



Procedures for Working Alone

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Introduction

The University of Texas – Dallas (UTD) along the Department of Environmental Health & Safety (EH&S) will establish specific practices and procedures to minimize the risks of injury or violence to staff, faculty, and students who, due to the nature of their work, are required to work alone and may require emergency assistance during the course of working alone.

Purpose

The Working Alone policy and procedures are intended to promote employee awareness and facilitate employee safety when they are working alone. UTD will ensure that there are safety plans in place for those who work alone. UTD will ensure, applying all reasonable measures, the protection of faculty, staff, and students who are performing their duties in areas or under conditions where they are required to be on their own.

Scope

This policy applies to all faculty, staff, and students who work or perform research on UTD premises or those who may be required to work off campus or in a field research capacity. Workers who are required to work alone may require assistance if they are exposed to conditions that may result in a job related injury, health impairment of any kind, victimization through criminal violence, or other adverse conditions.

Definitions

High risk activities: activities where the potential for the occurrence of accidents or injuries is deemed to be highly likely and where the severity of the injury or accident will bring serious consequences. High risk activities include the following:

- Working from heights
- Working in confined spaces (under the current EH&S policy, a worker is not permitted to work alone in a confined space)
- Lock out/tag out
- Working with electricity (See the Electrical Safety Policy)
- Working with hazardous substances or materials
- Working with material under high pressure
- Working where there is a possible threat of violence
- Working in isolation from first aid services or immediate/emergency assistance

Low Risk activities: activities where the potential for the occurrence of accidents and injuries is deemed to be highly unlikely and where the severity of an accident or injury is generally thought not to have serious consequences.

Risk Assessment: Individually and collectively, supervisors and workers are required to assess the conditions or circumstances under which an employee may be working alone to determine the risks, the level of risk, and prevention measures required to reduce those identified risks to acceptable levels. A critical part of the risk assessment is the determination of emergency assistance procedures.

Working alone: Individuals are considered to be working alone when they are working by themselves in an office, vehicle, laboratory, workshop, field site, or any area owned or operated by UTD or place where work is being conducted for UTD. Assistance, in the event of an injury, illness, or emergency, is not readily available to the individual.

Emergency Assistance: a means of communication to gain assistance in the event of an emergency involving an accident or serious injury, illness, or threat of violence.

After Hours: The period of time when “normal” weekday or shift operations cease.

Field Work: Field work consists of work activities conducted for the purpose of study, research, or training that are undertaken by faculty, staff or students of UTD at locations outside the geographical boundaries of UTD facilities.

Responsibilities

In order for the Working Alone policy and procedures to be effective, they will be implemented with reason and diligence. To achieve this, respective responsibilities have been defined to ensure those who can positively impact on the potential risks of working alone are aware of their responsibilities and have the knowledge and skill to effectively implement working alone guidelines.

Supervisor responsibilities

- Identify risks or hazards associated with the work to be performed or the environment where the work is to be done.
- Conduct and document a risk/hazard assessment for each different (specific) type of work or work location that can be deemed to be a working alone situation.
- Communicate the results of the risk assessment to all affected workers and others conducting similar work.
- Provide written working alone procedures in their area of responsibility in order to eliminate or minimize identified risks.

- Develop effective methods of communication for those who require emergency assistance, depending on the specific work, location of the work, and nature of the work. (For example: cell phones, radio, and pager). When electronic devices are not feasible, an effective contact system must be established (For example: check-in procedures and periodic site visits requiring worker to check in after the completion of specific tasks). The length of time a worker may be out of contact with a supervisor (the frequency of regular communications) must be based on the result from the risk assessment.
- Document when working alone is permitted and/or prohibited and ensure this is effectively communicated to all workers.
- Schedule potentially hazardous work for times when supervisors and appropriate help will be available.
- Provide adequate staffing (for example: buddy system) for hazardous tasks performed at off-hours or remote locations.

Worker responsibilities

- Participate in the working alone risk assessment and risk management decisions with the supervisor.
- Follow safe work practices outlined in safe work procedures.
- Maintain regular communication as directed by supervisors.

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- Monitor applicable legislation to ensure the Working Alone policy is up to date and incorporates any new or revised regulatory requirements.
- Provide consultation to supervisory staff in the development of departmental and site-specific working alone plans.
- Coordinate the development of department and site-specific working alone plans.
- Develop, modify and update as required a standard working alone checklist to be used as the basis for documentation of objective information concerning the specific working alone requirements.
- Audit to determine the effectiveness of the Working Alone procedure within the UTD community.

Working Alone Prohibited

There are certain situations where working alone will not be permitted. Working alone will be prohibited under the following circumstances:

- Confined space entry
- Working on energized electrical conductor or equipment
- Power line hazards: Use of a vehicle, crane, or similar equipment near a live power line where it is possible for any part or the equipment or its load to make contact with the live power line.
- View obstruction: A vehicle, crane, mobile equipment, or similar material handling equipment where the operator does not have full view of the intended path of travel.
- The use of fall arrest equipment and scaffolds.
- Quick-acting, acutely toxic material as described by the Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS).
- Use of supplied air respiratory equipment or self-contained breathing apparatus.
- Risk of drowning.
- Welding operation where a fire watcher is required
- Tasks which, based on the risk assessment conducted by the supervisor in consultation with the employee and EH&S are deemed to require more than one person.

Communication

The Working Alone procedure may include the following to ensure the most practical and effective means of communication:

- Portable or cell telephone,
- Walkie-talkie,
- Personal alarm or pager,
- Buddy system,
- Check-in system and requirement for updating an individual's status while working alone,
or

- Any other method that may be considered most effective to the specific department's safe operations.

Each working alone scenario will use these communication options, either singularly or in combination in the development of a site-specific working alone communication plan.

Guidelines for Conducting Working Alone Risk Assessments

There are a number of scenarios within the University setting that call for jobs having working alone situations. It is essential that employees and their supervisors work together to develop safe work procedures. It is mandatory that the working conditions or circumstances that present high safety risks be assessed so the probability of accident or injury can be minimized. Supervisors and employees will evaluate working alone assignments on a case-by-case basis and will consider the following risk factors for working alone:

- Tasks and hazards involved in the work to be performed.
- Consequences resulting from a "worst case" scenario. This will be accomplished by asking the question, "What if"
- Likelihood for other persons to be in the area.
- Possibility that a critical injury or incident could prevent the employee from calling for help or leaving the workplace.
- Emergency response time.
- Worker's training and experience.
- Worker's physical handicaps or any preexisting medical conditions.
- Frequency of job supervision, if at all.
- The time or shift when the job is to be done.
- Whether the individual is accustomed to working alone.

Supervisors shall provide written working alone safety plans for the safety and security of persons working alone. Safety plans shall include:

- Identification of the risks or hazards associated with the work to be performed or the environment where the work is to be done;
- Procedures to eliminate or minimize the identified risks (e.g., buddy systems);
- Methods of communication by which the workers can secure emergency assistance and how emergency assistance will be provided in the event of incidents or accidents.

- The length of time a worker may be out of contact with a supervisor (i.e., the frequency of regular communications); and
- Confirmation where and when working alone is permitted.

Supervisors must review working alone safety plans with affected employees with particular emphasis on safe work procedures and the provision of assistance to employees at risk due to infrequent supervision, intermittent communication, or physical isolation. Completed working alone plans must be copied to the employee, department Chairs, and to EH&S. Written safety plans should be reviewed and updated, if required, at least annually.