NSW GOVERNMENT | Education

FACT SHEET

Working alone or in isolation
What if/what next

Health and Safety is an important requirement for anyone working alone or in isolation. When planning to work alone or in isolation, reasonable steps must be taken to ensure the safety and welfare of staff and other participants.

Through the risk assessment process, staff members and their manager must discuss the work that is to be undertaken, identify the hazards, consider appropriate controls to eliminate or minimise risk(s) identified, document and communicate any further controls and gain approval to go ahead.

A sample SAFETY Risk Assessment and Management Plan for working alone or in isolation is included at the end of this resource for guidance. Some things you should consider when completing a SAFETY Risk Assessment and Management Plan include:

S What is the SITUATION? (Step 1)

What are the key safety aspects you need to consider when planning to work alone or in isolation?

This may include, but is not limited to:

- School staff working alone
- Communication whilst working alone
- Other workers – cleaner, contractors, community users and other organisations working from school sites
- Security
- Staff working alone – plant and equipment
- Working alone – personal health
- Bush fire risk when working alone

Consider:

- Is it on schools grounds – what part of the school grounds?
- When will staff members be working alone or in isolation, i.e. what day of the week?
- How long will staff members be working alone or in isolation and how long will an activity take?
- What are the work activities to be undertaken when working alone or in isolation?
- Will the use of plant or equipment be required?
- Will there be a need to work with animals?
- What communication strategies are in place to assist in an emergency?
- What security arrangements are in place?

A ANTICIPATE the hazards – *What if?* (Step 2)

What are the potential hazards and dangers to staff and other parties?

Potential hazards may include, but is not limited to:

- Slips trips and falls
- Manual handling injuries
- Fatigue

- Making emergency contact
- Health conditions or personal issues
- Unsafe practices of injury when using plant and equipment
- School site in bushfire prone area
- Emergency services unable to access site
- Injuries to other workers onsite during school holidays or afterhours

Consider:

- What is the weather forecast? E.g. exposure to wind, rain, sun and dehydration.
- Is a third party undertaking work, such as contractors or suppliers?
- Is adequate notification provided of contractors working on school grounds e.g. farm assistants aware of contract work occurring?
- Are staff members familiar with, and have knowledge of, the use of plant or equipment?
- Is the use of plant or equipment used in a safe manner and as per instructions? Is a Safe Operating Procedure or Safe Work Method Statement required?
- Do staff members have to administer medication when working alone or in isolation?
- If there are planned work activities, could staff members be injured?
- If working with animals, are staff members familiar with the type of animal? Do staff members have all the necessary food?
- Are there emergency evacuation and response requirement, including communication system in the event of a major emergency?

Hint: Consult, collaborate and communicate with relevant stakeholders. Seek advice from other staff members with prior experience and sound knowledge of working alone or in isolation.

F FIND out (Step 3)

Find out what's already in place and assess the risk rating. For each hazard identify current controls

Current controls may include, but is not limited to:

- Emergency Management Plan
- Asbestos Register
- Animals in Schools procedures
- Incident Notification and Response Policy and Procedure
- Safe Operating Procedures
- Staff Health Care Plan
- STRETCH Manual Handling Safe Working Procedures
- School/Workplace Working Alone Policy
- Communication Plan
- School/Workplace Security Policy
- Equipment Safety In School - Risk Assessments
- Chemical register and Safety Data Sheets

For each hazard, determine the risk rating - likelihood and the consequence of harm that may occur, considering current controls.

- Apply the 'Risk Rating Matrix' to rate identified risks.

E ELIMINATE or control – *What next?* (Step 4)

Take action to eliminate or control the risk(s)

Determine the required action. Consider whether there are any additional steps you can take to address the hazard. Is the level of risk at an acceptable level, or are further controls required?

Working alone or in isolation
What if/what next

Hint: Consult and communicate with relevant stakeholders. Review incident data or lessons learnt from previous working alone and in isolation activities to assist in managing the risk.

Consider:

Emergency response/emergency services

- Are Emergency Response procedures in place for unforeseen events e.g. weather/natural disaster, threat to life etc.?
- Is the worksite/ school ground on the Bushfire register? Are staff familiar with the action that needs to be taken in catastrophic weather conditions?
- Is there an internal and external emergency contact list?
- Do staff members understand the emergency response procedures?
- Do staff members require further training in Emergency Management?
- Is there a system in place to secure site for staff members when they are working alone e.g. access to keys?
- Is there a system in place to secure site when staff members leave the site?
- Is there appropriate lighting for safety and security at night time, walkways, hallways, car parks and entry areas?
- Is there a process for the management of intruders on school grounds?

Communication

- Will staff members have access to a school phone and mobile on the day?
- Is there another back up if your mobile phone coverage or land number is inactive e.g. two way communication?
- Is there a communication protocol established between staff members and their Principal (e.g. text in/text out)?
- Is there a scheduled communication times?
- Is there a procedure in place to notify Principal of hazards and corrective actions?

Security

- Will staff members have security keys at hand (in a designated location) in case of emergency, to ensure emergency services can access the school grounds?
- Are there special locks (ES keys) in place which would allow for access by emergency services? Which emergency services have access to the keys?
- Are there systems in place to secure the site for staff members working alone and to secure the site when the staff members leave?

