

REMOTE WORKER SAFETY

Common wisdom holds “there’s safety in numbers,” but how do you ensure the safety of employees who have to work alone, and how do you identify these employees?

As a general rule, a lone worker is anyone who cannot be seen or heard by others while doing his or her job and who does not expect contact with any other person. The remote employee can be in a large office building working in a location such as a storage closet or can be miles off a paved road in steep and rugged terrain.

ASSESS THE JOB

Not all remote work is hazardous. The level of risk depends upon location, type of work, interaction with the public and the tasks being performed.

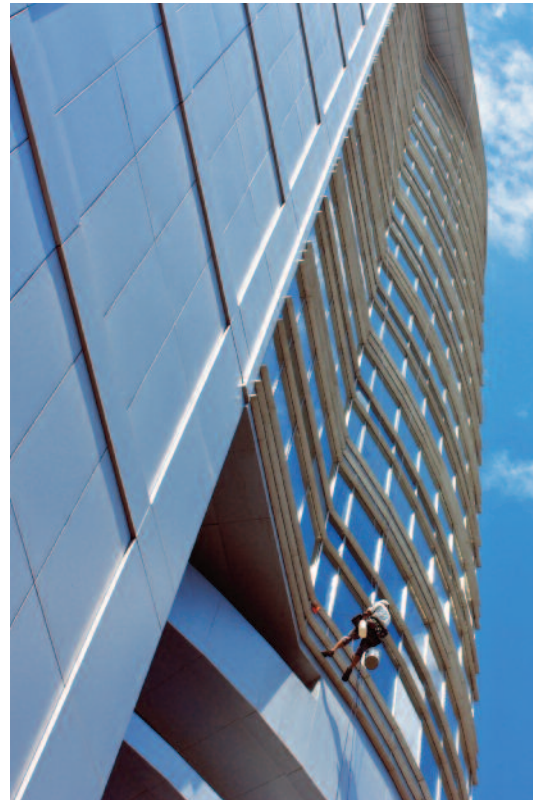
Some tasks are inherently dangerous and require special consideration, and include work

- at height
- in confined spaces
- with electricity
- with substances under high pressure
- with dangerous substances or materials
- with dangerous equipment
- with firearms or explosives
- with the public where a potential for violence exists
- involving exposure to animal bite or attack

CHECK-IN METHOD AND FREQUENCY

A check-in procedure is often adequate to ensure the safety of your remote workers. The frequency and method of employee check-in depends upon your analysis of the hazards attendant upon their work as well as what you consider a reasonable time for the remote worker to be alone. Consider the length of time required to complete the task, the weather conditions and time of day that the task is performed.

For most workers, a periodic phone call to or from a contact person will suffice; for others, constant electronic monitoring is required. For some, a simple voice check-in will be adequate; for others, a visual check-in is necessary. Your check-in procedure should



designate a contact person at specific times and include a back-up contact person. You may also wish to create a written record of contacts.

When choosing your mode of check-in, determine the adequacy of the communication method. Cellular phones must have a strong signal available at all times. If land lines are not feasible, satellite-based remote worker alarms may be your best option. Several types exist but in common they will notify the contact person should the need arise. These systems can be active (i.e., the remote worker must trigger the device) or passive (i.e., the system automatically monitors the worker and sends messages at pre-set times or intervals).

If the remote employee is traveling, it is wise to give the contact person a complete itinerary. This would include scheduled days, departure and arrival times, mode and

specifics of travel (i.e., airline, flight numbers, airports, scheduled stops, etc.), lodgings and appointment schedules. The contact person should be advised of any deviation from the itinerary. A check-in at agreed upon, specific times is still required.

ASSESS THE WORKER

Finally, consider the individual doing the remote work. Does the employee have any medical issues that could pose a problem? How much training and skill does the remote employee possess? Does he or she possess first aid skills, communications equipment expertise, vehicle repair and/or outdoor survival skills?

SUMMARY

To provide for the safety of your remote employees, give some thought to the general definition of working alone, analyze the tasks, the inherent hazards and equipment involved, then, at a minimum, establish a check-in procedure. Determine the nature, frequency and method of the required check-in, keeping in mind that these may require adjustment depending on changing job tasks and circumstances (locations, weather, etc). Remember to consider the vehicle being used by the remote worker and finally, think specifically about the person performing the task.

In short, forethought and planning will help ensure the safety of your remote worker.

REFERENCES

<http://www.islesystems.com/>

<http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/hsprograms/workingalone.html>

CONTACTS

For additional information, please contact:

Bob Lombard

Regional Director
775 323 1656 Ext. 19

lombard_bj@willis.com

David F. Brawner

Senior Risk Control Consultant
615 872 3536

dave.brawner@willis.com

You may also visit our [website](#) for additional information about the Willis Pooling Practice or to read prior issue of our *Pooling Bulletin*.

The observations, comments and suggestions we have made in this report are advisory and are not intended nor should they be taken as legal advice. Please contact your own legal adviser for an analysis of your specific facts and circumstances.

If the remote worker requires a vehicle, consider the condition of the vehicle and its adequacy to perform the assigned task. Consider also whether the worker is required to leave the vehicle, and if so, how far will your employee be from the vehicle and for how long? Is the vehicle to be used on well established roads with frequent traffic or in more isolated and desolate locations?

