



Preparing a Lone Worker Policy

TN85 Training Notes series: Administration

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It is common for a number of any church's staff and volunteers to work alone, at least for some of their time. But what in my experience is not so common is for the church to have a proper Lone Worker Policy. This is an important part of a wider Health and Safety at Work Policy.

The aim of these notes is to alert churches to this issue and offer guidance for what such a policy might include. Please email me with further ideas and improvements for when I update these notes.

I shall assume that a more general Health and Safety at Work Policy is already in place and so only address the specific issues of solo workers.

Note that there are not only legal issues behind the advice that follows, but the extra moral responsibility of a Christian employer who wishes to demonstrate the highest standard of care for people as a practical outworking of faith. It is a vital aspect of witness that churches and Christian missions should be seen to be model employers, beyond reproach.

Who works alone?

There are more examples than you may realise. Consider the following:

- a Church Administrator working in a church office when no one else is in the building or even *in that part of the building*;
- any other staff or volunteers, including caretakers/cleaners/caterers, working alone within a church building;
- receptionists at an entry point with no one else in sight;

- a Youth Minister alone with one or more teenagers whether in a public place, in a school or on private property;
- anyone working on maintenance or in the grounds of a church on their own;
- a solo pastoral visitor going to people's homes;
- one volunteer taking cash to the bank;
- members of staff (including Minister) who work from home, alone;
- members of staff travelling by car or public transport on their own in the course of their work.

In these cases danger may be increased when staff or volunteers work outside normal hours (such as a cleaner working at 7.00 am.) or when it is dark (an Administrator in a lonely vestry at 4.00 pm. on a winter's afternoon), or when these two cases are combined (a caretaker or a Minister locking up a church building at 11.00 pm.).

It will be obvious that there is overlap in these cases with other health and safety issues such as the use of mechanical or specialised equipment, danger from fire and safeguarding.

This list demonstrates that lone working is simply part of the essential practice for many church workers and may take place on church property, in their own home or in others' homes. No one would expect such situations to be always avoided, but a Lone Worker Policy will indicate that the employing body has recognised the risks and has sought to minimise them by common sense and appropriate measures.

It should also show that the workers have been given clear advice for how they might minimise the danger to themselves – because in these instances they have responsibilities too.

The risks

Risks include the following:

- physical accident (from injury, fire, etc. such as when using kitchen or maintenance equipment when there is no one available to fetch help if necessary);
- sudden illness, again when there is no one to raise the alarm;
- physical violence or threat of abuse in any form from a visitor;
- sexual behaviour or advances deemed to be inappropriate or threatening;
- accusations by a visitor of inappropriate behaviour by staff/volunteers when there are no witnesses;
- stress caused by working in isolation or from abusive phone calls or digital media.

The responsibilities of the employing body / Trustees

A list of such responsibilities might cover the following points, adapted to fit the particular situations being addressed.

- 1 To show that 'reasonably foreseeable risks' have been identified and updated regularly with appropriate action taken to minimise them. *For example lighting a pathway from church office to road through the churchyard.*
- 2 To ensure that there is adequate insurance cover for all lone working with standard practices adhered to. *For example, an accident book is properly maintained.*

- 3 To install all reasonable security equipment and systems after professional advice has been taken. *For example, CCTV if necessary, entry-phone system with locked doors when anyone is working alone, glass doors or hatch systems for visibility, adequate locking devices on doors and windows. Advice may have been obtained from local crime prevention staff.*
- 4 To equip staff in vulnerable positions with communication tools to ensure they can summon help when needed. *For example, emergency alarm button in a church office, personal alarms for all staff visiting homes, mobile phones (always charged up) when driving or working alone, lists of emergency telephone numbers (including church staff or members living nearby).*
- 5 To ensure that each member of staff feels that the employing body has taken all reasonable steps to ensure their safety. *For example through regular checks with each person concerned with proper line management or supervision in place.*
- 6 To offer appropriate training in personal safety to, and inspection of, those who work alone (and on all other issues of health and safety). This to include what to do in the case of fire or suspicion of intruders, how to exit the building quickly and safely, and where to find first aid kits. To keep proper records of those in vulnerable locations with next-of-kin details. *For example, in-house training, local courses, appropriate logbooks.*
- 7 To insist that staff follow the guidelines laid down on safe solo working. *For example, not to undertake maintenance work at heights when alone, only to visit certain clients in pairs, always to ensure church doors are locked after dark.*

The responsibilities of staff and volunteers

But there needs to be an understanding that the Trustees can only do so much. The behaviour and actions of the employees and volunteers can make a significant difference to the level of safety too.

