



Ontario Shared Services
HR Service Delivery Division
Employee Health, Safety & Wellness

OPS Working Alone Guideline

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Introduction

The Ontario Public Service (OPS) is committed to the health and safety of its employees. It is recognized that there are situations where OPS employees may be required to work alone. The OPS Working Alone Guideline is intended to help workplace parties address the hazards associated with working alone.

An OPS employee is considered to be working alone when both of the following conditions are met:

- the employee cannot be seen by or heard by another OPS employee, and
- assistance is not readily available to the employee in the event of injury, illness or emergency.

Note: Whether assistance is readily available is determined by the availability of person(s) who are capable and willing to assist in a timely manner.

In the OPS, employees carry out many work activities alone in various settings. Some common working alone situations include:

- travelling alone for work purposes
- working alone in an OPS workplace/office or outside core business hours
- travelling away from an OPS workplace/office to meet clients or to conduct inspection/enforcement work
- conducting field work alone or working in remote areas with no routine interaction with clients or the public
- interacting with customers or the public at service centres/counters.

While it is not always a risk to work alone, it can be in certain circumstances. Due to the wide variety of occupations in the OPS, it is important that managers/supervisors assess each situation carefully to identify the hazards associated with working alone and ensure that all reasonable precautions are taken for the protection of employee safety. The level of risk and the appropriate control measures will depend on the location, type or nature of work, and the potential consequences of an accident, injury or illness.



Purpose

This guideline has been developed to:

- Provide information and tools to assist managers/supervisors in assessing and controlling hazards associated with working alone.
- Identify work activities with regulatory restrictions impacting working alone.
- Outline the roles and responsibilities of workplace parties with regard to working alone.
- Provide a recommended approach for addressing working alone hazards and tips for common working alone situations.

Application and Scope

This guideline supports compliance with the OPS *Occupational Health and Safety Policy* and the [Occupational Health and Safety Act \(OHSA\)](#) and its regulations by providing workplace parties with general guidance on working alone in the OPS. More specific direction may be in place for certain OPS operations (e.g., Ontario Provincial Police, Office of the Fire Marshal and Emergency Management), and ministries are advised to adapt the general recommendations of this guideline to meet specific operational needs.

This guideline applies to OPS employees who are required to carry out work duties alone. This guideline does not apply to work-from-home arrangements. For work-from-home arrangements, refer to the [OPS Flexible Work Strategy's Health and Safety Telework Checklist: Home Offices](#), as well as any safety and security provisions in telework arrangement agreements.

It is recognized that the potential for confrontations or violence may be heightened for employees who work alone. Where there is a risk of violence, the OPS *Workplace Violence Prevention Policy* should be followed and the [workplace violence prevention program](#) material should be consulted, as well as any ministry-specific direction. In addition, where workplace harassment is identified or reported, the *Respectful Workplace Policy* should be followed.



Legislative Framework

In Ontario, the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* is the overarching piece of legislation that governs health and safety in workplaces. It is designed to protect workers against health and safety hazards in the workplace and outlines the rights and responsibilities of workplace parties. Currently, there is no specific regulation for “working alone” in Ontario.

The OHS Act requires employers ([Sections 25-26](#)) to:

- Provide information, instruction and supervision to protect the health and safety of workers.
- Inform workers about the hazards in the workplace.
- Take all reasonable precautions for the protection of workers.

These general employer duties would include addressing the potential hazards associated with working alone.

When a worker conducts business away from an OPS location, the worker is still considered to be at a workplace. A workplace is defined broadly under the OHS Act as “any land, premises, location or thing at, upon, in or near which a worker works”. By this definition, a site a worker visits or a vehicle used for business-related travel are considered to be workplaces, and the OHS Act-legislated employer duties would apply.

When a worker is working alone or off-site, supervisory duties also continue to apply. Among these duties, supervisors are required ([Section 27](#)) to:

- Ensure workers work in compliance with the OHS Act and its regulations.
- Ensure equipment, protective devices or clothing required by the employer are used or worn by the worker.
- Take all reasonable precautions for the protection of workers.

Worker duties ([Section 28](#)) would also continue to apply when working alone and in off-site workplaces. Some examples include:

- Using or wearing the equipment, protective devices or clothing that the employer requires to be used or worn.
- Reporting to the supervisor the existence of any hazards as well as any defects in equipment or protective devices.



Work Activities with Regulatory Restrictions Impacting Working Alone

In Ontario, a number of regulations under the OHS Act require that additional personnel (e.g., attendants, signallers) or rescue provisions be available when a worker carries out certain work activities. In practice, these requirements restrict a worker from working alone, since the corresponding work activities must not be conducted until the prescribed personnel or rescue provisions are in place.

