

# Guide to lone working in the housing sector

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By StaySafe Lone Worker Solutions



# Contents

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- Introduction..... 1
- What is a lone worker..... 2
- Housing industry risks..... 3-4
- High profile cases..... 5-6
- Legal duty of care..... 7
- Failure to comply..... 8
- HSE lone worker guidance..... 9
- Lone worker tips..... 10-11
- Risk assessments..... 12-14
- Lone worker policy..... 15-16
- The StaySafe solution..... 17
- Who we work with..... 18-19
- Contact us..... 20

# Introduction

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Every employer has a duty of care to protect their employees from workplace risks. For those working alone in the housing and property industry, lone working has become commonplace, with workers regularly carrying out house viewings or client meetings alone and away from the office.



While working alone is usually safe, housing employees face potentially difficult situations on a regular basis as they enter client's homes alone, work late hours, carry out maintenance and deliver bad news such as evictions. Such environments mean that unfortunately, violence and aggression is common within the industry.

This practical guide aims to outline the risks present within housing roles, and help you understand your responsibilities as an employer, as well as offering advice on how to support your employees – particularly in regards to lone workers.

# What is a lone worker?

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The HSE defines lone workers as; "those who work by themselves without close or direct supervision". This exposes them to risk by being isolated from the usual backup support, whether they regularly work alone or are only occasionally alone.

While lone working may conjure images of employees working in an empty building, lone workers are not only those who work completely in isolation. There are many roles within the housing industry that involve working alone such as visiting residents in their homes, inspecting empty properties, cleaning and carrying out maintenance.



# Housing industry risks

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## Human threat

Those working in the housing industry are at greater risk of violence and aggression due to working closely with clients and often dealing with sensitive or difficult situations. Housing staff are often required to work closely with vulnerable clients where mental health or substance abuse may also be a factor.

A recent survey by Inside Housing (UK) revealed a rise in the number of reported assaults against frontline staff in recent years. 65% of respondents had experienced verbal assault during the last year, with some stating that this was a regular or even daily occurrence.

Other experiences included racial abuse, being spat on, having furniture thrown at them and receiving death threats as well as being physically attacked or held hostage. The number of reported assaults is so high that in the UK, an assault occurs every 35 working minutes.



## Environmental risk

Working in locations away from the office which haven't been risk assessed can also expose employees to common workplace hazards such as slips, trips and falls, aggressive animals and electrocution.



## Driving

Travelling on the road is one of the greatest and most uncontrollable risks workers around the world face each day. In fact, it is estimated that more than a quarter of all road traffic accidents involve someone who is at work at the time (HSE 2014). Travel risks are not always immediately considered, yet many housing workers regularly spend time travelling between appointments and properties.



## Ill health

If a lone worker suffers from a medical emergency such as a heart attack or fainting, receiving immediate support and alerting emergency services could prove difficult without nearby colleagues, particularly if working remotely or out of sight and sound.

