

Working Alone Safely

By Nigel Day, OLS, OLIP

Your phone rings and one of your workers, a lone worker, asks for help. It is 5:30 p.m. and the rest of your staff has gone home. You ask where your worker is and what happened, reassure him and say help is on the way. Now what?

I suspect that most companies, at some stage of a project attend a field site alone or send a worker out alone. It is unavoidably necessary to do this in some circumstances, and with the development of technology, it is easier to perform work and data collection alone. Work utilizing robotic total

stations or GPS RTK systems, project estimating, quality control reviews, and so on, may require personnel to work alone. Even driving is a common working alone activity. This could include just driving to the site to meet other workers or returning to the site for further survey work. Driving is at least governed by rules of the Highway Traffic Act but perhaps your health and safety plan should include a driving protocol.

It might be useful if 'lone worker' is loosely defined. A lone worker is someone working without any other human presence nearby.

A Reminder

Section 25 (2) (h) of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (OHSA) states that "an employer shall take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances for the protection of a worker." An Employer is to provide 'information', 'instruction' and 'supervision' to a worker in order to protect his/her health and safety and establish safe working practices. A health and safety policy and plan helps you take these reasonable precautions. Thus, "Are the workers or even you protected in 'working alone' situations?" Employers are responsible for ensuring that the items as stated in Sections 25 and 26 of the Act are complied with. These sections deal with providing instruction, hazard identification, training, and policy writing, etc.

Remember your 'Due Diligence'

Due diligence is taking every duty or care reasonable in the circumstances to protect the health and safety of all workers. Proving 'Due Diligence' is the defence available to a person or company charged under the OHSA if something goes wrong. The defence requires that a person or company prove that they acted with a sufficient 'duty of care' and took all reasonable precautions (Sec 66 Act). Thus, the questions employers should be asked are, "Has the company established safe working protocols and has the staff been trained to use them?" and "Are they being followed within your company?" Training of the staff on only one occasion may not be sufficient; you should consider regular follow-ups and project specific review. Furthermore, in establishing protocols for lone workers, you should involve the workers in these discussions and incorporate their suggestions.

The Rights and Responsibilities of Workers

Respecting the legislated rights of the workers becomes a key item in expecting them to perform lone work. Be especially aware of their right to be



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informed of potential hazards and the right to refuse unsafe work. Also, the workers under Regulation 1101 (First Aid) must report all accidents and incidents and therefore must have the equipment and capability of doing so. “Are the lone workers carrying or do they have an appropriately stocked first aid kit close by and do they have a means of communication?”

What Lone Workers May Face - The Hazards

Remember that the identification of workplace hazards is necessary under section 25 (2) (d) of the Act.

“Are the lone workers at a risk of injury from traffic, falling, weather exposure, animals, cutting bush and any other hazard?” The answer is, “Yes,” to at least some type of hazard. “Are you having a ‘pre-start’ health and safety meeting prior to sending a worker out?” If you are attending a work site by yourself, “Are you leaving notice of where you will be, for

how long and how you can be reached?” It is simple to say, “Yes, there will be hazards and yes that workers will contact someone if they are in trouble,” but the precautions, training and communication expectations must be formally documented to prove your Due Diligence.

“Are your lone workers experienced (competent) in that specific work and are they medically fit and physically able to perform the work?” Competent and trained workers will likely perform better, work more safely and in the case of a health and safety problem, not panic and be able to find a solution more quickly. I would recommend that your lone workers (and others) be trained in and carry valid first aid certificates.

“Are there clear limits and expectations of what can and cannot be performed?” Worksites in remote locations and construction sites might well be the most dangerous areas your workers will visit and specific limita-

tions on lone worker duties might be warranted. A Joint Health and Safety Committee or Worker Representative could help you establish these limits and protocols.

Supervision

Employers or supervisors must undertake their health and safety duties seriously, including supervising. Remember that supervisors must be competent under the Act. Thus, “How do you supervise a lone worker?” This requires training, pre-start reviews of the project requirements, a review of the anticipated hazards and a process that ensures that the proper equipment for the job is available and is in good working order. It also includes, reviewing the emergency procedures protocol and ensuring that communication is available, etc. “Is the appropriate emergency protocol in place, which would incorporate a communication protocol?” Remember that the higher the risk or exposure to

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hazards, the greater the level of supervision and contact that is required. The supervisor must know the experience and physical capabilities of the lone worker and then remind the worker to work safely and check in at predetermined times. The employer or supervisor must ensure that the lone workers return safely at the end of the day to a pre-determined place.

The Equipment

A lone worker must carry at least some standard equipment. You should prudently include a first aid kit or have close access to one. Also, a means of communication should be available, such as a cell phone, satellite phone or signalling device. Any and all personal

protective equipment must be worn. For remote locations, additional seasonal clothing, as well as food and potable water should be available.

Is the Work Better Performed Alone?

Just because the equipment allows it, "Should you send a worker out alone?" It is possible that you may not have had a health and safety issue in the company and if you take 'all reasonable precautions' you may never have one. However, sending workers out alone likely increases an employer's liability and the risk, from a health and safety perspective, if something should go wrong. Driving, quality control and site reconnaissance are some of the

common working alone activities. Economics is obviously one factor in the decision to send out lone workers. This is also dictated by availability of equipment and expected project completion times. However, some surveying data collection requirements may actually be better performed with two or more staff regardless of equipment capabilities if the hazards are great and the staff are not properly trained and experienced. Topographic data collection, for example, may be better performed with two people using RTK units, rather than one.

