FACTSHEET

Working Alone

Health and Safety Directorate

Work health and safety is an important consideration for anyone working alone or in isolation. The implementation of risk management procedures and communication between all parties is imperative in addressing the health and safety risks associated with working alone.

The Department's procedure sets out the process for managing risks associated with working alone or in isolation. The procedure requires the employee who will be working alone and their workplace manager to discuss the work that is to be undertaken, consider what measures are appropriate to eliminate or minimise the risk and to document the measures in a risk management plan. The risk management plan needs to be reviewed and updated prior to any period of working alone.

Key considerations for working alone or in isolation

Discuss the work activities to be undertaken and develop an agreed list of duties taking into consideration the knowledge and competency of the person undertaking the work. Identify low risk work that can be done safely, use available safe operating procedures and ensure personal protective equipment is available.

Confirm the dates and times that the work will be undertaken. It's important to discuss, agree and set times for when the employee will be working on site.

Eliminate the risk – Where possible eliminate the health and safety risks by considering available options to "buddy up" employees from a neighbouring school or workplace. Two people working together are often more productive and can split their time across the two sites to ensure the work gets done.

Review site security arrangements – Discuss arrangements for site security e.g. security gates are to be locked but the site is still accessible by the emergency services in the event of an emergency through the use of ES keys. It is important to ensure that locks have not been modified or additional locking mechanisms applied as this may delay an emergency response.

Identify an appropriate communication strategy – The type of system chosen will depend on the distance from the base and the environment in which the employee will be located. Some examples include:

- **Telephone** – the employee must be able to reach the phone in the event of an emergency.
- **Mobile phone** – mobile phones cannot be relied upon as an effective means of communication in many locations. Network coverage should be confirmed before any work commences and consideration should be given to coverage black spots on the site. Work should not be undertaken in any coverage black spots.
- **Radio communication systems** – two way radio may be a suitable means of communication after taking into consideration factors such as frequency, power and distance from or between broadcasters.
- **Personal security systems** – personal security systems provide a means of emergency communication for people working alone or in potentially dangerous environments. These systems are usually wireless and portable so are suitable for people working alone or in isolation.

Consider what training is required to enable the work to be undertaken safely. Take into account the individual's level of work experience and training. Does the individual demonstrate sound judgement and safe behaviours?

Plant, equipment and chemicals – When discussing the work activities to be undertaken consider the plant, equipment or chemicals that might be required to undertake the work. Make sure the equipment has been adequately maintained and that the guarding is fitted.

Consider the individual – Is there anything that needs to be considered in the employee's ethnic, cultural or religious background that is likely to increase the risk of working alone e.g. long periods of fasting where a lack of food and water may increase the risk of ill health. Does the employee have any known health conditions that might increase the risk of working alone?

Consider the environment and the factors that could affect the health and safety of the employee. Make sure the employee has access to sunscreen, a hat and is wearing clothing that will protect them from UV rays. Also consider the likelihood of coming into contact with animals including reptiles, spiders and other harmful animals.

Managing emergencies – Discuss the emergency management plan and consider the response in the change of circumstance. Is the workplace in a bushfire prone area or has the site been assessed as high risk and placed on the Department's Bushfire Register? If so it is critical that the employee monitors the fire danger ratings issued and continues to monitor local radio.

Risk Assessment Process

Identify the hazards in the workplace and the potential risks associated with those hazards:

- Take account of previous incidents or near misses
- Establish hazard reporting procedures
- Assign appropriate staff to conduct regular workplace inspections e.g. the Health and Safety Committee.

Assess the risks using the risk assessment matrix – **to be linked**. Determine the seriousness of the risks by considering both the likelihood of the incident to cause harm and severity of the outcome. This provides a priority order for dealing with WHS issues.

Eliminate or control the risks using the hierarchy of controls – **to be linked**. Develop the most suitable strategies to eliminate or control the risks.

Consult with staff throughout the risk management process, Ensure contractors and others undertaking work on school premises are aware of activities being undertaken by departmental staff. This also applies in reverse, departmental staff must be aware of all other work being undertaken on site by contractors or others undertaking work.

Document the risk management plan using the proforma, guidance and sample. Communicate the plan to staff and others needing to know, providing relevant information as required.

Monitor and review the effectiveness of controls and change if necessary. Consider whether staff are aware of control measures, if new hazards have been identified and what further actions may be required.

Review risk assessments where there is a significant change in the workplace or if risk controls are not effective (e.g. an incident occurs).

Seek assistance from relevant state office staff where sufficient expertise is not available at the workplace.

Support material

Sample checklist for working alone

Health and Safety support available

Further information

Guidance in completing the risk management plan proforma – working alone

Sample risk management plan – working alone

Code of Practice – Managing the work environment and facilities

Safety Alert No 3: Ladder Use

Safety Alert No. 45: Working Alone