The following table lists examples of these work activities and their regulatory references. Managers/supervisors should consult these regulatory references to determine the specific requirements for additional personnel or rescue provisions for each work activity.

Activity (Example)	Regulatory References
Confined space entry	Section 15, Confined Spaces Regulation 632/05 Section 247, Construction Projects Regulation 213/91
Working around liquid where this is a risk of drowning	Section 27, Construction Projects Regulation 213/91 Section 86, Industrial Establishments Regulation 851/90
Use of fall arrest equipment or safety nets	Section 26.1, Construction Projects Regulation 213/91
Work in tunnels, shafts, caissons and cofferdams	Section 246, Construction Projects Regulation 213/91
Work in trenches	Section 225, Construction Projects Regulation 213/91
Work on electrical systems in excess of 300 volts	Section 42.1(3), Industrial Establishments Regulation 851/90 Section 191(8), Construction Projects Regulation 213/91 Section 68(4), Health Care and Residential Facilities Regulation 67/93
Operating vehicle, crane, or similar equipment near live power line	Section 60(2), Industrial Establishments Regulation 851/90 Section 73, Health Care and Residential Facilities Regulation 67/93 Section 188, Construction Projects Regulation 213/91
Operating vehicle, crane or similar equipment without full view of path	Section 56, Industrial Establishments Regulation 851/90 Section 104, Construction Projects Regulation 213/91
Underwater diving operations	Diving Operations Regulation 629/94



Activity (Example)	Regulatory References
Entering a silo, bin, hopper, structure, container or thing that is not a confined space	Section 50, Industrial Establishments Regulation 851/90
Working alone in an underground mine	Section 16, Mines and Mining Plants Regulation 854/90
Hoisting operations	Section 153(13), Construction Projects Regulation 213/91
Underground work	Section 264-5, Construction Projects Regulation 213/91
Non-secured portable ladder use (exceeding six meters or likely to be endangered)	Section 73, Industrial Establishments Regulation 851/90

Note: There may be work activities without regulatory restrictions for which there is ministry-specific or workplace-specific direction to have additional personnel or rescue provisions available.

It is recommended that managers/supervisors also consider additional personnel or rescue provisions for high-risk activities that do not have regulatory or ministry/workplace working alone restrictions. Some examples of these activities/hazards include:

- large volumes of flammable solvents
- X rays or isotopes
- high risk microbes
- hazardous animals
- extreme temperature environments
- use of heavy equipment/machinery
- use of supplied air respiratory equipment (SAR) or self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA)
- welding

In all cases, managers/supervisors are advised to consider whether the presence of additional personnel or rescue provisions would be a reasonable and effective measure for reducing the risk of a high-hazard activity. Where available, industry best practices and/or voluntary standards may include provisions that have implications for working alone. For example, the CSA Standard for welding operations (CSA W117.2-06) requires a fire watcher for cutting or welding performed where there is combustible material nearby.



Recommended Approach for Addressing Working Alone Hazards

Where OPS employees are required to work alone, it is recommended that managers/supervisors consider the following approach for addressing working alone hazards:

1. Conduct a hazard assessment.
2. Implement hazard controls.
3. Provide information and instruction to employees.
4. Establish a means of communication/supervision.
5. Plan for emergencies.

An assessment tool is provided in [Appendix A](#) to assist managers/supervisors in following the recommended approach when employees are required to work alone. Managers/supervisors may also contact their CEHSW [health and safety advisor](#) for further assistance.

Where appropriate, and where circumstances are similar, a single working alone assessment may be suitable for multiple employees, multiple locations and/or multiple tasks.

1. Hazard Assessment

A hazard assessment should be conducted to identify all actual and potential hazards associated with the location, environment and type or nature of the work. In addition, factors that may influence the level of risk associated with working alone hazards should be taken into consideration. To assist managers/supervisors, the *Workplace Hazards for Managers* document on the OPS Wellness portal provides a summary of workplace hazards and outlines the process for hazard recognition, assessment and control.

To identify working alone hazards, follow these basic guidelines:

- **Consider all aspects of the tasks that will be carried out while working alone.** Think about what activities are involved and what potential hazards can result in employee injury or illness.

Note: Work tasks with regulatory or ministry/workplace restrictions that impact working alone should only be conducted if the required personnel or rescue provisions are in place.



- **Review past records.** If available, review past workplace records, reports, client information and/or raised concerns. Previous working alone assessments may provide useful information in this regard. It may be useful to also review hazard information from similar operations/workplaces, especially where hazards are unknown.
- **Involve the employees and workplace joint health and safety committee (JHSC)/health and safety representative (HSR).** Ask employees and the JHSC/HSR to provide input regarding hazards, concerns and possible solutions. It is also recognized that OPS employees who work alone in the field may encounter unexpected hazards. In these cases, employees should be instructed to report the hazard to their supervisor.

