

Working alone or in isolation

An employer's guide to the amendments in Part 4 of the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation

Why specific requirements for working alone or in isolation?

Employees who work alone or in isolation face an increased risk of confrontations or even violence. For example, a lone retail worker may be more vulnerable when dealing with angry, difficult, or abusive customers. Even if an incident doesn't lead to a physical confrontation, it can still be stressful or emotionally traumatic for the worker. And if a solo worker is injured or an emergency occurs, how does the worker get help? What if the worker is unconscious? Even though such incidents aren't that common, when they do occur the consequences can be serious.

That's why there are specific requirements in the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation for working alone or in isolation. New amendments to these requirements will come into effect February 1, 2008.

How do the amendments affect employers?

These amendments apply to any employer who has employees working alone or in isolation. The amendments include additional requirements for employees working night shifts at late night retail premises such as fast-food outlets, convenience stores, or gas stations. Depending on your situation, you may need to identify potential hazards in your workplace and develop procedures to ensure that your employees remain safe on the job. This guide will describe what you need to do to meet the legal requirements that are specified in sections 4.20.1 to 4.23 of the Regulation.

Where do I find the amendments?

When the amendments come into effect in February 2008, you will find them in sections 4.20.1 to 4.23 ("Working Alone or in Isolation") of the Regulation. You can find a searchable online version of the Regulation and its accompanying Guidelines at WorkSafeBC.com. An updated CD-ROM will also be available at that time.

Until then, you can find the amendments at WorkSafeBC.com. Under "Quick Links" click "OHS Regulation." Then under "Updates & Decisions" click the appropriate link under "Pending Amendments." Finally, click "Approved amendments with explanatory notes."

Note on resources

The resources mentioned throughout this guide are all available at WorkSafeBC.com for online viewing or downloading. For posters and books, click "Publications." For slide shows, click "See a slide show."

What does it mean to work alone or in isolation?

According to the Regulation, to *work alone or in isolation* means “to work in circumstances where assistance would not be readily available to the worker, (a) in case of an emergency, or (b) in case the worker is injured or in ill health.”

Examples of working alone or in isolation

- Retail (convenience store) employees
- Taxi drivers
- Truck and delivery drivers
- Home care and social services employees
- By-law officers and security guards
- Forestry workers (doing high-hazard work with no regular interaction with other people)
- Warehouse workers in cold rooms or freezers
- Night cleaners and custodians in private and public buildings
- Night-shift employees

Working alone or in isolation does not include

- Independent realtors
- Owner-operators of trucks

Do you have employees who work alone or in isolation?

If the answer is “yes,” you must:

- Identify hazards and tell workers about them
- Eliminate or minimize the hazards by using engineering and/or administrative controls
- Develop and implement a written procedure for checking on the well-being of your workers (a person-check procedure)
- Train workers in the person-check procedure
- Review written procedures at least annually, or more frequently if there is a change in work arrangements or the procedures are not effective

In the Regulation:

See sections 4.20.1–4.22 and 4.23



Resource

Your Retail Business Series
Safety Tip 1: Working Alone
(StartSafe poster)

Describes basic safe work practices for that employers can implement and employees can follow when working alone.



Resource

Your Retail Business Series
Safety Tip 2: Dealing with Shoplifters
(StartSafe poster)

Describes safe work practices for preventing shoplifting and dealing with it if it does occur.

What are *late night hours* and *late night retail premises*?

