

Working Alone Frequently Asked Questions

Background

WorkSafeBC's [Occupational Health and Safety Regulation](#) defines working alone or in isolation as working in circumstances where assistance would not be readily available to the worker in case of an emergency or in case the worker is injured or in ill health.

Staff who work in these situations require a working alone program. Working alone includes staff who are teleworking from home and includes situations such as two employees working together but unable to get emergency help quickly due to a remote work location. An easy definition of assistance being readily available is a person is within verbal or visual contact with other workers.

Proactive Check-in and Out System

WorkSafeBC states that an electronic means of communication (e.g., phone or radio) does not constitute assistance being readily available. For example, having a worker who is teleworking, or an isolated field crew require more than just having a phone available to call 911 for assistance. There must be a proactive check-in system with designated check-in/check-out times and procedures in place in the event of a missed check-in/out.

Roles and Responsibilities

Supervisors/Managers

Supervisors and managers must:

- Review the worksite to determine if staff are working alone
- Ensure that any risks of working alone or in isolation have been identified and assessed
- Review the job tasks that are performed when working alone and eliminate or reduce the risk of injury wherever possible
- Ensure procedures have been developed for checking on staff working alone in consultation with the staff and with the Joint Occupational Safety and Health Committee
- Train staff in the working alone procedures
- Take steps to ensure that staff are using the check-in system
- Keep records of training, equipment, and working alone procedures

Once the working alone procedures are established, they must be reviewed at least annually to ensure that they work effectively and to address any new situations that may have arisen.

All Employees

All staff who work alone or in isolation have responsibilities when it comes to working alone.

Employees must:

- Participate in risk assessments and in developing work procedures
- Report the hours they will be working alone or in isolation to a designated person
- Follow the procedures established, including checking-in/check-out at agreed upon intervals

Joint Health and Safety Committees (JOHSC)

JOHSC (or worker representatives at smaller workplaces) should provide input and advice for the:

- Risk assessment
- Hazard assessment
- The development of controls
- Check-in/check-out intervals
- Annual reviews

The JOHSC should also be promoting the use of the working alone program with staff.

Managing the Program

All staff require training on the method and frequency of check-in/check-out, and the expected response if they miss a check-in/check-out. Training must clarify the expectation that employees will use the working alone program when when working alone. Missing check-in/check-outs and not using the system unacceptable and is grounds for ending a telework agreement. The program is not about tracking employee productivity it is about worker safety.

Regardless of the technology used to check in/check-out, such as email, instant messaging, phone, GPS devices or third-party service providers, supervisors need to keep records of check-in/check-outs to ensure that the protocols are working and that staff are using them. As a minimum, keep two weeks of records and review them to ensure that staff who were scheduled to work alone or in isolation were following expected protocols.

The working alone protocols should be reviewed at least annually or or if there are changes to the job tasks which staff will be performing.

Contact the BC Public Service Agency Workplace Health and Safety using [MyHR](#) For more information.

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1. Employees think we are putting a check-in system in place to track their movements and workloads. Why do we need a working alone program for our workplace?

[WorkSafeBC's Occupational Health and Safety Regulation](#) mandates working alone programs for all workplaces. This is a regulation that all employers across BC must comply with if the employer determines that staff are assigned to work alone or in isolation.

2. Can an employee just call their spouse or home and tell them when they working alone and when they will come home?

No, the employer has the legal duty to ensure the safety of staff who are working alone. There must be a formal working alone program that describes when check-ins are completed availability and a structured response to a missed check-in. A call to a spouse or family member may be part of an employer's follow-up if an employee has missed a check-in, but the spouse/family should not be responsible for checking on the well being of a worker while they are working.

3. My employee is working from home and their spouse, children, roommate, etc. are there, so they are not working alone. Do they still have to check-in/check-out?

The employer has a duty to ensure the safety of staff who are teleworking. Family members or roommates are not accountable to the employer and there is no guarantee that they will be present at all times when an employee is teleworking and able to render assistance. There must be a check-in system between the teleworker and their supervisor or a designate.

4. I have an employee who drives as part of their job. Are they working alone?

Managers should take into consideration the time of year, travel conditions, and where staff will be traveling. Staff driving on well-travelled public roadways to attend meetings or other workplaces in urban areas generally do not need to have a check in system. Contact MyHr for assistance with travel safety in remote or rural areas.

If staff are engaged in other duties while driving, such as inspections or enforcement, then the nature of the work may require a working alone program. Sending staff to remote areas on low traffic volume roads or resource roads may also require a working alone program.

5. My workplace has late night cleaning staff. Do I need to have a check-in system for them?

Only if the cleaning staff are your staff. If it is a contracted service, or the service is provided by the building, the employer of the cleaning staff must provide them with a working alone program. Managers/supervisors are only responsible for providing a working alone program for their own staff.