Some factors to consider that may influence the level of risk associated with working alone hazards include:

- the length of time the employee will be working alone
- the location of the work
- the type or nature of the work
- whether the work is routine or occasional (e.g., familiarity with the work and hazards)
- characteristics of the individual employee (e.g., pre-existing medical conditions or restrictions, level of employee experience/training)
- the nature of client/public interactions
- the potential consequences of an accident, injury or illness.

The assessment tool in [Appendix A](#) includes some questions to assist managers/supervisors in evaluating these factors.

Managers/supervisors should keep records of working alone assessments and any concerns reported by employees who are working alone. This information can be useful when conducting future assessments and should be taken into consideration when developing or updating control measures and communication plans.

2. Hazard Control

If an identified hazard cannot be eliminated, appropriate control measures should be developed and implemented to address each of the identified hazards. Controls should take into account the factors that influence the risks associated with working alone situations.



There may be various control options for a given working alone situation. Managers/supervisors should determine which control measures are most suitable for the circumstances, and implement them as necessary. Categories of control measures and examples are provided below.

Work Practices

Work practices, such as safe work procedures, can help reduce the hazards associated with working alone.

Some examples include:

- working alone communication planning (check-in procedures, use of communication equipment, etc.)
- emergency response procedures
- parking in areas with high visibility
- liaising with building security or neighbouring businesses for check-in and emergency assistance purposes
- disengagement procedures (i.e., instructions for leaving a dangerous situation)
- fatigue awareness/control strategies

A variety of [employee safety tips](#) are available later in this guideline for common working alone situations in the OPS. Managers/supervisors are advised to incorporate some of those safety tips when developing safe work procedures.

Administrative Controls

Administrative controls can modify work processes or limit the period of time an employee is exposed to the working alone hazard(s).

Some examples include:

- scheduling to eliminate working alone situation (e.g., buddy system)
- scheduling to reduce working alone duration
- scheduling higher risk activities during normal business hours, or when another employee is capable of helping if an emergency situation were to arise
- training on safe work and disengagement procedures
- visual identifiers (e.g., uniform, fleet vehicle, ministry identification)
- recording information for the purpose of warning or flagging risks/hazards to employees before they visit a client or site

Engineering Controls

In some cases, engineering controls can be implemented at the workplace to help reduce the hazards associated with working alone. It is recommended that managers develop safe work procedures in connection with these controls and instruct employees in these procedures.

Some examples include:

- installing a protective barrier between an employee and the public
- installing mirrors or observation windows to improve visibility
- adequate lighting
- installing security systems and measures, such as video surveillance cameras, panic/emergency alarms and height markers on door frames, where appropriate

For work carried out in an OPS workplace/office, it is recommended that managers/supervisors review any building security plans and measures, and ensure employees are familiar with the security controls and/or protocols in place.

Personal Protective Equipment



Personal protective equipment can be used to protect the employee from the working alone hazard(s) where the risk of working alone cannot be reduced by other controls.

Some examples include:

- personal locator beacon with GPS interface and distress button/function, where appropriate
- safety equipment for site inspections (e.g., hardhat, safety boots, hearing protection)
- safety equipment for enforcement operations

3. Information and Instruction

Employees working alone should be informed of the actual and potential hazards associated with the working alone task(s) and provided with information and/or instruction on how to work safely. This may include reviewing written safe work procedures with employees, providing instruction on check-in procedures and emergency response procedures, and training on the proper use of equipment.

Certain employees who work alone (e.g., new, inexperienced staff) may face increased risks and may therefore require additional information and/or instruction on procedures or controls in place.

Note: It is important that records be kept that include dates and descriptions of all information and instruction provided to employees, as well as signatures of those involved.

4. Communication/Supervision

Supervision to protect the health and safety of employees must still be provided in the case of employees who are working alone. In most working alone situations, direct face-to-face check-ins by a supervisor will not be possible and another means of communication will be the main form of supervision.

A means of communication is an important control measure and it is recommended that a [working alone communication plan](#) be determined ahead-of-time for employees who work alone. Managers/supervisors should take into consideration any concerns reported by the employees who are working alone when developing communication plans. The type of communication device/equipment selected will depend on the circumstances



and location, and the extent of the working alone communication plan (e.g., frequency of check-in with the supervisor or designated person) will depend on the level of risk.

Communication Equipment

Communication devices/equipment allow for contact with the employee to confirm their wellbeing and for the employee to call for assistance if needed. It is important to ensure the mode of communication is suitable for the work location. For instance, cellular phones will not function in locations without cellular service. Some examples of communication devices/equipment that can be used include:

- two-way radio
- cellular phone
- satellite phone
- office/desk phone
- smartphone or computer (for email)
- GPS text messaging device

Communication equipment should be properly maintained in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. In addition, it is recommended that managers/supervisors instruct employees to test communication equipment at the beginning of each shift, and re-test for reception upon arrival at a destination when travelling. If communication equipment stops working (or runs out of battery), the employee should be instructed to go to a nearby place (e.g., store) and contact the supervisor.