Late night hours means any time between the hours of 10:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. *Late night retail premises* means a retail location that is open to the public for late night hours, including the following:

- A gas station or other retail fueling outlet
- A convenience store where goods are sold directly to consumers

Examples of late night retail premises

- Restaurants, coffee shops, and fast-food outlets
- Money Marts
- Private liquor stores
- Pool halls and bowling alleys
- Pubs and bars

Late night retail premises do not include

- Taxi cabs or limousines
- Toll booths
- Hotel check-in desks
- Street vendors (food or merchandise)

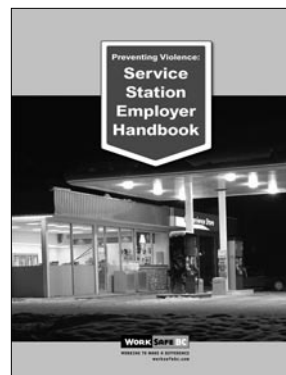
Do you have employees who work late night hours at a gas station or retail store?

If the answer is “yes,” you must:

- Follow the general requirements previously described in “Do you have employees who work alone or in isolation?”
- Develop and implement a written procedure for handling money safely, and train workers in this procedure
- Install a physical barrier or locked door between the worker and customers, **or** have at least two workers on shift during late night hours
- Require customers to prepay for fuel at all gas and other refueling stations (including full-service stations) at all times

In the Regulation:

See sections 4.22.1 and 4.22.2



Resource

Preventing Violence: Service Station Employer Handbook

Explains how to develop and implement a violence prevention program for a gas station.

How to identify hazards and assess risks

If you have an employee who is working alone or in isolation, it's your responsibility as an employer to tell the employee about any hazards in the workplace. This means you will need to identify hazards and assess the risks associated with them.

Identifying hazards

Potential hazards for retail businesses include the following:

- Robbery and assault
- Theft (shoplifting)
- Irrate or abusive customers or clients
- Unwelcome members of the public (loiterers)

Whenever there is direct interaction between employees and the public, there is a potential for violence to occur. According to the Regulation, if experience in a specific workplace or in similar workplaces indicates that a potential for violence exists (for example, in the retail industry), you are required to conduct a risk assessment.

You will also need to identify any other hazards that could result in a worker injury. This is important when you have employees working alone because a serious injury could result in them being unable to self rescue or call for help.

- Use your knowledge and experience of your business and work location to identify potential problems. Consider all aspects of your business.
- Consider previous incidents of violence in your workplace. How many incidents have there been and what happened? What about incidents at nearby businesses or previous work locations?
- Ask for input from employees about current problems, concerns, and possible solutions.

Assessing risks

Once you've identified hazards, you should assess the risks associated with them. Evaluate all the information and prioritize the areas that need improvement. What's the likelihood of a hazard resulting in an accident or injury? If an accident is likely or it could result in a serious injury, then you will need to develop written safe work procedures to deal with the hazard in question. If an accident is unlikely or it would only result in a minor injury, then there is no need to develop written procedures. Consider the following questions when assessing risks at your workplace:

Have previous incidents occurred at this location? Yes No

If yes, how many incidents occurred over what period of time? _____

Were police called? Yes No

Were weapons used? Yes No

Were there physical injuries? Yes No

If yes, how serious were the injuries? _____

Have verbal assaults occurred? Describe them. _____

Tips for eliminating or minimizing hazards

Once you've identified hazards, you need to find ways to control them. If possible, eliminate the hazard completely. If elimination is not practicable, try to minimize the hazard as much as possible.

Controlling common retail hazards

- Keep all outside areas well lit.
- Designate a well-lit parking spot close to the building for those who work alone after hours.
- Ensure that back doors are locked from the outside when not in use (but don't violate local fire codes).
- Keep doors and windows free of posters to ensure a clear line of sight.
- Lower shelving units so workers have a clear line of sight to all parts of your business.
- Install overhead mirrors so workers can see all parts of the store from the cash register area.
- Raise the area where your cash register is located. Keep counter-top displays to a minimum.
- Build the counter high and deep enough to provide some physical distance from threatening individuals.
- Install a panic or emergency alarm for workers.
- Post signs that state there is no cash or minimal cash less than \$20 on the premises, or that it is locked in a safe.
- Install security cameras and advertise their presence.
- Identify areas where workers can safely retreat and call for help.
- Regularly check on workers who are working alone. Consider providing workers with an automatic warning device that triggers if movement or signals are not detected within a set time.
- Organize specific work tasks that may place a worker at risk of injury from violence so those tasks will be completed when there is more than one employee working.

