



Lone and 'Out of Hours' Working

Module 1



Health & Safety
Essentials

Registered charity number 207890

Introduction and legal framework

Introduction

The Health and Safety Executive define lone workers as *“those who work by themselves without direct or close supervision”*.

In the case of laboratory work, it is quite common during normal working hours for chemists and other scientists to work alone to some extent merely by being in a separate laboratory, instrument room or write-up area. Lone working can occur during normal working hours as well as in the evening, at night or at weekends. It is important to distinguish lone working during normal hours and ‘out of hours’, especially in the Higher Education sector. It is possible for a laboratory worker to be on the same floor of a building or even in the same general area as others, yet be working alone. However, it is generally accepted practice when working outside normal hours (i.e. ‘out of hours’) with hazardous substances the laboratory worker must be in ‘line of sight’ or earshot of another. The work will be risk assessed and further controls may be required to account for a worker if they are working alone or out of hours (See *Health & Safety Essentials – COSHH and Risk Assessment*).

However, it may not always be possible to apply the necessary control measures for lone working. This may result in an unacceptable risk to the lone worker. In this case, lone working must be avoided.

Legal framework

There is no specific safety legislation covering lone working but the general duties are found in the Health & Safety at Work Act and the Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations. These laws place a duty on employers to ensure the safety of employees and others and hence require a risk assessment approach. In general terms, Higher Education establishments have a ‘duty of care’ to their staff, students, and visitors (including contractors). It is well understood in the Higher Education sector that flexibility and access to facilities outside of normal hours is required to facilitate research but on the condition that robust processes are in place to protect ‘out of hours’ and lone workers.