Check-In Procedures

Check-in procedures should be implemented to monitor the wellbeing of employees working alone.

For low-risk work, confirmation of the employee's wellbeing by email exchanges at the beginning and end of the shift may be a sufficient check-in procedure.

For higher-risk work, it is recommended that a more extensive check-in procedure be established. A sample working alone communication plan is provided in [Appendix B](#) to assist managers/supervisors, or a designated person, in monitoring employees.

A check-in procedure should include the following:



- a designated person (e.g., manager/supervisor, communications centre) who will be contacted by the employee and will keep a record of checks
- time intervals between contact/checks
- a procedure to follow in case the employee fails to establish contact as specified.

The time intervals for check-in should be determined in consultation with the employee assigned to work alone and based on the level of risk. For example, an employee who works alone in an office next to other businesses may not need to check-in as frequently as an employee who works in the field with no person nearby. In addition, check-in arrangements for employees working alone outside regular working hours should be made as necessary.

The use of a contact centre may be suitable in some situations to coordinate check-in arrangements with the employee. In the OPS, the Provincial Communications Unit (PCU) of the Ministry of Natural Resources provides tracking (check-in) and additional communication services on behalf of managers/supervisors. This may be a suitable option for some ministries to consider. For more information on PCU costs and services, contact the PCU manager's desk at (705) 945-6645.

5. Emergency Response Plan

Securing assistance in the event of an emergency or unsafe situation is critical. Emergency response plans should be established and tailored for various working alone situations, taking into consideration the type of work and the location.

9-1-1 is a service that connects dialers to a local call centre that can dispatch emergency responders. While use of this service is typically recommended to secure emergency assistance, 9-1-1 call-routing may not function adequately in certain remote locations or when using certain communication devices. Where appropriate, employees should be provided with alternate phone numbers for obtaining emergency assistance. These may include:

- the OPP toll free emergency line (1-888-310-1122)
Note: Toll free numbers (e.g., 1-888, 1-800) may not be compatible with satellite phones.
- the direct line of the nearest [OPP Provincial Communications Centre](#)
- the direct line of a local emergency response unit.



Some ministry emergency management units may be able to provide assistance to managers/supervisors when developing emergency response plans. Emergency response plans should include:

- procedures for the employee who is working alone to follow in the case of an emergency
- procedures for the designated contact person to follow if contact cannot be established by way of the check-in procedures (failed check-in protocol) or if the employee requests emergency assistance.

In some situations, the use of emergency response devices can be an appropriate measure to assist with detecting the need for assistance and locating the employee. Some devices can detect if an employee has fallen or been immobile for a period of time and will activate a distress signal to notify that assistance is required. Devices with GPS interface, such as personal locator beacons (PLB), can be used as a means to track down the location of an employee in distress, where suitable, and are especially useful for work in remote or isolated work locations. This type of equipment is intended for emergencies and not intended to replace communication equipment.

The Provincial Communications Unit (PCU) of the Ministry of Natural Resources can assist in co-ordinating an emergency response for those who are registered for tracking (check-in) service. The use of this service may be considered for employees who routinely work in remote locations.



Working Alone Situations

The following section includes a series of employee tip sheets for some common working alone situations in the OPS, which include:

1. [Travelling alone](#)
2. [Working alone in an OPS workplace/office or outside core business hours](#)
3. [Travelling away from an OPS workplace/office to meet clients or to conduct inspection/enforcement work](#)
4. [Conducting field work alone or working in remote areas with no routine interaction with clients or the public](#)
5. [Interacting with customers or the public at service centres/counters](#)

Managers/supervisors should review these tip sheets to assist with identifying common hazards/risks, preventive measures and safety tips associated with the working alone situations. Where applicable, managers/supervisors are advised to consider these tips when developing safe work procedures or other controls for employees.

Note: It is recognized that workplace violence is a hazard that may be associated with many of these working alone situations. Consult the employee tip sheets posted on the [workplace violence prevention program page](#) of the OPS Wellness portal for information on mitigating this hazard.



Employee Tip Sheet: Travelling Alone

Main Hazards

When travelling alone, you may encounter risks associated with the mode of transportation and location. Some of the main hazards associated with travelling may include:

- motor vehicle use (driving hazards)
- fatigue
- extreme weather conditions

Risks are heightened when travelling in remote areas where communication may be limited and summoning help is difficult. In these situations, additional hazard controls are recommended. Refer to the [employee tip sheet for field work and work in remote areas](#).

