

Safety Note # 194
WORKING ALONE



Working alone is not the ideal situation, but sometimes it is necessary. Depending on the task and work environment, doing a job alone can be more dangerous than doing the same job with the assistance of a co-worker. If an employee is injured, gets ill, or trapped, there might not be anyone nearby to help. Some of the ANR positions that might be required to work alone include laboratory personnel, agriculture workers, shop employees, Advisors, research personnel, community educators, and office support staff. This also includes employees who travel alone for work.

Working alone means being where you cannot be seen or heard by another person including supervision. Cal-OSHA does not have any specific regulations pertaining to working alone. However, the Federal-OSHA General Duty Clause provides the following general guidelines.

FED-OSHA GENERAL DUTY CLAUSE - *Section 5(a)(1) of the Occupational Safety and Health Act, requires that each employer furnish to each of its employees a workplace that is free from recognized hazards that are causing or likely to cause death or serious physical harm.* The general duty provisions can be used by OSHA where there is no standard that applies to the particular hazard.

The following are tips to use for employees who are working alone:

- Conduct a risk assessment to determine if working alone may be done safely.
- Establish a clear action and communication plan for solo workers to use in the event of an emergency.
- Set limits for what tasks are permissible for working alone. For example, a laboratory worker may perform inventory or cleanup activities, but should not work with highly hazardous substances alone.
- Ensure a means of communication between lone workers and supervisors. Phones, smart phone apps, webcams, handheld radios may be an acceptable means of communication.
- Establish contact times between workers and supervisors during the work shift. The frequency of the contact should increase with the relative hazard of the work.
- Have safety equipment such as fire extinguishers and first aid kits available.
- If an employee has any medical or physical conditions which would prevent them from working alone, they should inform their supervisor or Human Resources of the need for accommodation.
- Employees working alone should be trained, competent and experienced, and know when to call for assistance when needed.
- According to the Cal-OSHA heat illness prevention standard (CCR 8-3395), working alone is not allowed during temperatures equal or exceeding 95 degrees Fahrenheit. (See <http://ucanr.edu/heatillness> for more information about heat illness prevention)
- Ensure the lone worker has a means of transportation if required.
- Verify when employees working alone have returned to the office or home.

Contact UC ANR [Risk & Safety Services](#) for advice on conducting a risk assessment for working alone.