

Code of Practice for Workers Working Alone

Workplace Safety and Health Division

Manitoba 

Building for the Future

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INTRODUCTION

This Code of Practice provides practical guidance concerning the requirements of Manitoba Regulation 105/88R, respecting "Workers Working Alone", adopted under The Workplace Safety and Health Act. It does not replace either the Regulation itself or the Act.

GENERAL INFORMATION

This Code of Practice is not intended to document the many and varied circumstances in which a worker may be required to work alone, or to specify a method of monitoring required for each specific working alone situation.

A significant number of job functions have been and will continue to be performed by workers working alone. Recognition of this fact indicates that those individuals involved must approach the hazards inherent to those occupations and develop safe work procedures.

The key concepts contained in the Regulation for Workers Working Alone are:

1. The necessity of assessing all working alone situations to determine the conditions or circumstances which may result in misfortune to the workers working alone and attempt to reduce the probability of such misfortune; and
2. The provision of a means of securing assistance for workers working alone in the event of injury or other misfortune.

THE WORKPLACE SAFETY AND HEALTH ACT

The next few sections present selected extracts from The Workplace Safety and Health Act, which concern duties of employers and workers at work.

General Duties of Employers

4(1) Every employer shall in accordance with the objects and purposes of this Act

- (a) ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare at work of all his workers; and
- (b) comply with this Act and regulations.

Further duties of employer

4(2) Without limiting the generality of an employer's duty under subsection (1), every employer shall

- (a) provide and maintain a workplace, necessary equipment, systems and tools that are safe and without risks to health, so far as is reasonably practicable;
- (b) provide to all his workers such information, instruction, training, supervision and facilities to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare at work of all his workers;

- (c) ensure that all his workers, and particularly his supervisors, foremen, changehands or similar persons, are acquainted with any safety or health hazards which may be encountered by the workers in the course of their service, and that workers are familiar with the use of all devices or equipment provided for their protection;
- (d) conduct his undertaking in such a way as to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that persons who are not in his service are not exposed to risks to their safety or health arising out of, or in connection with activities in his workplace;
- (e) consult and co-operate with the workplace safety and health committee where such a committee exists, regarding the duties and matters with which that committee is charged under this Act;
- (f) consult and co-operate with the worker safety and health representative where such a representative has been designated, regarding the duties and matters with which that representative is charged under this Act;
- (g) co-operate with any other person exercising a duty imposed by this Act, or the regulations.

General duties of workers

5. Every worker while at work shall, in accordance with the objects and purposes of this Act,

- (a) take reasonable care to protect his safety and health and the safety and health of other persons who may be affected by his acts or omissions at work;
- (b) at all times, when the nature of his work requires, use all devices and wear all articles of clothing and personal protective equipment designated and provided for his protection by his employer, or required to be used and worn by him by the regulations;
- (c) consult and co-operate with the workplace safety and health committee, where such a committee exists, regarding the duties and matters with which the committee is charged under this Act;
- (d) consult and co-operate with the worker safety and health representative, where such a representative has been designated, regarding the duties and matters with which that representative is charged under this Act;
- (e) comply with this Act and the regulations, and;
- (f) co-operate with any other person exercising a duty imposed by this Act or the regulations.

These are only a few of the items in the Act. The entire Act and relevant regulations should be studied in detail in order to gain working knowledge of their provisions.

DEFINITION

The definition of "workers working alone" has been written in such a manner as to indicate that the regulation will apply to virtually all workers who are performing a job function and are not in the presence of their employer, another person in a supervisory capacity designated by the same employer, or another worker directly associated with the same employer, at the particular workplace location and during the same time period the working alone job function is being performed.

A great number of workers will fall into this category. However, during this time they may be in contact with workers associated with a different employer or the general public. Such contact does not eliminate the concept that the worker is working alone, and therefore, will require the same particular attention as outlined in the Regulation. Such instances may become an integral part of assessing the risks to which the worker may be exposed and the development of methods to secure assistance should misfortune occur, during the subsequent consultative process and plan development.