Safety Tips

While these tips are intended for business travel, and not commuting to and from work, you are encouraged to apply safe travel practices at all times.

- Follow safe driving and vehicle maintenance practices. Refer to the [OPS Safe Driving Guideline](#) for more information on minimizing the risks associated with driving.
- Look up weather conditions in advance. Rearrange work schedule to avoid travelling during poor weather conditions.
- Be well rested before travelling.
- Become familiar with the travel route.
- Check that communication equipment functions in areas where travel takes place.
- Take appropriate communication equipment (including charger or extra batteries).
- Bring emergency contact information.
- Pack [first aid](#) and emergency supplies.



- Working alone communication plans for travel (or travel plans) will differ depending on the level of risk. It is important for your supervisor or designated contact person to at least be aware of the following details when you travel alone:
 - destination
 - expected/planned travel route
 - estimated time of arrival
 - return time or date
 - contact information
 - mode of travel



Employee Tip Sheet: Working Alone in an OPS Workplace/Office or Outside Core Business Hours

Main Hazards

When working alone in an OPS workplace/office or outside core business hours, you may face violence from intruders and/or have difficulty summoning help when a health and safety incident or accident occurs, including an individual medical emergency (e.g., heart attack, fainting).

Safety Tips

- Be familiar with emergency exits, evacuation procedures and building security practices.
- Know how to access help. For example:
 - Have emergency contact information and phone numbers easily accessible.
 - Program building security and other emergency numbers into speed dial.
 - Where applicable, activate duress alarms or contact security immediately if suspicious of anyone's activity or feeling threatened.
- Keep doors and windows to secured areas locked.
- Do not open locked doors to unauthorized persons.
- Schedule appointments to avoid unexpected visitors.
- Retain possession of keys/access card at all times.
- Avoid stairwells.
- Check elevators before entering and be sure to stand near the controls at all times.
- Report concerns to your manager/supervisor so steps can be taken to correct/address the issues.
- Notify your manager/supervisor if you have any medical conditions that may increase the risk of working alone (e.g., heart conditions, diabetes), so that appropriate precautions can be taken.
- Follow check-in procedures discussed with manager/supervisor.
- When working outside of core business hours, notify your supervisor about expected work hours, especially if they are constantly changing.



- Move your car to a well-lit spot near the building's entrance.
- When leaving work, have your car keys in hand and check the outside and inside of the vehicle before entering it.
- Be aware of building practices:
 - Are the lights turned off at a certain time? Will the building exits be restricted?
 - What are the security arrangements? Will there be a patrol on the floor? If yes, notify security about the work situation and request for check-ins during their rounds. If possible, arrange for a security escort to your vehicle after working late.
 - Will there be other occupants working late in the workplace or close by? Let these occupants know you are in the building.
- Plan your route home, especially if you are unfamiliar with the travelling route outside of regular hours.



Employee Tip Sheet: Client Visits and Inspections/ Enforcement

Main Hazards

When meeting with clients away from an OPS workplace/office or conducting inspection/enforcement work alone, you may face an unfamiliar environment and unpredictable client behaviour.

The main hazards associated with client visits and inspection/enforcement work include:

- violence or threat
- harassment
- site-specific health and safety hazards (e.g., construction hazards, industrial hazards, outdoor environment, etc.)
- use of motor vehicles (driving hazards)

Safety Tips

- Disengage and remove yourself from a situation when feeling in danger.
- Wear safe and professional attire – avoid clothing/shoes that will hinder or impede ability to leave an unsafe situation. Where provided, wear ministry uniform and personal protective equipment.
- Avoid drawing attention to yourself – for example, do not wear expensive and/or excessive jewelry.
- Ensure that communication devices are charged before embarking on a visit/inspection.
- Follow check-in procedures discussed with manager/supervisor.
- Carry ministry-issued identification and present it when required.
- Be sure to follow any health and safety policies at inspection sites (e.g., wear appropriate personal protective equipment as required).
- Be aware of the surroundings – identify where the exits are located and position yourself closer to the exit than the person you are visiting.
- Keep an arm's-length distance between yourself and the person you are visiting.
- Always speak slowly and calmly.
- Refrain from discussing personal matters or travel plans.