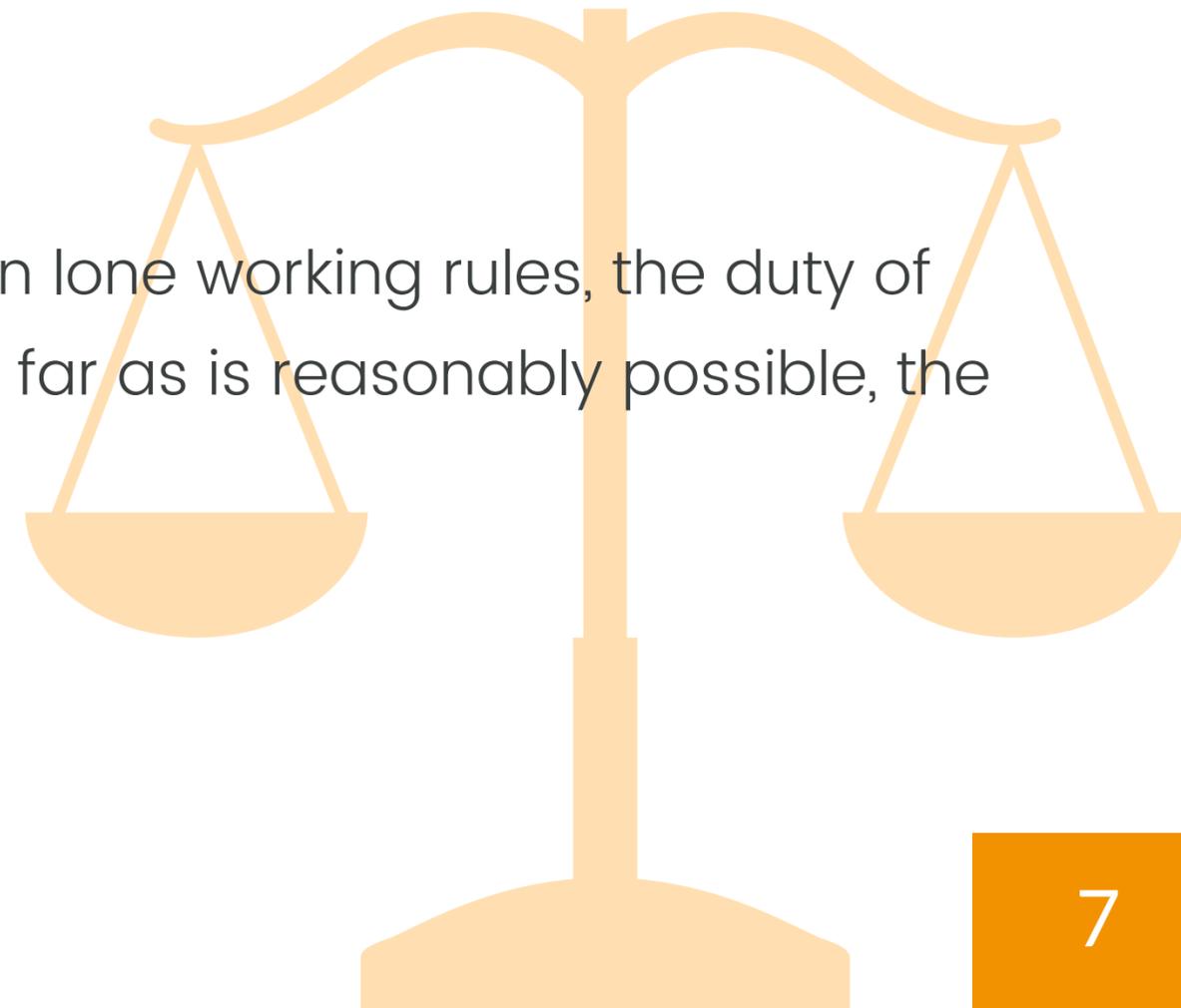
# Legal duty of care

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Every employer holds a general duty to take all reasonable steps to eliminate risk to health and safety of their workers while they are at work. Where risk cannot be entirely eliminated, they must be minimised as far as is reasonably practical.

This duty extends to temporary, volunteer and subcontracted workers as well as members of the public who could be affected by work activities.

While there are few pieces of legislation that focus specifically on lone working rules, the duty of care remains the same as with other employees – to ensure, as far as is reasonably possible, the health, safety and welfare of all employees.