SECURING WORKERS FROM RISKS

As previously mentioned, subsection 4 (2), clause (b) of The Workplace Safety and Health Act states that every employer shall "provide to all his workers such information, instruction, training, supervision and facilities to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare at work of all his workers".

When workers are involved in working alone situations, consideration should be given to the fact that, should some misfortune occur, the worker may not be able to secure assistance as readily as when working with a group of co-workers.

With the understanding that misfortunes to workers will never be totally eliminated while performing any given job junction, whether it be determined as working alone or not, both employers and workers have the responsibilities and duties to undertake that job function in the most knowledgeable and safest manner, thus minimizing the possibility of such misfortune. An example of situations that utilize risk-reduction policy and procedures are those involving criminal victimization. The City of Winnipeg Police Department and rural constabulary detachments have developed an extensive program respecting Business Crime Prevention. Materials and information are disseminated upon request through their respective Community Relations sections.

DEVELOPMENT OF PLAN

The Workplace Safety and Health Act requires a significant number of workplaces in the Province of Manitoba to establish a workplace safety and health committee or a worker safety and health representative. For further information, refer to the Act, Manitoba Regulation 106/88R and the Code of Practice for Safety and Health Committees.

The Workplace Safety and Health Act requires that employers and workers consult and co-operate with workplace safety and health committees or with the worker safety and health representative on matters regarding the safety, health and welfare at work of all workers at the workplace.

Safety and health committees and worker safety and health representatives should enhance the ability of workers and employers to resolve safety and health concerns reasonably and cooperatively. They should do so on their own, with a minimum of government involvement. In workplaces where safety and health committees exist or where worker safety and health representatives are designated and have participated in the consultation procedure for plan development and agreement for workers working alone, it should be considered as having been a legitimate safety and health concern discussed, resolved and, therefore, be referenced in committee meeting minutes, submitted to the Workplace Safety and Health Division as indicated in the appropriate Code. The first and foremost condition that must always be considered is that a worker is working alone.

A. Assessment

When assessing the conditions or circumstances under which the worker is required to work alone, particular job functions will have inherent hazards associated with them that may be deemed as high risk, low risk or combinations of both. The degree of risk involved will not eliminate the requirement of developing control methods to minimize these risks.

Some examples of work functions that present high-risk hazards may include:

- Entering any confined space
- Working with:
 - high energy materials (radioactive, high temperature)
 - toxic gases, liquids, or solids
 - cryogenic (low temperature) materials/processes
 - high pressure systems - high voltage electrical systems
 - moving equipment or machinery
- Working in:
 - extreme weather conditions
 - laboratory functions
 - services industries where job functions may not be hazardous but where cash or goods handled may cause the situation to attract criminal victimization
- Handling or transferring flammable liquids.

Some examples of work functions that present low risk may include:

- maintenance functions other than on active processing equipment
- security watchman's functions (except in hazardous locations)
- janitorial or custodial functions (except in hazardous locations)
- routine job functions that are part of a longstanding operating procedure and where experience has shown them to be safe
- desk work

B. Control Measures and Documentation

Upon assessing the conditions or circumstances under which a worker is required to work alone, control methods shall be developed and documented to minimize the identified risks arising out of or in connection with that activity. A means of securing assistance for the worker working alone in the event of injury or other misfortune shall be included.

The following suggestions may be incorporated as part of the developed plan. Dependent on the situation, to which they are to be applied, the examples could constitute control methods to minimize risks, means of securing emergency assistance or a combination of both.

Checking the worker's well-being while working alone:

1. Second Person or "Buddy System"

The most appropriate work activity for the "buddy system" as part of a working alone plan is where workers are required to enter confined spaces.

"Confined spaces" means areas in which access or egress is restricted, such as manholes, sleeves, pits, valve chambers or lift stations, and there is a danger of accumulation of hazardous gases, vapours, mists or lack of oxygen.