Equipment/Plant

- Are there Safe Operating Procedures for plant or equipment readily available/accessible?
- Has testing and tagging been completed on plant and equipment within the past 12 months (check date)?
- Has the equipment/machinery had manufacturers guarding fitted?
- Are staff members aware of the location of the asbestos register and how to deal with unsuspected finds of asbestos?
- Do staff members have appropriate Personal Protective Equipment, sun protection and any other protection necessary?
- Do staff members have information required to manage contractors and visitors on the day?
- What process is in place if concerns arise?
- Can staff members delay activities that may increase the risk?

Chemical Safety

- Do all staff members have access to the current Chemical Register?
- Are Safety Data Sheets in date (no older than 5 years) to ensure staff have accurate information on safe handling and storage of chemicals?
- Has a risk assessment been conducted for hazardous chemicals / dangerous goods i.e. class 1, 2 or 3 chemicals?

Weather

- Can staff members structure work patterns to minimise work outdoors during the middle of the day?
- Can staff members monitor weather forecasts, fire danger ratings issued and local radio news?
- Can staff members apply rest breaks taken in the shade?
- Do staff members have a thorough understanding of the Bushfire factsheet and communications protocol?

Health

- Is there a process in place that requires staff members to carry the First Aid Kit equipped with a current EpiPen during periods of working alone or in isolation?
- Have staff members planned for a discussion to take place between them and their Principal/Supervisor ahead of planned activity to confirm no changes to health status, and management of health condition?
- If staff members have an underlying health condition, will they:
  - Have access to medication and first aid kits and water for hydration, at all times?
  - Need any support for administration or in case of emergency? And by who?
- Is there a system of checking on health and welfare of staff members? I.e. assigned contact – relative /friend and designated contact intervals?
- Have staff members considered working in pairs when undertaking high risk activities e.g. General Assistant's (GA's) buddying up with other GA's when performing activities requiring the use of ladders or when pruning trees?

Working with animals

- Are there animal protocols for working alone, and are they up to date?
- Are staff members up to date with seasonal protocols in place?
- Are the pens and yards free of obstruction e.g. protruding nuts, bolts, wire, trip hazards?

Determine residual risk

Once additional controls have been determined, identify the residual risk. Have your control measures reduced the risk? Is the level of risk acceptable to go ahead or are additional controls needed?

- Apply the 'Risk Rating Matrix' to rate the residual risks.

T TALK to others (Step 5)

Inform those responsible for additional controls

- Record the person responsible for implementing any additional controls.

Y YOU must report, monitor and review (Step 6)

Finalise the SAFETY Risk Assessment and Management Plan with the relevant sign-off authority for approval

Prior to the working alone or in isolation activity, ensure:

- You communicate with relevant staff member and Principal about the risk and what's being done to manage it
- All risks have been dealt with inside the time frames identified, and
- Additional controls have been actioned.

Include a review date following the event and identify any further controls for future planning. Obtain the details (name, signature and date) of those you have communicated the SAFETY Risk Assessment and Management Plan to. Refer to the procedure for more guidance on report, monitor and review.

Further Information

Phone the Incident Report and Support hotline 1800 811 523 (option 6).

Visit the Health & Safety Intranet page

Contact your WHS Consultant for advice and support in completing a SAFETY Risk Assessment and Management Plan.

SAFETY Risk Assessment and Management Plan - Sample

Refer to the steps within this resource to assist you in completing a SAFETY Risk Assessment and Management Plan for working alone and/or in isolation within your school setting. The following is an incomplete risk assessment sample **only** and is to be used as guidance.

Step 1 – What are the safety aspects that need to be considered when listing the details of the activity, event or task?

Step 2 – what could cause harm to students, staff, contractors, or visitors?

Step 3 – How are you managing the hazard? Determine the risk rating using the Risk Rating Matrix

Step 4 – What additional controls and strategies can you put in place? What will the risk rating be with the additional controls in place? Refer to Risk Rating Matrix to determine the residual risk rating

Step 5 – Who is responsible for implementing additional controls?

Step 6 – What is the review date of the additional controls?

Situation	Anticipate	Find out		Eliminate or control		Talk others	You
List the details of the activity, event or task	What could go wrong?	What current controls are in place?	Risk rating	What else can be done to control this risk?	Residual risk rating	Controls to be actioned by who?	When do you need to review the control?
Communication whilst working alone	Not able to make an emergency contact	• Mobile phone – Check the phone is functioning and that staff bring their own or have access to a phone charger. • Landline or two way communication is available. • Emergency Management Plan – all staff trained and aware of their school plan.	4	• Mobile phone coverage has been reviewed and the signal is strong in all areas of the school. • System is in place to notify, communicate and conduct interval checking/schedule times for contact. • Principal or delegate assigned as contact person. • A text in text out system of communication has been agreed. • Emergency procedure for contact person to follow in the event no contact is made. • Procedure to follow to notify incidents or injuries. • Procedures in place to notify principal of hazards and corrective actions. • Emergency numbers and afterhours contact numbers provided to staff.	5	All staff / principal / executive Principal / executive	Before working alone (date)

Working alone - personal health	Health conditions or other personal issues	• Discussion between the Principal and staff ahead of working alone:
		  ○ If there are any ethnic, cultural or religious considerations
		  ○ management of health condition and support required.
		• Staff who are injured are not to work alone unless as part of a signed return to work plan.
			2	• Discussion between Principal and staff ahead of each working alone period to confirm that there have been no changes to the staff member's health status.
				• System of checking on health and welfare of staff with health condition – assigned contact – relative /friend and designated contact intervals.
				• Staff will keep hydrated and take appropriate breaks.
					3	All staff / principal / executive	Before working alone (date)