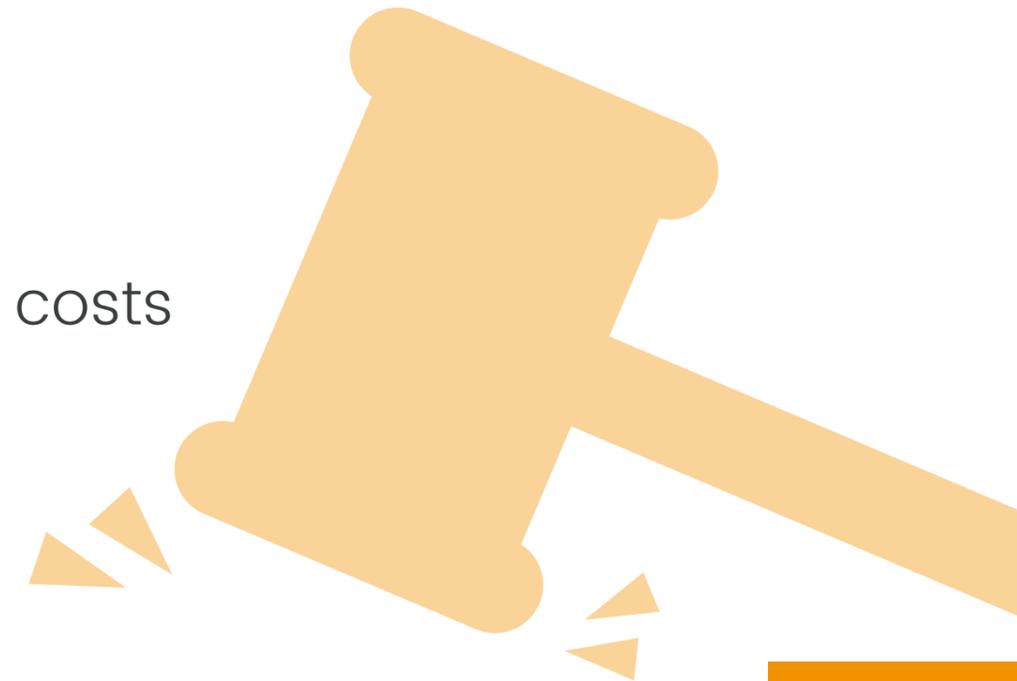


# Failure to comply

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Failing to comply with health and safety legislation can have detrimental effects on a business, regardless of whether an incident or accident occurs as a result. Some of these consequences include;

- Low productivity and morale in staff
- High employee turnover
- Covering or replacing staff
- Lost time due to stop work orders
- Large fines with the potential of reaching millions
- Additional costs associated with compensation, resources and legal costs
- Loss of reputation and ultimately, business
- Prison sentences for individual/s found responsible



# HSE lone worker guidance

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Government agency, the HSE provides additional guidance for best practice when protecting lone working staff;

## Monitoring

Procedures must be put in place to monitor lone workers as an effective means of communication are essential. These may include:

- Supervisors periodically visiting and observing people working alone;
- Pre-agreed intervals of regular contact between the lone worker and supervisor, using phones, radios or email, bearing in mind the worker's understanding of English;
- Manually operated or automatic warning devices which trigger if specific signals are not received periodically from the lone worker, eg staff security systems;
- Implementing a robust system to ensure a lone worker has returned to their base or home once their task is completed.

# Lone worker tips

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- Send your employees in pairs when meeting with new clients, delivering bad news or discussing sensitive and possibly upsetting information
- If working in pairs is not viable, consider meeting clients at the office, or in a public space, so they are seen by multiple people and any signs of aggression can be identified early on
- Ensure there is always an up to date log of whom your employees are meeting with and where
- Implement a check-in policy so that if something happens, someone will be alerted even if the employee is unable to raise the alarm
- Carry out risk assessments to identify any possible hazards or areas/clients where lone working may not be safe

- Provide training for your employees on conflict resolution and personal safety
- Consider implementing a lone worker monitoring system. As lone workers are not directly supervised, procedures should be put in place for monitoring their safety and regularly checking in to make sure they are ok
- Lone workers should also be equipped with a way to signal for help in an emergency. A panic button will allow them to send an alert at any time while man down alerts will detect a fall and automatically send an alert on the employees behalf

# Risk assessments

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When carrying out a risk assessment for lone working staff, you must consider hazards related to the work being carried out, the people they come into contact with and the different environments they travel through and work in.

There are 5 steps you can follow to get started with your risk assessment;



## 1. Identify the hazards

- Talk to your lone workers and ask them for feedback on any risks they have identified
- Look at past incidents and near misses and identify the causes
- Look at common hazards identified by bodies such as HSE and consider whether they could be present in your workplaces



## 2. Determine who might be harmed and how

Next you must consider which of your employees might be harmed by the identified hazards. Perhaps the hazard is associated with a particular work site which is only visited by one employee or perhaps the hazard applies to the work being carried out across a group of lone workers.