The Workplace Safety and Health Division regulates all confined entry work activities by requiring the use of the second person or "buddy system" as the only permissible control method and emergency assistance provision for the worker conducting the job function.

Such situations are referred to in Manitoba Regulation 189/85 [sections 112 and 142 and subsection 164 (2)] and are outlined in Guidelines for Confined Entry Work.

The Division also requires compliance with Canadian Standards Association Standard W117.2-1974, entitled "Code for Safety in Welding and Cutting (Requirements for Welding Operators):

9.4.5

Where a welder must enter a confined space through a manhole or other small opening, means shall be provided for quickly removing him in case of emergency. When safety belts and life-lines are used for this purpose they shall be so attached to the welder's body that his body cannot be jammed in a small exit opening. An attendant with a preplanned rescue procedure shall be stationed outside to observe the welder at all times and be capable of putting rescue operations into effect.

In all "buddy system" situations, consideration must be given to the buddy's qualifications. The buddy must be knowledgeable concerning the activities of the worker he/she is observing, be properly equipped with emergency equipment, and be capable of putting preplanned rescue or emergency operations into effect.

With the "buddy system", a second person's presence is required at all times. However, where the probability of serious consequence is high, both should not be exposed to the hazard simultaneously. The second person should be within sight, but safely removed from the immediate area.

2. *Personal Check by Another Person*

In many working alone instances, checking the worker's well-being may be achieved by periodic visits at regular intervals by an individual, such as the employer, another worker of the employer or someone designated by the employer.

The length of time between checks will depend on the estimated hazard of the job function.

As indicated in the "buddy system", the person designated to check the worker working alone must be knowledgeable of that worker's activities and must be capable of putting preplanned emergency operations into effect. Contact with the general public, such as, "passers by" is not considered adequate.

3. *Periodic Telephone Contact*

Use of the telephone for communication at regular intervals may be adequate in low-risk working alone situations. Telephone numbers for routine calling and emergency situations would have to be posted prominently.

An example could include a night watchman's function at a location, which has been determined to have low risk. Watchmen or security guards could call in to their dispatch offices at regular intervals, e.g., every hour prior to commencing their rounds, indicating their personal status at the workplace and the status of the workplace itself.

The intervals between these contacts would have to be determined by the estimated hazards at the workplace. Regulating the telephone contacts to specific times during that work function would reduce the number of false-alarm situations arising from the person working alone or contact person not being available for contact due to other than emergency situations.

Protection of persons involved in routine job functions will change when that person and job functions are performed in non-routine conditions. These conditions include the absence of other workers in the workplace or when the function is being conducted during other than normal working hours for that person. Even for low-hazard activities, such as office desk work, that person should be instructed in and be knowledgeable about emergency procedures for working alone, for example, outside of regular office hours.

4. *Constant or Intermittent Mechanical or Electrical Surveillance*

When considering the use of mechanical or electrical surveillance equipment to accommodate the working alone situation, security systems in use at the workplace may be modified so that they will monitor a particular worker who is working alone as well as the status of the workplace itself.

Many workplaces utilize personal pagers, two-way radios, emergency sounding devices, visual monitoring systems, and similar equipment. This equipment is used as part of everyday operations. For reasons inherent to each particular operation, either wireless or hard-wired systems have been adopted.

The most important point to consider is the suitability of safety measures and systems to worker's needs. For example, if an employee is deaf, visible alarms should be provided in the workplace.

5. Central Monitoring

The development of protection and assistance plans for workers working alone, or the workplace in general, may include an arrangement whereby the activities of those required to work alone are monitored by a person or facility designed for that purpose.

When using a central monitoring system to relay an alarm, the following requirements must be addressed:

- a) All federal, provincial and municipal regulations and by-laws must be met.
- b) The system must be self-monitoring, with line security between the property and the station to ensure that the system is in operating condition at all times and that a compromised line will automatically signal the monitoring agency.
- c) There must be an emergency power supply meeting applicable federal, provincial or municipal requirements to ensure the system is in operating condition at all times.
- d) In rural areas, signal-to-station may be via auto or digital dialer.