- Report anything unusual to your supervisor.
- Continuously assess the situation to determine if the level of risk is acceptable. This type of monitoring/assessment should be carried out:
 - pre-contact (e.g., reviewing available information about a location/client)
 - on approach (e.g., observations upon arrival at a site or while approaching a client)
 - in-contact (e.g., observations and analysis of a site or of a client's behaviour throughout an interaction)



Employee Tip Sheet: Field Work and Work in Remote Areas

Main Hazards

When conducting field work alone or work alone in remote areas, you may face a variety of hazards, and being physically isolated from other individuals may heighten the associated risks. The main hazards associated with field work and work in remote areas are:

- use of motor vehicles, vessels, snowmobiles, etc.
- work near or on water
- exposure to biological hazards
- wildlife
- equipment/tool use
- slips and falls
- environmental (e.g., lightning, wind, fog, extreme heat/cold)

Safety Tips

- Look up weather conditions in advance.
- Review any working alone communication plans and/or procedures. Establish communication according to any check-in schedule that is in place.
- Check that communication equipment functions in areas where travel takes place.
- Take communication equipment (i.e., not leaving it in the vehicle), as well as check-in and emergency contact information.
- Ensure that communication equipment used in the field is charged and is tested upon arrival. Be sure to protect this equipment from the elements (e.g., water exposure).
- Follow check-in procedures discussed with manager/supervisor.
- Bring emergency equipment (e.g., first aid kit) as well as any medications (e.g., prescription drugs, EpiPen[®]) that are needed.
- Become familiar with potentially hazardous plants, wildlife and terrains. See the Seasonal Hazards page on the OPS Wellness portal.
- Drink plenty of fluids and take rest breaks, as needed, if working outdoors on a hot day. For more information, consult the CEHSW's Heat Stress Bulletin.



- Dress in layers, cover exposed skin and stay dry if working in cold temperatures.
- Wear appropriate footwear for the terrain/task.
- Wear coloured safety clothing if conducting remote field work during hunting season.
- Report all incidents or concerns to your supervisor.
- Follow safe driving and vehicle maintenance practices where applicable.



Employee Tip Sheet: Service Centres/Counters

Main Hazards

Employees who work alone at service centres/counters may face unpredictable behaviour from clients or the public, and summoning help may be difficult.

The main hazards associated with service centre/counter work are:

- violence or threat of violence
- harassment

The risks posed by these hazards from both clients and intruders may be heightened if the work involves handling money or important documents.

Safety Tips

For tips on mitigating the risks associated with workplace violence, review the employee tip sheets posted on the [workplace violence prevention program page](#) of the OPS Wellness portal.

- Be familiar with emergency exits and evacuation procedures.
- Be familiar with building security practices and applicable security system components (e.g., alarms, mirrors).
- Follow check-in procedures discussed with manager/supervisor.
- Ensure that doors and windows are free of obstructions, and allow for a clear line of sight into and out of the building.
- Ensure that indoor and outdoor lighting is kept on.
- Ensure that windows and doors to secured areas are locked.
- Become familiar with all nearby exit routes.
- Avoid mention of being alone at the premises.
- Follow safe working procedures related to cash control, if applicable.
- Post signs indicating that there is minimal cash kept on site.
- Post signs indicating that the premises are monitored.
- Report any unusual incidents to the supervisor.
- Liaise with neighbouring businesses and check in on each other, if possible.



- Where possible, allow client visits by appointment only.
- Become familiar with the applicable conflict resolution guidance provided in the [OPS Workplace Violence Prevention tip sheets](#).
- Keep an arm's length distance between yourself and the client/customer.
- Have a desk or other physical barrier (e.g., glass, acrylic partition) between yourself and the client/customer.
- If you cannot provide a requested service, and the client/individual becomes irate, write down that person's information and assure them that their request will be forwarded to your manager/supervisor.
- Use non-violent response strategies to avoid confrontations.
- Place personal safety first and disengage from a dangerous situation when feeling unsafe.



Roles and Responsibilities

These are recommended roles for workplace parties for addressing working alone hazards.

Director/Senior Manager

- Review the recommendations of this guideline and implement as appropriate.
- Ensure managers/supervisors and employees receive appropriate information and instruction regarding working alone.
- Ensure managers/supervisors provide information, instruction and training to employees regarding working alone hazards, control measures and safe working procedures.

Manager/Supervisor

- Assess working alone situations in consultation with employees and JHSCs/HSRs to identify existing or potential hazards related to the nature of the work or the work environment.
- Develop and implement safe work procedures, or other control measures, for working alone where required, including check-in procedures and emergency response procedures.
- Ensure that work activities with regulatory or ministry/workplace restrictions impacting working alone are only carried out if the required personnel or rescue provisions are in place.
- Communicate hazards associated with working alone to workers and provide information and instruction on the control measures and safe work procedures where applicable. Ensure records are maintained of all information and instruction provided.
- Consult with the JHSC/HSR on conducting hazard assessments, investigating incidents and developing safe work procedures where applicable.
- Approve when workers are working outside regular business hours and provide a level of monitoring appropriate for the circumstances.
- Document and investigate all reported incidents and/or concerns associated with working alone.
- Review and evaluate safe work procedures and other control measures periodically and when there is a significant change in work practices.



