



Health Care Health & Safety  
Association of Ontario

Health care workers in community and home services face special risks when working alone in patients' homes. Even in many health care facilities, staff working some shifts may find themselves on their own. This fact sheet focuses on some of the ways employers can protect these workers.

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### Legislative Requirement

In Ontario, as in most other Canadian provinces and territories, the law doesn't discuss working alone as a distinct issue. However, all employers, managers and supervisors must do "everything that is reasonable under the circumstances" (*Occupational Health & Safety Act*, Sec. 25) to ensure that their workers have a healthy and safe workplace. Ensuring that workers working alone are safe is within the scope of the intent of the law.

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### Tips for Working Alone

#### Have Written Policies

Ensure you have a written policy that commits your organization to safeguarding workers who work alone. The purpose is to protect employees in situations that could result in injury or health problems or expose them to possible criminal violence or other adverse conditions.

#### Consult the JHSC

Consult the JHSC or worker representative as well as the workers involved to:

- Identify all situations in which a worker must work alone.
- Assess the conditions under which that work takes place.
- Develop a plan tailored to the individual work situation, outlining steps to ensure as far as possible, the worker's safety.

#### Gather Appropriate Information

Make sure the plan includes:

- The name, address and location of the workplace.
- The nature of the work being done there.
- Identification of the possible risks to each worker who may be working alone.
- Control measures that will minimize each risk.
- Details of how workers can get help if they are in situations that could endanger their safety or in the event that they are injured.

### Choose Appropriate Control Measures

Possible control methods include:

- A “buddy” system.
- Regular personal checks by another person (visits/walkthroughs by the employer, supervisor, security guard, another worker, police).
- Periodic telephone contact.
- Mechanical or electronic surveillance (e.g., pagers, walkie-talkies).
- Central monitoring of staff working alone.

In some circumstances, it may be appropriate to use a work permit for working alone. This permit should indicate when (start and end dates), where and for whom the worker will be working and be signed by the supervisor and worker.

### Train Staff in Ways to Work Alone Safely

This includes:

- How to determine the risk of specific work situations on a daily basis.
- How to leave a risky situation safely.
- How to identify, prevent and manage aggressive behaviours.

It needs to be emphasized to all workers that their safety comes first.

When problems have occurred:

- Provide necessary counselling or help for staff.
- Investigate the incident thoroughly to identify ways to prevent future problems.
- Make the plan discussed above available to a provincial inspector upon request.

*This information is correct at the time of publication. It is intended to help supervisors, managers, employers and JHSC members become more aware of the possible safety implications for workers who work alone and the measures needed to make these work situations safer.*



## Fast Facts

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