Lone working controlling the risk

Recent events have highlighted the dangers of lone working in greencutting – and the turf management industry as a whole. What lessons can we learn? What can be done to reduce lone working risk? What does the law require and what simple, practical controls can be introduced? Tom Searle from Britrisk Safety shared his views with GI.

Firstly let’s be clear about a few key facts: lone workers are those who work alone without close or direct supervision, even though others may be present in the area.

There can be little doubt that whatever their age, risk assessment of the actual task being undertaken, they automatically become far more aware of the simple fact that the person concerned is alone or isolated, so this is not an issue that should be seen as trivial in any sense.

Whilst it is not illegal to work alone, the law does require employers to carry out a risk assessment and take steps to avoid or control the risks where necessary. The assessment must involve instruction, training and supervision. There is also a requirement to monitor the actual task being undertaken and view the place of work in the context of the actual task being undertaken, the person concerned is alone, the law does require employers to carry out a risk assessment and take steps to avoid or control the risks where necessary.

The assessment may include:

- An awareness that some tasks may be too hazardous to be carried out alone, the law does require employers to carry out a risk assessment and take steps to avoid or control the risks where necessary.
- The implementation of ‘A Buddy’ system involving regular contact between workers and supervisors at pre-agreed intervals via mobile phone or radio.
- The use of a manually operated ‘Personal Alarm System’ (PAS) that transmits an immediate automatic alarm if activated by the user. Devices are available that automatically triggers a Man Down warning and sensors indicate that the user has become suddenly immobile.
- The implementation of a monitoring system that ensures the person concerned has returned home or to base by electronic time and date.
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It is important that procedures are kept short and simple. Long-winded procedures are not applied result in accidents.

Emergency procedures are critical if an accident has occurred. The recipient of the distress call needs to know clear essential facts.

The person placing the call only needs to be aware of the relevant emergency procedures but also the location of the accident. By virtue of the lone working scenario, this may not always be immediately obvious and critical time can be lost if the emergency services are not directed specifically to the scene in the most efficient and accessible route.

A method statement may be appropriate - a short document accompanying the risk assessment that describes the main aspects of the task and the subsequent procedures, including how the process of supervision will work.

So, having identified the main elements of risk control, how can we pull together the vital communication process and ensure that everyone is involved is kept fully briefed and procedures referenced?

The answer lies primarily in ‘Tool box talks’ (more familiar perhaps to workers in the construction industry).

Put the kettle on, pull up a few chairs around the table and let’s talk through the main risks and controls. The older, more experienced hands should be initiating discussion and monitoring the young guns, particularly apprentices and other youngsters with less experience (and while we’re on the subject, don’t forget about the raised risks and obligations surrounding ‘Young Persons’).

Once again this should not be a long laborious process that impacts negatively on the busy working day, but taking one topic per week and spending 15 minutes on a designated topic will not only mean the skilled are constantly kept up to scratch but there is a great incentive in everyone’s safety and well-being.

One final ‘Quick Win’ - use of the Dynamic Risk Assessment process can be a great supplement to written risk assessments and will assist in employees’ own legal duties to take care of themselves and others.

Dynamic risk assessment may be defined as ‘A continuous process of identifying risk, assessing it and coming up with ways to reduce or eliminate such risk.’ It operates at systemic, strategic and dynamic levels and involves the concept of a ‘Safe Person’. It was initially introduced by the fire service but may be extended to the workplace to supplement written documents.

This is a subject of its own, but suffice it to say it is a process by which operatives continually assess risks as they carry out tasks in this context it is not a written procedure and should be used to complement formal assessments.

For example, when cutting grass around a bunker an operative can carry an emergency system that ensure the person concerned has returned home or to base by electronic time and date.

Photo credit: Jon Forsyth

About the author

Tom Searle is Managing Director of Britrisk Safety Limited, the former director of BCHS (Buckinghamshire College of Horticultural Studies). Tom specialises in risk identification and dynamic risk assessments. He was the lead author of the DHSSFS guidance ‘Reducing the Risk of Lone Working’. Tom teaches at an educational level and is a specialist trainer in lone working.


Tom Searle from Britrisk Safety shared his views with GI.

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www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg73.pdf
controlling the risk

Lone working

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Firstly let’s be clear about a few key facts - lone workers are those who work alone without close or direct supervision, even though others may be present in the area.

There can be little doubt that whatever risks arise, risk assessment is the critical aspect of the actual task being undertaken, they automatically become far more acute due to the simple fact that the person concerned is alone or isolated, so this is not an issue that should be seen as trivial in any sense.

Whilst it is not illegal to work alone, the law does require employers to carry out a risk assessment and take steps to avoid or control the risks where necessary. The assessment must involve instruction, training, and supervision. There is also a requirement to consult workers when considering any risk assessment.

What’s more, employers must ensure that risk assessments are kept short and simple. Long-winded procedures are not easy to read, if they are not read, they are not applied and procedures that are not applied result in accidents.

Emergency procedures are critical. Once an accident has occurred, the recipient of the distress call needs to know clear essential facts. The person placing the call not only needs to be aware of the relevant emergency procedures but also the exact location of the accident. By virtue of the lone working scenario, this may not always be immediately obvious and critical time can be lost if the emergency services are not directed specifically to the scene via the most efficient and accessible route.

A method statement may be appropriate - a short document accompanying the risk assessment that describes the main aspects of the task, and the sequence of events, including how the process of supervision will work.

So, having identified the main elements of risk control, how can we pull together the vital communication process and ensure that everyone involved is kept fully briefed and procedures referenced? The answer lies primarily in ‘Tool box talks’ (more familiar perhaps to workers in the construction industry)

Put the kettle on, pull up a few chairs around the table and let’s talk through the main risks and controls. The older, more experienced hands should be initiating discussion and mentoring the young guns, particularly apprentices and other youngsters with less experience (and while we’re on the subject, don’t forget about the raised risks and obligations surrounding ‘Young Persons’).

Once again this should not be a long laborious process that impacts negatively on the busy working day, but taking one topic per week and spending 15 minutes on a designated topic a time will not only assist in everyone’s safety and well-being but will aid in the familiarity of controlling the workplace.

In the past, passing on knowledge is often achieved by just ‘passing on knowledge’.

One final ‘Quick Win’ - use of the Dynamic risk assessment process can be a great supplement to written risk assessments and will assist employers’ own legal duties to take care of themselves and others.

Dynamic risk assessment may be defined as a continuous process of identifying risk, assessing it and coming up with ways to reduce or eliminate such risk. It operates at systematic, strategic, and dynamic levels and involves the concept of a ‘Safe person’. It was initially introduced by the fire service but may be extended to the workplace to supplement written documents.

This is subject all of its own, but suffice it to say it is a process by which operatives continually assess risks as they carry out tasks. In this context it is not a written procedure and should be used to complement formal assessments. For example, when cutting grass around a bank, an operative can instantly rehearse questions such as:

What does my training and experience say about this job?

Is this bank too steep / too wet to do this?

How could I injure myself doing this?

If this machine turned over NOW what would I summon help?

Does this task FLUX, panel, flux?

Finally, for further help on Lone Working take advantage of the best source of free, health and safety guidance and support in the world. The HSE website contains a wealth of fully illustrated information – and it’s free! Here is the link:

www.hse.gov.uk/pubn/db/ind473.pdf