- Ensure workers can obtain assistance in the event of an accident, injury or emergency.

Workers

- Participate in training and review of working alone information.
- Work in accordance with the safe work procedures, including check-in procedures and emergency response procedures, if applicable.
- **Place personal safety first!** If faced with a situation in which you feel endangered, disengage and leave. Once in a safe location, notify your manager/supervisor to determine the next steps.
- Notify the police if a criminal action has been faced or encountered.
- Report to manager/supervisor **all** incidents that occur and concerns that arise while working alone, including any unsafe situations or identified hazards.
- Provide as much information as possible to manager/supervisor after an incident, including descriptions of people and equipment involved, since there may not be any other witnesses.
- Notify and obtain approval from supervisor if planning on working outside of typical working hours.

Joint Health and Safety Committee (JHSC) or Health and Safety Representative (HSR)

- Report any identified working alone hazards to manager/supervisor.
- Provide input and recommendations to assist with the assessment of working alone hazards.
- Provide input and recommendations regarding control measures, including safe working procedures.
- Provide input and recommendations regarding working alone training and instruction.

Centre for Employee Health, Safety and Wellness

- Provide health and safety advice to managers, supervisors, JHSCs and HSRs on implementing the contents of this guideline and on recommended practices relating to working alone.
- Provide guidance to managers, supervisors and workers regarding applicable legislation.



- Support managers/supervisors in conducting risk assessments for working alone situations.
- Support managers/supervisors with the selection of suitable control measures and the development of safe working procedures.
- Monitor the OPS Working Alone Guideline and update it based on feedback and/or new information such as legislation, standards and best practices.



References and Resources

- [Occupational Health and Safety Act](#). Revised Statutes of Ontario, 1990 Chapter O.1, as amended.
- [“Working Alone – General”](#). Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, 2014.
- [“Working Alone – A Handbook for Small Business”](#). WorkSafe BC, 2012.
- [“Working Alone Safely: A Guide for Employers and Employees”](#). Government of Alberta, Employment and Immigration.
- [“Working Alone”](#). OPSEU, 2009.

For more information on the recommendations of this guideline, contact your [health and safety advisor](#), Centre for Employee Health, Safety and Wellness.



Appendix A: Working Alone Assessment Tool for Managers/Supervisors

This tool will assist managers/supervisors in addressing working alone hazards. Where circumstances are similar, a single assessment may be suitable for multiple employees, locations and/or tasks.

General Information			
Ministry		Division/Branch:	
Supervisor name(s):		Date of assessment:	
Job title(s)/Employee name(s):			
Work location(s):			

1. Hazard Assessment			
Work Tasks			
Describe the work task(s):			
Y	N	Restrictions on Working Alone:	
		For the above tasks, are there any regulatory or ministry/workplace requirements that place restrictions on working alone (see p.5 of the guideline)? If yes, list them:	
Hazard Identification:			
List all potential hazards associated with the type(s) of work or location(s):		<i>(List biological, chemical, physical, safety, ergonomic, and/or psychosocial hazards)</i> <i>Review past records, if available.</i>	

Consider the following questions when assessing working alone situations and hazards:
(adapted from the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety)

Length of time the employee(s) will be working alone:

How often will the employee(s) be required to work alone?

How long will the employee(s) be working alone to finish the job?

What time(s) of day will the employee(s) be working alone?

Y N Location(s) of the work:

Is any of the work in a remote or isolated location?

Will the employee(s) be driving to the work location(s)?

Will the employee(s) leave the vehicle for long periods of time?

Does the work involve any unsafe locations (e.g., poor lighting, high crime area)?

Are there records of reported hazards or incidents for review regarding the location(s)? If yes, list them:

Y N Types or nature of the work:

Does the work involve interaction with the public and/or pose a risk of workplace violence (e.g., clients with challenging behaviour)?

Is there a high risk hazard involved (e.g., working with hazardous materials, working at heights)?

Does the work involve money or valuables?

Does the work involve seizing property or goods?

Is there a risk of an animal attack, or poisoning/allergic reaction from insect/animal bites?

Will machinery, tools or equipment be used? If yes, list them:

Will there be extremes of temperature/weather (e.g., heat stress, cold stress, icy conditions)?

Is fatigue likely to be a risk factor?



Y	N	Characteristics of individual employee(s):
		Do any of the employees have pre-existing medical conditions or restrictions that may increase the risk associated with working alone?
		Are any of the employees inexperienced in the work?
Provide details of these (or other) individual factors, including names of employees affected:		

“Y” responses provided above may signify an increased risk for working alone. Consider control measures to mitigate these risks.

2. Hazard Control

What control measures are currently in place to mitigate the identified hazards?
(e.g., safe work procedures, check-in procedure, training, engineering controls, personal protective equipment, etc.)