Best Practices

You might work for years and suffer no health and safety issues, not even require the use of a single bandage for a worker. However, if something happens, you may get judged on 'best practices.' What is deemed to be reasonable, in the circumstances, to be a good and prudent practice loosely becomes a best practice. Thus, upon investigation, "Would your peers and health and safety experts deem that the work required and the field circumstances are reasonable for a lone worker?" You must involve those workers, who have experience in or are expected to perform lone work, to have input in establishing lone work guidelines and constraints. I recommend that the employer investigate the history of working alone on the job. "What has the survey industry in general experienced?" Perhaps you might consider using WSIB as a resource to get statistics. Exposure to liabilities will be reduced if you perform a best practice review and incorporate sound protocols.

Risk Assessment and Analysis

You should prudently undertake a risk assessment every time you contemplate lone worker surveying activities. You should assess the worker's experience, health, the site location, the duration of work, the time of day, the type of work, the hazards, how to get

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to the site, and the availability of communications, among other things. If the risks and hazards can't be 'reasonably' identified, mitigated and/or controlled, then sending a worker out alone would obviously be unwise. Lone work on easily accessed sites that is easily supervised with the anticipated hazards easily mitigated, might be prudent.

A Critical Injury and Rescue Protocol

You must always be cognisant of the critical injury definition and the requirements placed upon an employer. Thus, "What will/should an employer or supervisor do if a lone worker has an injury, especially a critical injury. If you train and can track the lone worker and have in place an effective protocol, the common injuries are easy to deal with. "Where is the worker?" "Who is rescuing and/or providing first aid to the worker?" If the worker is providing first aid to themselves, "Will they require further medical attention, by whom and how?" "Are you documenting the situation in an accident/incident report?" If the person is in a remote location, "How are they getting to safety?" You should establish an "overdue" worker procedure, where certain protocols automatically become active once an established reporting-in time has not been met.

Sending out a 'lone worker' can have serious consequences. However, if you follow all of the protocols that ensure the safety of a lone worker, then you may never have to receive that 5:30 p.m. phone call from one of your staff in need of help.



Nigel Day is currently working in the Thessalon, Ontario office of **M.F. Tulloch Inc.** He is a member of the firm's Health and Safety Committee. Previously, while employed at MTO, he was trained in many of the aspects of Health and Safety and Survey Operations.

Surveyors In Transit

R.J. Emo has re-joined **Zubek Emo, Patten & Thomsen Ltd.** in Collingwood.

McNeice, Harvey, D'Amico Surveyors Ltd. has closed the Wasaga Beach consultation office.

The Uxbridge office of **Reid J. Wilson Surveying Ltd.** has relocated to 66 South Balsam Street, L9P 1G5. Phone and fax unchanged.

The notes and records of **R. Lawryshyn** and **D. Ostapiak** have been placed with **J. Vinklers Surveying Ltd.** in Toronto.

M.K. Walker, formerly with National Defence Headquarters, has been appointed Director, Policy and Review, National Search and Rescue Secretariat, 275 Slater Street, Suite 400, Ottawa, K1A 0K2. Phone: 613-996-2581, fax: 996-3746 (see also new email).

S.G. Fletcher has relocated to Cansel's Toronto office: 81 Kelfield Street, Unit 2, M9W 5A3. Cell: 705-321-9949, fax: 416-249-8168.

S.J. Card, formerly with McElhanney Land Surveys Ltd., has joined Midwest Surveys Inc., located at 3950 - 12 Street N.E., Calgary, T2E 8H9. Phone: 403-244-7471, fax: 244-2466 (see also new email).

D.A. Morton Surveying in Markham has relocated to 12 David Street, L3P 1Z9. Phone, fax and email unchanged.

Paul F. Forth, O.L.S. has purchased the practice of Douglas E. Magee, O.L.S. (Parry Sound). The notes and records now placed with P.F. Forth are: D.E. Magee, J.K. White, W.J. Beatty and T.E. Briggs (Parry Sound area).

J. Nanfara, formerly with Young & Young Surveying Inc. (Bolton), has joined Rady-Pentek & Edward Surveying Ltd. (Toronto).

Mosaic Mapping Systems Inc. (Nepean/Ottawa) has relocated to 140 - 1 Antares Drive, Ottawa, K2E 8C4. Phone, fax and email unchanged.

F.E. Wall, formerly with D.S. Urso Surveying Ltd., has joined M.F. Tulloch Inc. as the supervising surveyor of the Sault Ste. Marie office. N.A.P. Day has relocated from MFT's Sault office to the Thessalon office.

Miller & Urso Surveying Inc. has purchased S.J. Gossling & Associates Inc. in Sudbury, and has opened a branch office at that location. S.J. Gossling is the managing-OLS.

Greg Bishop Land Use Consultant has begun practice in Haliburton (POB 985, postal code: K0M 1S0). Ph/fax: 705-457-4558 (see also new email).

New and Revised Email

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