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Lone working controlling the risk

Recent events have highlighted the dangers of lone working in greenkeeping – 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 risks are present by virtue 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 that in an issue that should be seen as trivial many times.

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 potential risks and measures to control them.

The assessment may include:

- An assessment that specific tasks may be too hazardous to be carried out by an inexperienced worker and that as a consequence at least two people must be present at all times.
- If this is not practicable, that task is deferred until more staff are present or when on weekend duty, avoiding using machinery for potentially dangerous complex tasks (such as snowing steep banks).
- How the task and lone worker will be supervised.
- The means by which assistance and support is summoned should the need arise.
- The arrangements for emergency response and how this will be delivered.
- Whether the worker concerned has any personal health risk factors, such as a latent condition or status that may adversely raise their personal risk level.
- Whether there are any reasons to think that there may be a raised risk of attack or assault – such as cash carrying, or being called out at night to investigate a premises.
- Reference to monitoring arrangements as applied below.
- Monitoring arrangements are a critical aspect of supervision. This may include:
 - Supervisors periodically visiting and observing the place of work
 - and ensuring that the task in hand is being carried out safely and in accordance with instructions.
 - A 30-day system involving regular contact between worker and supervisor at pre-agreed intervals via mobile phone or radio.
 - The use of a manually operated Personal Alarm Button (PAB) that transmits an immediate automatic warning if activated by the lone worker.
 - Devices are available that automatically trigger a 999 alarm if someone indicates that the user has become suddenly immobile.
 - The implementation of a robust system that ensure the person concerned has returned home or to base by a certain time.

A procedure is required to ensure clarity of vision and full understanding by all concerned of what needs to be done. The 3 Ws apply: WHO WHAT WHY WHO? WHO? The main vehicle for this is the risk assessment and process specific arrangements that must accompany the Health & Safety Policy.

It is important that procedures are kept short and simple. Lengthy, waded 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 exact location of the accident. By virtue of the lone working scenario, this may not always be immediately obvious and critical line can be lost if the emergency services are not directed specifically to the street 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 operations, including how the process of supervision will work.

So having identified the main elements of risk control, how can we pull together the risk communication process and ensure that everyone involved is kept fully briefed and processes reinforced? The answer lies primarily in 'toolbox 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 reporting, the younger ones, particularly apprentices, workers and other youngsters with less experience should write on the subject, don't forget about the main risks and controls surrounding Young Person's Work again this should not be a negligible process that impacts negatively on the busy workday, but taking one topic per week and spending 15 minutes on it, designed to get a lone worker used to a great involvement in everyone's safety and well-being.

Our Frank O'Neil says, use of the Dynamic Risk Assessment process has a great complement to work-based assessments and will ensure that an employer's own legal duties to their staff of instruction and training.

Dynamic risk assessment may be defined as a continuous process of identifying risk, assessing it and taking steps to reduce or eliminate such risk. It operates at a systems, strategic and tactical level 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, which operators continuously assess risk as they carry out tasks. In this context it is not a written protocol and should be used to complement formal assessments.

For example, when cutting grass around a building an operator's safety releases questions such as:

- What does my training and experience say about this job?
- Is this task too risky / too tight to be safe?
- How could I injure myself / doing this?
- How would I measure my own NOW and risk measure turned over NOW how would I measure myself?

Finally, for further help on Lone Worker take advantage of the best source of free health and safety guidance and support in the world. The HSE website contains a wealth of daily illustrated information – and it's free! Here is the link: www.hse.gov.uk/pubn/fs/fs67.pdf

about the author

Tom Searle is a highly experienced safety professional with over 20 years' experience in the health and safety industry. He has worked for a number of major UK and international organisations, including the NHS, the Home Office, the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Transport. He is a frequent speaker at industry conferences and has written several books on safety management.








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British and International Golf Greenkeepers Association