Lone and 'Out of Hours' Working

Module 2

ROYAL SOCIETY OF CHEMISTRY

Health & Safety Essentials

Registered charity number 207890

Risk assessment

Risk assessment in general is covered in some detail in *Health & Safety Essentials – Risk Assessment* but this module examines the aspects that are particularly important to lone working and working out of hours.

Both normal working practice and foreseeable emergencies (such as fires, spillages, equipment failure, illness and accidents) need to be considered.

Where a significant risk is identified, the steps which need to be taken to manage them will involve:

- avoiding lone working where reasonably practicable;
- minimising the need for lone working, for example by reducing its duration and/or frequency; and
- providing equipment and procedures to control the risks.

Where these steps are neither practical nor possible, a thorough risk assessment must be conducted. Care should be taken to consider the risk of fire and availability of emergency procedures (e.g. first aid). During 'out of hours' periods fewer personnel will be on site; this needs to be considered. It is unlikely that the same type of laboratory procedures that are commonplace during normal working hours can be undertaken 'out of hours'. Nonetheless, certain work (e.g. work with light sensitive materials) may be best suited to 'out of hours' and can be facilitated if one of the research group has received first aid training.

1. Assess the WORK ACTIVITY

- Is there machinery involved in the work that one person cannot operate safely?
- Are chemicals or hazardous substances being used that may pose a particular risk to the lone worker?
- Does the work involve lifting objects too large for one person?
- If the lone worker's first language is not English, are suitable arrangements in place to ensure clear communications, especially in an emergency?
- Are there particular experimental procedures involved that may pose a risk to the lone worker?

Some work activities require more than one person to be present as the risk cannot be suitably controlled by one person working alone.

2. Assess the WORKPLACE

Typically, the assessment would examine topics such as:

- Is there easy access and an appropriate exit or escape route? Consider the need for alternative routes if working out of hours when the workplace may be locked up.
- Would the response to emergencies be particularly exacerbated due to its location? For example, the response from emergency services may be slow.

3. Assess the PERSONS' CAPABILITIES

In assessing the capability of the lone worker, consideration should be given to reasons why the individual might be more vulnerable than others.

- Does the person have sufficient experience to work alone?
- Does the person know what to do in an emergency and could they manage an emergency on their own? For example, in the event of a fire, flood or medical emergency.

Persons who may be particularly vulnerable are the young or trainee workers, new and expectant mothers, and people with a disability (See *Health and Safety Essentials – New and Expectant Mothers* and *Health and Safety Essentials – Workers with Disabilities*). Risk assessment of young and inexperienced workers needs to establish if they can cope where they do not have a more experienced colleague to turn to.

Where the work may be of a routine nature, efforts should be made to assess the likelihood and impact from the person having to deal with boredom and tiredness, and what additional effect that has on the risk of working alone.

Higher risk activities (such as those involving heavy lifting or use of highly flammable substances) should be conducted with another laboratory worker present.