

Working alone

OHS information for employers and workers

This resource provides information about Alberta's OHS Code requirements when a worker is working alone.

KEY INFORMATION

- “Working alone”, in the context of OHS legislation, refers to workers who are working by themselves at a site where assistance is not readily available if there is an injury, illness or emergency.
- Employers must fulfill several requirements in the OHS Code if they have workers who work alone.
 - Additional requirements apply to retail fuel and convenience store workers.

When is a worker working alone?

The working alone requirements in Part 28 of Alberta's OHS Code apply when both of the following conditions are met:

- Workers are working by themselves.
- Assistance is not readily available to the worker if there is an injury, illness or emergency.

WHAT DOES “READILY AVAILABLE” MEAN?

Three factors determine whether assistance is “readily available” in the event of an injury, illness or emergency:

- **Awareness:** Will other people capable of providing assistance be aware of the worker's needs?
- **Willingness:** Is it reasonable to expect that these other people will provide helpful assistance?
- **Timeliness:** Will assistance be provided within a reasonable period of time?

The assessment of whether assistance is readily available must consider the risk associated with the work (e.g. the type of work, the remoteness of the location, the hazards that are commonly present, etc). If workers face hazards that pose a high risk of serious injury, the requirement that assistance be “readily available” may actually need to be treated as “immediately available”.

Who works alone?

Many types of workers could be considered to be working alone under OHS legislation. Some examples include:

- **Workers who handle cash** (such as convenience store clerks, retail and food outlet workers, and taxi drivers).
- **Workers who travel to meet clients** (such as home care workers, social workers and bylaw enforcement officers).
- **Workers who do hazardous work but have no routine interaction with customers or the public** (such as workers in the logging and oil and gas industries).
- **Workers who travel alone but have no routine interaction with customers or the public** (such as truck drivers and business people who are on the road).
- **Workers who are at risk of a violent attack because their work site is out of public view** (such as security guards and custodians).

Employer requirements

Because working alone is considered a hazard, employers of workers who work alone must meet the hazard assessment and control requirements specified in Part 2 of the OHS Code. They must:

- **Conduct a hazard assessment** to identify existing or potential hazards arising from the conditions of the work. Employers must repeat this hazard assessment:
 - At reasonably practicable intervals to prevent unsafe and unhealthy working conditions.
 - When a work process or operation changes or a new work process is introduced.
 - Before significant additions or alterations are made to a work site.
- **Implement appropriate measures** to eliminate or control the hazards.

Affected workers must be involved in the hazard assessment and in the elimination or control of the hazards that are found.

If possible, you must eliminate the hazard of having workers work alone. Examples of how employers can do this include:

- Organizing work schedules so workers don't have to work by themselves without assistance being readily available.

- Rearranging the physical layout of the work site so workers can maintain contact with one another to ensure assistance can be provided.

However, if it is not reasonably practicable to eliminate the hazard of working alone, employers will need to implement controls to address the hazard.

For more details about how to do a hazard assessment and implement controls, see [Hazard Assessment and Control: a handbook for Alberta employers and workers](#).

Under Part 28 of the OHS Code, employers with a worker who works alone are also required to:

- **Provide the worker with an effective means of communication** with the employer or a person designated by the employer.
 - This must be a radio, a phone, or some other effective means of electronic communication.
- **Contact (or have the designate contact) the worker at regular intervals** appropriate to the hazards associated with the work.

If effective electronic communication is not practicable at the work site, the employer or designate must visit the worker, or the worker must contact the employer or designate at intervals appropriate to the nature of the hazard associated with the work.

VIDEO SURVEILLANCE CAMERAS

Maintaining contact with workers can potentially be achieved through the use of video surveillance cameras. The employer's hazard assessment should assess whether such a system would enable effective communication and regular contact by the employer with workers.

Special requirements for retail fuel and convenience store workers

In addition to the controls required by the employer's hazard assessment and Part 28 of the OHS Code, if a worker at a gas station, retail fuelling outlet, or convenience store is working alone, the employer must provide a personal emergency transmitter monitored by the employer or the employer's designate. The personal emergency transmitter must be on the worker at all times while working alone.

For more information, see [Workplace Violence Prevention Plan Employer Guide: For retail fuel and convenience stores](#).

Examples

The following examples describe typical workplace situations where someone is working alone. Can you tell whether the working alone requirements under OHS legislation apply?

Remember, the requirements apply when work is being conducted and assistance is not readily available if there is an injury, illness or emergency.

EXAMPLE 1

A worker is the only staff member on duty at a restaurant in a mall food court. Other workers are present at nearby restaurants in the food court.

Although the worker is working by themselves, the workers at the nearby food outlets could reasonably be expected to provide or call for assistance in case of an emergency. Thus, the working alone requirements of the OHS Code would not apply in this situation.

