsection (1), if effective electronic communication is not practicable at the work site, the employer must ensure that
- (a) the employer or designate visits the worker, or
 - (b) the worker contacts the employer or designate at intervals appropriate to the nature of the hazard associated with the worker's work.
- 394(2)** Repealed
- 394(3)** Repealed

(5) The OHS Code 2009 requires employers to regularly contact the worker working alone. What does this mean?

In addition to the employer providing the worker working alone with an effective communication system, the employer (or their designate) must regularly contact the worker at intervals appropriate to the nature of the hazard associated with the worker's work. Regular contact must also be made if effective electronic communication is not practicable at the work site.

The time intervals at which contact is made should be based on the level of risk that the worker is exposed to. For example, a person working at a retail store located in a strip mall, with workers of other employers nearby, may not require contact as frequently as a person who is working in a free-standing retail store.

As a second example, consider a laboratory setting. When establishing the time interval between contacts the employer needs to consider the materials and equipment being worked with, including anything stored in the lab that a worker could accidentally hit or spill. If a worker is unlikely to encounter any hazardous materials or equipment, then checking in with someone upon arrival or departure should be sufficient. If the worker is working with hazardous chemicals or equipment, then the contact interval should be based on the likelihood of serious health consequences should the worker be injured while working alone.

In many situations the most practical approach may be to make contact at the beginning and/or end of a work shift. The nature of the hazard associated with the worker's work, as reflected in the employer's hazard assessment, should help to assess the level of risk that the worker is exposed to and set the appropriate contact interval.

(6) Can you provide some examples of what Workplace Health and Safety considers to be acceptable electronic communication systems?

In working alone situations, employers are required to provide affected workers with an effective communication system that allows a worker to call for assistance if there is an emergency or the worker is injured or ill. This same communication system provides a means by which the employer can contact the worker to confirm his or her well-being. Portable two-way radios and telephones are obvious methods of communication.

Employers may also use other effective means of electronic communication. An acceptable system is one that allows the worker to send an "OK" signal at predetermined intervals and which activates procedures to contact the worker or initiate emergency response if the worker does not send a signal at a predetermined interval or if a signal for assistance is received. A discussion of systems currently available in the marketplace, suitable for urban/rural and remote locations follows. Additional systems not described here may also be acceptable.

Means of electronic communication – urban/rural settings

The following electronic communication systems serve as examples of approaches currently available to employers and workers.

- *Call-in systems* – these systems are available from security service providers and only require access to a phone. Workers call into the system at scheduled intervals during their shift and enter a code to confirm their safety. In the event that a worker fails to phone in by his or her scheduled interval, the service provider follows a predetermined protocol to make contact with the worker. If the worker cannot be contacted, emergency assistance is dispatched.
- *Externally monitored panic alarm devices* – numerous security service providers offer panic alarm devices for use in their service area, which workers can carry with them, eliminating the need for access to a phone. As is the case with call-in systems, panic alarm devices can be programmed to require a worker to confirm his or her safety at scheduled intervals.

Some devices also offer a "person down" feature which notifies the security provider when a worker does not move for a given period of time, as well as a panic button which notifies the security provider of an emergency. In the event that the "person down" or panic alarm feature is activated, or a worker fails to confirm his or her safety at a scheduled interval, the service provider attempts to contact the worker before emergency assistance is dispatched. These devices are designed to be carried on the worker at all times, and can be worn around the worker's neck or on his or her belt. It is the employer's responsibility to ensure that workers consistently wear the device when assigned to work alone.

- *Internally monitored panic alarm devices* – panic alarm devices can also be purchased with a monitoring station that is operated by the employer, rather than an external security service provider. The employer's monitoring station can be linked to a number of different panic alarm devices and will emit an audible signal in the event that a worker fails to confirm his or her safety or the "person down" or panic button features are activated.

Means of electronic communication – remote locations

Examples of work activities in remote areas include range riding, field biology work, timber cruising, surveying, fire watch, mineral exploration, seismic blasting and guide work. Working alone in remote areas can present particular risks given that the work is typically done outdoors and often in difficult terrain or in otherwise relatively inaccessible areas.

Such areas also present particular challenges to providing a means of making regular contact with workers. Land-based telephone lines and security services are typically unavailable, and cell phone coverage may be limited or non-existent. However, examples of electronic communication systems that may be of use in such locations include the following.

- *Wireless satellite hand-held alerting and tracking devices* – several systems are available and provide capabilities such as alerts, simple messaging and position reporting through the use of GPS (Global Positioning System) technology. Systems are available that can provide coverage in most outdoor situations. Because of potential operational limitations based on the terrain in which the systems will be used, any system being considered for use should be tested for reliability in the type of setting that it will eventually be used.
- *Satellite phones* – these can also be effective in remote areas and offer the advantage of permitting extended two-way voice communication. Satellite phones should be evaluated for reliability in the areas they are intended to be used.
- *Radio transmitters* – in some circumstances i.e. where there is a relatively permanent base worksite with power generation capability, it may be feasible to use a local radio transmitter that provides surface-to-surface two-way radio contact. In some areas repeaters can be accessed for a wider coverage area.