You should also take into consideration the experience and training levels of your lone workers.



### 3. Evaluate harm level and decide appropriate precautions and practical steps to take

Once hazards have been identified, you then need to decide how likely it is that harm will occur, and what the level of harm will be to your lone worker

Some practical steps you could take include training, implementing safety equipment and securing worksites.

If your risk assessment has identified a number of hazards, place them in order of importance and address the most serious risks first. For hazards, likely to cause accidents or ill health, you should establish whether short-term controls need to be put in place immediately while you take steps to control the risk long term.



### 4. Record your significant findings

Your records should be simple, easy to understand, and focus on the control systems you have put in place. Keeping a record will allow you to review past risk assessments and provides you with base evidence should an accident or incident occur.

Your written risk assessment should show that;

- A thorough check was carried out
- You considered who might be affected by the hazards
- You took all reasonable steps to control the hazards
- The remaining risk is low
- You involved your employees or health and safety representatives in the process

## 5. Regularly review your risk assessments and update if necessary

Workplaces are constantly changing and new hazards are likely to arise as you expand, hire new employees or implement new equipment and ways of working. You may also find that the procedures you have put in place haven't been effective, and more still needs to be done to control risk.

Therefore, it is important to regularly review the lone worker risk assessments and safety procedures you have in place. As part of your risk assessment review you should consider;

- Whether there have been any significant changes in the workplace
- Whether your policies and procedures have been effective
- Whether your lone workers have identified any other issues
- Whether any accidents or incidents have occurred

If you identify any issues, it is important to follow steps 1-4 again and keep your risk assessment up to date.

# Lone worker policy

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Following on from your risk assessment, you will need to produce a lone worker policy. A lone working policy is a guide that will set out your companies' rules on working alone and help your employees to understand the risks associated with their role. It should also provide them with practical advice and instruction on how to safely work alone.

Your work alone policy should include the following;

- **A definition of lone working**

You must be clear on when you consider your employees to be lone working so they know when the policy applies to them. For example, do you consider those working late in the office alone to be lone working or does your policy only refer to those leaving the office to carry out home visits?

- **Your risk assessment**

Set out a list of the risks identified as part of your risk assessment and break them down by job role, location and lone worker type. If you have a number of lone workers carrying out different roles, you should consider writing several policies. This will help your employees to better understand the risks relevant to them and avoid having to read through the irrelevant information.

- **The procedures and measures you have put in place**

It is important for your employees to know what actions, you have taken to reduce risk and what is expected of them. While you should provide briefs and training on the procedures your lone workers need to follow, the policy is a good place for them to refer back to.

- **The purpose of the lone worker safety policy**

This section provides an opportunity to let your employees know you care about their safety. The focus here should be on the benefits to their well-being rather than your own benefits or legal requirements. Placing emphasis on safety and well-being will help to encourage compliance.

- **The responsibilities of each employee including management and the lone workers**

In order for procedures and systems to work, each employee involved must be aware of their responsibilities. Be clear on which responsibilities lie on the lone worker and which lie on their supervisor.