However, a lone worker at a restaurant along a highway would be considered to be "working alone" because the worker would have no way of getting assistance in an emergency.

EXAMPLE 2

A worker equipped with a mobile phone is working alone in an area where the worker cannot be seen or heard by anyone capable of offering assistance.

Even though the worker has a mobile phone, assistance is not considered to be "readily available", because the worker cannot be seen or heard by anyone capable of offering assistance (such as if the worker becomes unconscious). The working alone requirements apply in this case.

As such, the employer is required to conduct a hazard assessment to identify existing or potential hazards arising from the conditions and circumstances of the worker's work.

The employer must also establish an effective means of communication, including contact at appropriate intervals, between the worker and people capable of rendering or calling for assistance if needed.

Note that in this example, although the hazard assessment might show that the mobile phone is an effective means of communication, it could also potentially reveal that an alternative is needed (such as if cellular service in the area is poor or non-existent).

EXAMPLE 3

In the course of making deliveries, a worker is driving on Highway 2 between Calgary and Edmonton.

During daytime hours, other motorists would likely be able to provide or call for assistance in a timely manner if this worker needed help while driving on this major well-travelled highway. As such, the working alone requirements would not likely apply. However, if the worker were driving on this highway very late at night, working alone requirements could apply.

In addition, if the worker were driving on a remote road with very infrequent traffic, and it would be unreasonable to expect timely help from other motorists, then the working alone requirements would apply.

Steps employers can take

To help employers figure out what actions they can take to ensure the health and safety of their workers who are working alone, a list of some potential questions is provided at the end of this bulletin.

Employers can use this list as a guide in developing their own list of questions specific to their own work site, which can in turn help highlight issues that may need to be addressed before people can work alone safely.

Contact us

OHS Contact Centre

Anywhere in Alberta

- 1-866-415-8690

Edmonton and surrounding area

- 780-415-8690

Deaf or hard of hearing (TTY)

- 1-800-232-7215 (Alberta)
- 780-427-9999 (Edmonton)

Notify OHS of health and safety concerns

alberta.ca/file-complaint-online.aspx

Call the OHS Contact Centre if you have concerns that involve immediate danger to a person on a work site.

Report a workplace incident to OHS

alberta.ca/ohs-complaints-incidents.aspx

Website

alberta.ca/ohs

Get copies of the OHS Act, Regulation and Code

Alberta Queen's Printer

qp.gov.ab.ca

OHS

alberta.ca/ohs-act-regulation-code.aspx

For more information

Hazard Assessment and Control: a handbook for Alberta employers and workers (BP018)

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/bp018

Workplace Violence Prevention Plan Employer Guide: For retail fuel and convenience stores (BP031)

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/bp031

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Working Alone – Questions for Employers to Consider

The questions below are intended to help you, as an employer, identify what steps you might be able to take to ensure the safety of your workers who have to work alone.

Some of the questions only apply to certain specific industries or types of businesses, while others may apply more generally. In addition, this is not a complete list of all questions that could be asked. Instead, use this list as a guide to figure out what types of questions you might want to ask that are specific to your own work site. Regardless of these questions, you should also make sure to consult the OHS Code to ensure you are meeting OHS requirements for workers who are working alone.

Yes	No	N/A	Safe work policies and procedures
			Do you have policies that require meetings with clients or members of the public to be held at a safe location?
			Are workers required to file a travel plan whenever they have to travel to a remote location?
			Do you have a procedure in case a worker who is travelling alone doesn't arrive at their destination?
			Is there a procedure for workers to check in before and after any planned activities at a work site?
			Are workers instructed to take adequate rest breaks when they are travelling alone?
Yes	No	N/A	Security
			Do you have a security system at your work site, with signs prominently displayed to advertise its presence?
			Is the entrance to the work site in view of people who might pass by?
			Is there sufficient lighting to illuminate secluded areas?
			Do you limit the amount of cash kept on hand at the work site?
			Would protective shielding help protect workers?
Yes	No	N/A	Emergency readiness
			How can workers get timely assistance if needed?
			Are there first aiders and first aid kits at the work site?
			Are emergency response procedures current and readily available to workers?
			Do workers who have to drive to remote locations have emergency supplies in the vehicle in case they are stranded in extreme cold or inclement weather?
Yes	No	N/A	Equipment
			Are all motor vehicles, equipment, and machinery in good working condition?
			Is there a regular maintenance program for vehicles that are used to drive to remote locations?
			Does dangerous equipment and machinery at the work site feature an automatic-off switch to prevent continued operation?
Yes	No	N/A	Training
			Are all workers trained and competent to work alone safely?
			Are workers trained in how to respond to any wildlife that could threaten their safety?
			Are workers who have to attend remote locations trained on what to do if they are stranded in extreme cold or inclement weather?
			Are workers trained on what to do if there is a potentially violent situation?