

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 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 potential risks and measures to control them.

The assessment may include:

- An awareness that some tasks may be too hazardous to be carried out by an unaccompanied 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 e.g. when on weekend duty, avoiding using machinery for potentially dangerous complex tasks (such as mowing 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 heart condition or asthma that may inherently raise their personal risk level.

- Whether there is any reason 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 alarm.

- Reference to monitoring arrangements as specified 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 'Buddy' 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 user. Devices are available that automatically trigger a 'Man Down' warning if sensors indicate 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 5 W's apply: WHO? WHAT? WHEN? WHERE? WHY? The main vehicle for this is the site and person-specific arrangements that must accompany the Health & Safety Policy.

It is important that procedures 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

Photography courtesy of Gareth Roberts

about the author



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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 processes refreshed? 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 apprentice workers 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 is time well spent and a great investment in everyone's safety and well-being.

One final 'Quick Win' - use of the 'Dynamic risk assessment' process can be a great complement 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 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 a subject all of its own, but suffice it to say it is a process by which operatives continually assess risk as they carry out tasks. In this context it is not a written process and should be used to complement formal assessments.

For example, when cutting grass around a bunker an operative constantly rehearses questions such as:

What does my training and experience say about this job?

Is this bank too steep / too wet to be safe?

How could I injure myself doing this?

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

Does this task FEEL safe?

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/pubns/indg73.pdf