- **How to report on hazards or incidents**

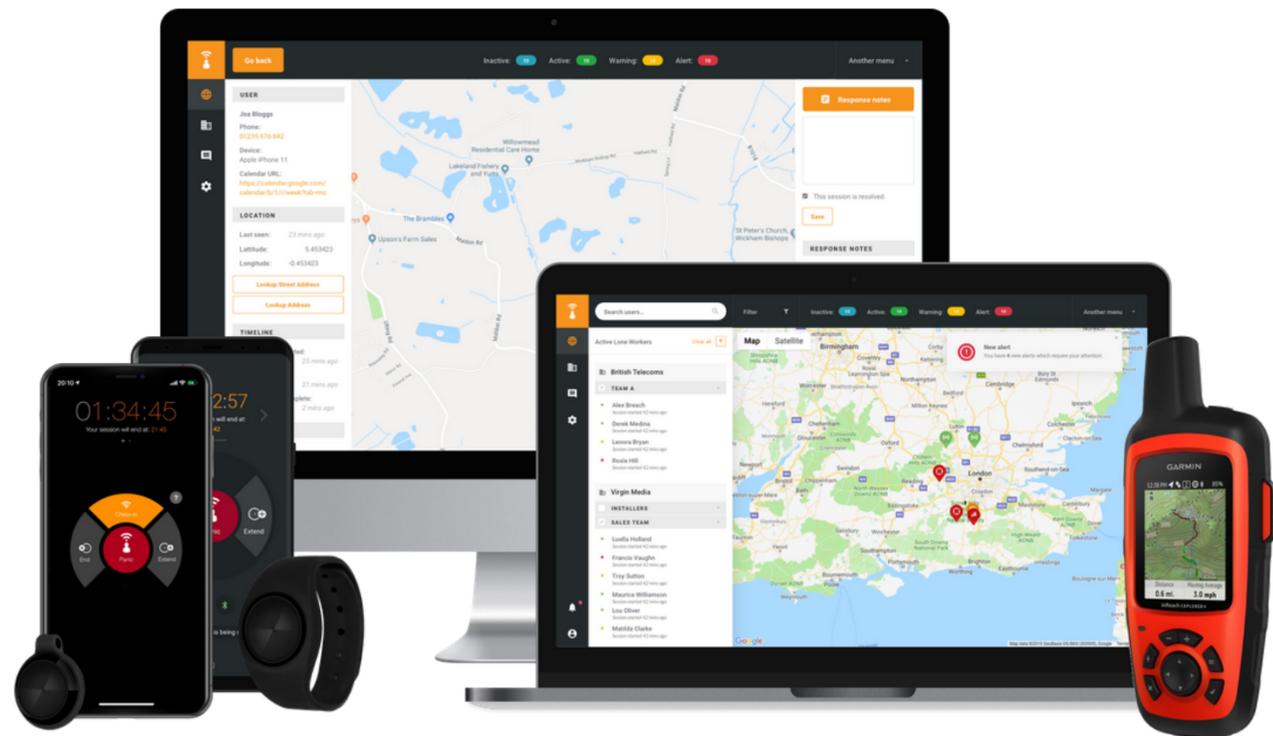
Outline how and when your employees are expected to report a hazard or incident. Is it the lone worker's responsibility or that of a health and safety representative? Do they need to fill out a form or do you have an online portal for reporting?

- **Where to go to receive additional help and support**

# StaySafe solution

At StaySafe we have specifically designed functionality to overcome common lone workers challenges faced in the housing industry. Discreet panic can be used in one-on-one situations while a Duress PIN can be entered when forced to close the app by an aggressor.

Safety apps like StaySafe, can offer a reliable and efficient way of providing protection.



- Timed sessions
- Session check-in
- Panic button
- Discreet panic
- Man-down alerts
- Duress PIN
- Discreet panic
- Low signal mode
- Location monitoring
- Two-way audio
- Satellite devices
- Audit trail & reporting
- Optional third party monitoring

# Who do we work with?

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A number of companies operating within the Housing sector currently use StaySafe to monitor and protect their lone workers. Operating in different areas of the world and across varying job roles, user feedback is testament to the easy to use and flexible nature of the StaySafe solution.

Some of our clients include;





"We are impressed by the versatility of the StaySafe app and broad range of features which tackle the issues we were previously facing. Switching to the StaySafe solution has proven more reliable, more user-friendly and much more efficient for lone workers and their managers. We now feel assured and wise to where our staff are which is of utmost importance as schedules can change last minute, and our staff are regularly in contact with members of the public that they have never met with before."

- Nerys Eldridge, Project Officer, Hafod Housing Association



"As we have multiple workers visiting many properties and client's homes, it is important we can keep on top of their safety between appointments through mandatory check-ins. Overall, the app adds reassurance for us and our employees and we are confident that this system offers better value for money than our previous system, which was regularly left forgotten or uncharged by our lone workers."

- Clare Godbold HR Business Partner Aspire



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# StaySafe™

Lone Worker



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