Sample guidelines for employee training

- Greet customers and make eye contact when they enter the store.
- Check that all the doors and windows are locked and that no one is in the washroom or storage room before one person is left to work alone.
- Do not resist if there is a threat of violence.



Resource

Preventing Violence for Retailers (slide show)

Mark Startup, president and CEO of Retail BC, explains basic safe work practices for preventing retail violence.

Sample safe work practices for handling money and making bank deposits

All retail businesses should have safe work procedures for handling money and making bank deposits, particularly if an employee is working alone. The following are some basic safe work practices.

Handling money

Employers should develop and employees should follow these guidelines for handling money in the store:

- Handle money at a location away from entrances and exits.
- Keep as little cash in the cash register as possible.
- Place large bills in a drop box, safe, or strongroom that is out of sight.

Employers can make the workplace safer by doing the following:

- Make sure sales counters are clearly visible from inside and outside the store.
- Fit counter safes with time-delay locks.

Making bank deposits

Employers should develop and employees should follow these guidelines for making bank deposits:

- Vary the time and route for making deposits.
- Avoid making bank deposits at night.
- Don't carry money in bags that make it obvious you're carrying cash or bags that are marked with the company logo.
- Make deposits with a co-worker, if possible. The co-worker should face away from the depository to keep an eye on other people in the area.

Sample training record for working alone

Date of training: _____

Employee name: _____

Position: _____

Duties: _____

Supervisor name: _____

Supervisor contact information: _____

Location of written work procedures: _____

The trainer must ensure that training includes the following procedures. Both the trainer and the employee should initial each item to indicate that it has been covered during training.

| Procedure | Initials (trainer) | Initials (employee) |
|--|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| Opening and closing the store | | |
| Handling money and making bank deposits | | |
| Taking out garbage | | |
| Person-check procedure (see sample procedure on page 8) | | |
| What to do if you or a co-worker is injured | | |
| Dealing with robberies | | |
| Dealing with shoplifting, dine and dash, or gas and dash | | |
| Dealing with irate or abusive customers | | |
| Emergency procedures | | |
| Other | | |

Sample procedure for regular person checks

This section describes procedures for checking on the well being of an employee working alone.

You will be contacted by: _____

They will contact you: in person by telephone other method _____

They will contact you: every 30 minutes every hour every 2 hours at end of shift

You will attempt to call the contact person within five minutes if you were not available at the predetermined person-check time.

If your contact person cannot reach you at one of these predetermined times, he or she will make another attempt within five minutes. If your contact person still cannot reach you after the second attempt, he or she will do the following:

1. Call the neighbouring store (if there is one) and have someone check on you.
2. Call the owner or manager of your store, and send someone to your work location if there are no neighbours.
3. If necessary, call 9-1-1 and request help at your location.

Emergency information

In case of an emergency (for example, fire, earthquake, flood, or a bomb threat) call the following person:

Contact name: _____

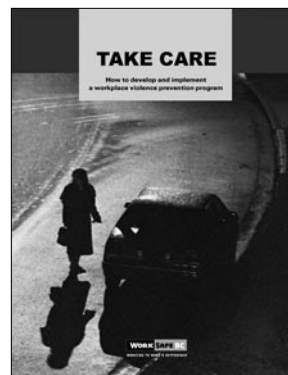
Contact phone number: _____



Resource

Preventing Violence, Robbery, and Theft: A Guide for Retail Owners, Managers, and Workers

Describes how to prevent violent incidents in the workplace and how to deal with incidents that do occur.



Resource

Take Care: How to Develop and Implement a Workplace Violence Prevention Program

Explains how to set up a violence prevention program to eliminate or minimize violence in your workplace.