

Workplace Violence Training Program: Working Alone

Consider the following issues to prepare for the session:

- Are your workers on their own for all or part of a shift—you need to be ready to discuss the hazards they might encounter.
- This Safety Talk is a chance to review personal security for all workers; you could talk about commuting alone and at night, and precautions for weekend travel.
- Ask your workers for tips of their own about safety when working or traveling alone. Remember, an effective person-check system should have input from all levels of the workforce—management, supervisors, and workers.

Start Meeting with Fatality Report

The murder of a teenage girl on her first solo night shift at a gas station brought calls for improving security for night workers who must work alone. The 17-year-old girl was found murdered in the back room of a gas station in Montréal. The station's owner said the building should have been locked while the young woman was on shift. Customers should have been served through a transaction window, but obviously someone was able to get inside the building.

Do you have young workers who could be vulnerable to attack while working alone at night? What plan do you have in place to protect them?

Deliver This Safety Talk

Doing a job alone can be more hazardous than doing the same job in the company of others. If you're injured, ill or trapped, there's no one nearby to help or call for assistance. Lone workers are also more vulnerable to crime such as robbery or assault. Workers alone in the wild country are at heightened risk of wild animal attack.

But while working alone carries potential danger, it may also be necessary, especially for occupations like home care nurses, security guards, property managers, bulk plant attendants, taxi drivers, custodians, loggers, ranch hands, retail clerks, and oil field mechanics.

The key is to understand and control the risk. Such risks depend on circumstances including the location, whether the work itself is risky, and whether it involves direct interaction with the public. For example, workers who handle money, work away from the regular work site, or work alone with mental health patients or clients face particular hazards. So do those who work at heights, in confined spaces, or with electricity, hazardous substances, or dangerous equipment.

Consider these tips for greater safety when working alone:

- Talk to your boss and colleagues about your job, the hazards, how to minimize them, and whether work can be rescheduled so you don't have to do it alone.
- Set up a check-in system enabling you to call or page someone at regular intervals so they'll know you're okay.

- Agree on a tracking method to be used if you don't check in or get checked on within the required time.
- Carry a personal alarm, cell phone, or two-way radio and manage the batteries so you'll always be able to get through.
- Use a buddy system, taking another worker with you into higher risk situations.
- File a travel plan when you drive somewhere alone.
- Keep vehicles well-maintained to avoid breakdowns.
- Stock an emergency survival kit in the vehicle.
- When visiting a potentially dangerous client, customer, or business associate, take a taxi and have the driver wait outside.
- If you work alone late at night, get a security escort to your vehicle or bus stop.

Handling cash or other valuables puts you at risk for violent robbery. Have your employer take steps to reduce the amount of cash on hand to lower the incentive for robbers. Have your work area arranged for maximum visibility from windows. Receive training in how to avoid and handle a robbery and learn to use the security system.

Final Word

Some people enjoy working alone and choose solitary jobs on purpose. An injury or a violent encounter can take the fun out of your work, so be prepared to work as safely as possible when you work alone.