Note:

For workplace violence hazards, review applicable sections of workplace violence risk assessments (WVRA) completed for the workplace.

3. Information and Instruction

“X” responses signify areas where additional ‘information and instruction’ measures are recommended to help mitigate working alone risks.

✓	X	N/A	
			Have the identified potential or actual hazards been communicated to the employee(s)?
			Have written instructions or training on the controls (e.g., safe work procedures) been provided to the employee(s)?



			Has instruction on the working alone communication plan been provided to the employee(s)?
			Has instruction on the emergency response protocol been provided to the employee(s)?
			Employee(s) informed of their duty to report all hazards identified, and all incidents that occur over the course of their work, to their supervisor?
			Employee(s) informed to continuously assess the situation/level of risk when working alone to determine if there are any changes?
			Employee(s) instructed to place personal safety first by leaving dangerous situations?

4. Communication/Supervision (See [Appendix B](#))

“X” responses signify areas where additional ‘communication/supervision’ measures are recommended to help mitigate working alone risks.

✓	X	N/A	
			Is there an effective means of communication for the employee(s)? Specify the method(s) of communication provided to the employee(s):
			Is the means of communication functional at all the work locations and under all working conditions?
			Have instructions in the use and maintenance of the communication devices/equipment been provided to the employee(s)?
			Have instructions to keep devices/equipment charged and to test regularly for reception been provided to the employee(s)?
			Is there a check-in procedure?
			Does the check-in procedure involve regular contact with the supervisor or designated person?
			Is the check-in procedure effective outside regular work hours?

5. Emergency Response Plan

“X” responses signify areas where additional ‘emergency response’ measures are recommended to help mitigate working alone risks.

✓	X	N/A	
			Does an emergency response plan exist that is tailored to the work circumstances?
			Has the employee(s) been advised of the procedures to follow if an unsafe situation is encountered during the course of their work?
			Have emergency kits/supplies been provided to the employee(s)?
			Is the response adequate for work in a remote or isolated location (if applicable)?

Additional Actions

Managers/supervisors are advised to implement additional safety measures based on the responses provided in this working alone assessment.

List the additional measures that will be implemented for this working alone situation (e.g., controls, procedures, response plans):

Notes

- For workplace violence hazards, consult the OPS *Workplace Violence Prevention Policy*, [program resources](#) (including WVRA) and any ministry-specific direction and procedures.
- If one assessment has been carried out for multiple locations/tasks/employees, take into account any differences that would impact the control measures.



Appendix B: Working Alone Communication Plan

Employee Information	
Name:	Job/Position:
Email:	Duties:
Cell Phone Number:	Alt. Phone Number:
Communication equipment/devices provided:	Vehicle information and licence plate (if applicable):
Emergency Response – Employee	
If the employee requires emergency assistance, the employee will:	<i>Insert emergency contact information and/or reference appropriate emergency response procedures/protocol.</i>
Check-In Procedure	
Supervisor (or Designee)	
Name:	
Email:	
Phone number(s):	
Method	
Employee will contact the supervisor (or designee) using the following method (e.g., email, telephone, message, other):	
Frequency	
Employee will contact the supervisor (or designee) at the following times/time intervals? (e.g., every x minutes, every x hours, beginning and end of shift, other):	
Emergency Response – Supervisor (Or Designee)	
If the employee requests emergency assistance from the supervisor (e.g., uses a code word, sounds an alarm), the supervisor will:	<i>Insert emergency contact information and/or reference appropriate emergency response procedures/protocol.</i>
Protocol for Failed Check-In	
<i>If the employee fails to check-in as designated above, follow these steps:</i>	
Step #1	Supervisor (or designee) will make attempts to contact the employee directly (e.g., by phone, by email).
Step #2	If necessary, supervisor (or designee) will make attempts to contact the employee through any available individuals who can carry out a physical/visual check on the employee (e.g., security guard at the site, a contact at a neighbouring store/site, a fellow OPS employee working relatively nearby).
Step #3	If the employee remains unaccounted for, the supervisor (or designee) will initiate an emergency response, as follows: <i>Insert emergency contact information and/or reference appropriate emergency response procedures/protocol.</i>



Working Alone Schedule

#	Work/travel locations:	Date:	Expected start time:	Expected end time:	Name/phone number of a contact at or near work location (if available):
1					
2					
3					

Check-In Record

Date:	Time:	Employee successfully checked-in? (Y/N)	Employee Location:	In the case of a failed check-in, describe the attempts made to contact the employee and the contact that was finally established:	List any concerns expressed by the employee (Include reasons for a delayed check-in, if applicable):

Signatures

The employee and check-in supervisor have read and understand the working alone communication plan:

Signature of check-in supervisor (or designee):	
Signature of employee:	