

Departmental Advisory on Lone Working Practices

Department of Chemistry, OSU

Lone Working

Lone working represents a situation where a person has neither visual nor audible communication with someone who can assist or summon assistance in the event of an accident, illness or other emergencies. Lone working include those work activities undertaken during outside normal departmental working hours (late evening, night, weekends and holidays when the department is closed).

Lone working is common practice in research environments such as the Department of Chemistry, where it is often difficult to confine work activities to normal working hours. However, the Department recognizes the importance of ensuring that all lone working activities are managed appropriately. The safety of workers must always be carefully considered in these situations, since other coworkers are unlikely to be present to assist in an emergency. Such emergencies may arise due to fire, accidents, chemical spills, etc.

Low Risk Activities

Lone working activities should be restricted, where possible, to activities presenting a low risk even if control measures fail. It is acceptable for **low risk laboratory activities** to be performed by a lone worker provided the person performing the task is:

- competent (i.e. has the necessary experience and has received appropriate training)
- capable of dealing with any reasonably foreseeable accident or other emergency alone, without the assistance of colleagues

Higher Risk Activities

There are occasions when it is not appropriate for activities to be performed by lone workers unless special arrangements involving help or back up are introduced. **Special arrangements may be considered for all activities where it is judged that the risk cannot be adequately controlled by one person.** An informal risk assessment may be conducted for these higher risk lone working activities, including a description of arrangements needed to ensure the work can be carried out safely.

Responsibilities and Arrangements

It is the responsibility of the **faculty supervisor** of each group to identify and assess those activities requiring special arrangements to monitor the safety of lone workers and identifies those activities that must **not** be performed by lone workers.

All lone workers should be aware of the following as part of their safety training:

- the University's emergency contact number to summon help in an emergency or if they experience difficulties
- the accident, incident reporting procedure
- any restrictions on lone working activities within their group
- any specific precautions and arrangements considered necessary for some lone working activities

The faculty supervisor of a lone worker must ensure that an individual has received appropriate training and has the necessary experience before allowing lone working. It is good practice for those individuals working outside normal working hours to inform a friend or family member of their location, contact information and approximate time of return. Although lone workers cannot be subject to constant supervision, it is important that appropriate measures are selected to monitor the safety of individuals engaged in these higher risk activities.

This advisory written by M. Subramanian for and on behalf of the Safety Committee for the Department of Chemistry, Oregon State University, February 6, 2007.