PLAN CRITERIA

Those persons directly involved in the consultation process for developing plans for workers working alone should ensure that as much information as possible is included to inform and instruct both the worker who is working alone and the supervisor as to the set procedures for that particular job function.

The criteria outlined in section 4 of the Regulation indicates the minimum information to be included in the plan.

Each specific type of activity will no doubt have particular requirements and procedures in place for the function to be conducted in the safest possible manner. These requirements may be a result of company policy or pertinent regulations or standards.

Working alone plans should be an extension of the safety and protective equipment necessary to perform that job function under any circumstance.

Instances may occur where a particular employer will have more than one employee working alone. Frequent staff turnover may also be a factor in operations involving working alone situations. Uniform plans could therefore be developed by the same process as previously described to cover these persons, if all person directly involved in these working alone situations are in agreement. These types of "blanket plans" would be suitable only if the working alone situations involved similar conditions. Modifications would be necessary should a particular employee in a general plan have special needs.

Uniform plans should stipulate a fixed period for the plan to remain effective. At the end of such a time period, the plan should be reviewed and updated in the same manner as the original plan.

PLAN AGREEMENT

The signing of a plan that has been developed in accordance with section 3 of the Regulation will be an indicator of success in meeting this requirement of the Regulation.

The developed plan shall provide instruction for supervisors and workers and designate their respective responsibilities. The working alone plan shall be in writing and shall be provided to all workers and supervisors directly involved in the working alone environment.

PLAN NOT AGREED UPON

Should a situation arise where the employer and worker, in consultation with the workplace safety and health committee or worker safety and health representative, cannot agree on an appropriate working alone plan, a safety and health officer and, at the option of the worker, another person representing the worker from that workplace may be requested to meet with those persons directly involved in the working alone environment to assist in resolving the matter.

In the event that agreement cannot be achieved on a plan, the appeal process will follow the system set forth in subsection 43 (6) to 43 (8) of the Act.

PLAN TO BE AVAILABLE TO A SAFETY AND HEALTH OFFICER

For the purpose of enforcing The Workplace Safety and Health Act and this Regulation, a safety and health officer may, at any reasonable time or where in his/her opinion a situation exists that is or may be dangerous, require any documents, books or records that relate in any way to the safety and health of workers to be produced for inspection and to make copies thereof or take extracts therefrom.

The employer shall maintain a current signed copy of the plan at the workplace.

ADHERENCE TO DEVELOPED PLAN

As previously mentioned in Part III of this Code of Practice, The Workplace Safety and Health Act requires the employer to provide for the safety, health and welfare at work of all his or her workers, and workers are required to utilize provisions made for their protection while at a work.

Workplaces are compelled to comply with Manitoba Regulation 105/88R (Workers Working Alone) unless exempted in section 9.

EXEMPTION

The Workplace Safety and Health Division recognizes the fact that other Manitoba Government jurisdictions may develop legislation which will address requirements pertinent to their specific workplaces. This legislation will be developed in accordance with the specific objects and purposes of The Workplace Safety and Health Act.

For example, The Employment Standards Act has provisions regarding the employment of a child or adolescent which prohibit, restrict, or regulate their employment in workplaces deemed to be dangerous, unwholesome or unhealthy. Such legislation is considered to be complementary to the provisions of Manitoba Regulation 105/88R.

CODE OF PRACTICE FOR WORKERS WORKING ALONE

"I hereby approve this Code of Practice, the effective date of the approval being the 17th day of June, 1989

RON GLASSFORD, P.ENG.

Acting Director

Workplace Safety and Health Division

Dated at Winnipeg, Manitoba, this 2nd day of June, 1989

GLEN G. BLAHEY, CRSP

Witness

Commissioner for Oaths

Commission Expiry November 5th, 1990