- 1 To avoid placing themselves in unnecessarily dangerous situations. *For example, by visiting in pairs where felt necessary, by not agreeing to meet anyone in an isolated place, by carrying a personal alarm, by placing themselves near an exit when dealing with someone who might be violent.*
- 2 To be alert to possible dangers and to minimise risk by their own behaviour. *For example, keeping lights on until a building is completely vacated, choosing different routes at different times when taking cash to the bank, placing safety guards in position when using power tools.*
- 3 To inform others of their movements by keeping a register at a central location of visits being made, and informing others of time expected back for potentially difficult visits, with an agreed action plan should the worker not communicate on time.
- 4 To inform one's line manager and other staff of any suspicious behaviour noted or any threats made to them.
- 5 To avail themselves of all training opportunities provided by the church/mission.
- 6 To drive responsibly and to keep their vehicle properly insured, tested and maintained, with a current breakdown insurance, always with adequate petrol in the tank, and to park in well-lit areas.

Particular factors to be taken into account

All of these will affect the level of risk in the above cases.

- 1 the health of the worker, physically, mentally and emotionally;
- 2 the needs of the worker if English is not their first language;
- 3 the location and remoteness of the workplace;
- 4 the maintenance and safety of all equipment and premises;
- 5 the need to lift heavy objects (including boxes of stationery) when alone;
- 6 the provision of first aid cover and help that can be summoned easily and quickly.

It is assumed that there will be a properly set out risk assessment with identified control measures for lone workers as part of the general Health and Safety at Work Policy. This is a requirement for all organisations employing at least five staff (some of whom may be part-time cleaners so 'five staff' catches many churches) – but it would be advisable to do this anyway.

What does a Lone Worker Policy look like?

Here is a suggested list of contents.

1 **Summary**

For example: This Lone Worker Policy outlines the actions being taken by *(employer)* in relation to our staff, volunteers and visitors who may at any time work alone on church activity, together with the actions we expect such workers to take themselves to minimise risks.

2 **Authorisation and related documents**

For example: This policy was last updated and authorised by *(body)* on *(date)* and will be reviewed at least annually by *(church officer)*. It forms one part of our wider Church Health and Safety at Work Policy which is set out at *(reference)*. See also the staff handbook and our current insurance policies and risk assessments *(or whatever)*.

3 **People who work alone in our church**

A summary of the list of possible people (see 'Who works alone?' section above and the risks then listed).

4 **Policy**

For example: The purpose of this Lone Worker Policy is to ensure all staff and volunteers are aware of the specific risks in working alone and to set out the respective responsibilities of employer and staff/volunteers to minimise such risks. The *(Trustees)* commit to carrying out their responsibilities in a thorough and disciplined way. It is a condition of employment that staff will abide by this policy and that failure to do so can result in disciplinary proceedings.

5 **Responsibilities of the employer**

See appropriate section above for ideas.

6 Responsibilities of staff and volunteers

See appropriate section above for ideas.

7 Optional extra sections

Here are examples of other sections you might wish to add:

- something for hirers of the building if working solo and not covered in another document;
- training in personal safety: courses and events;
- further guidance for solo home visits;
- further guidance on safeguarding.

For further information

- 1 The appropriate Health and Safety Executive (HSE) leaflet. See <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg73.pdf>.
- 2 The National Churchwatch website: <http://www.nationalchurchwatch.co.uk>. You may be uneasy about some of the language used on the site but there is helpful security advice.
- 3 The Suzy Lamplugh Trust website: <https://www.suzylamplugh.org/FAQs/lone-working>.
- 4 Your church insurance company and central denominational resources may have specific guidance notes.

These notes are available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes> then TN85.

See also Training Notes TN33, *Danger at church!*, and TN111, *A church policies checklist*. Also Articles A8, *Worker agreements* and A32, *Be creative as a line manager*.

Contact John if you would like to enquire about the possibility of advice on the care and management of staff.

Cartoons are by Micki Hounslow for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication and Administration. File TN85 under Administration (with a link to Management).

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