



South Cumbria &
North Lancashire Branch

Joint meeting 16th May 2019



South Cumbria Occupational
Health & Safety Group

Topic: *Lone working - a solutions-based approach*

Speaker: Arup Majhi, Safety Health & Environmental Manager, Carlisle City Council

Venue: The Netherwood Hotel, Grange-over-Sands, Cumbria LA11 6ET

Jim Tongue, Chairman, *South Cumbria & North Lancashire IOSH Branch*, welcomed members to the Branch's joint May meeting with *SCOHS*. He then introduced Arup Majhi, a popular speaker, with responsibility for a wide range of *Carlisle City Council* lone workers.

Arup explained that he hoped to initiate a useful exchange of ideas by providing an overview of risk reduction "solutions" that *Carlisle City Council* have adopted to reduce the Lone Working risks to staff, Council Members and to contractors.

He began by defining lone workers as:

"...people who work alone for some or all of the time without direct or close supervision or support..."

He reminded members that this definition encompassed different types of lone working such as:

- *Working away from the main workplace - out in the community or in people's homes*
For example: estate agents, social workers, sales representatives, traffic wardens, taxi drivers, bus drivers, district nurses, journalists, inspectors etc...
- *Working in the workplace outside normal hours*
For example: cleaners, utilities repair or maintenance staff, security guards etc...
- *Working alone in a small workplace*
For example: people working in petrol stations, kiosks, or small shops etc...
- *Working alone in part of a communal building*
For example: receptionists, teachers and lecturers who are not working alongside other employees

Arup then explained that lone working is not illegal but that health and safety legislation and *HSE* guidance require employers to undertake *Lone Working Risk Assessments* that:

- Consider carefully, and then deal with, any health and safety risks for employees, contractors and self-employed people undertaking lone working tasks on their behalf.
- These responsibilities cannot be transferred to other persons

He said that it is also important that lone workers understand that they, as well as their employers, have responsibilities for themselves, and for others who may be affected by their work activities. He emphasised that lone workers needed well-structured training so that they understood why their employers needed to establish robust lone working procedures (including a back-up plan in case of emergency).

Arup explained that *Lone Working Risk Assessments* required the same basic approach of all workplace Risk Assessments including the need to assess:

- The **PEOPLE** lone workers may encounter - will they pose a threat?
- The **PLACE** where they will be lone working - is it a safe working area?
- The **TIME OF DAY** when the lone worker is working - will this increase potential risks?
- The **TASK** that they will be doing and its potential risks.
- The need for a robust **BACK-UP PLAN** with adequate assistance if things go wrong.

Arup said that many *Local Authorities*, such as *Carlisle City Council*, were increasingly sanctioning lone working due to financial constraints and changes in working practices. Their lone workers included: drivers, parking enforcement officers, facilities and maintenance officers, planning officers, benefits assessors, mobile cleaning officers, election officers, canvassers, environmental health officers, hostel home officers, late or early office staff, gardeners and street cleaners - each having some similar potential lone working hazards as well as job specific hazards.

He then summarised the most serious hazards that lone workers may face:

- Exposure to violence and aggression.
- Personal medical emergencies.
- Stress and/or mental injuries arising from meetings with clients/patients or from violent and aggressive behaviour by members of the public.

Next Arup initiated a discussion on ways of setting up robust lone working systems:

General lone worker management system requirements

- *Appropriate lone worker training* - with an interactive discussion of potential problems of specific tasks before allowing workers to undertake lone working.
- *Encourage lone workers to share medical information* – stress the importance of managers needing to know about medical conditions that could lead to a medical emergency so that appropriate emergency back-up measures can be put in place – requires trust between managers and workers.
- *Buddy and support systems* – buddies can be relatives or fellow workers and needs to include a system that will lead to specific emergency actions if the worker does not arrive home, or ‘report in’ by a previously agreed time.
- *Security systems* – ensure that lone workers have appropriate security protection such as: mobile phone app, personal safety device, CCTV, fobs, ID cards.
- *Robust Back-up plan in case of emergency* – with clear instructions for lone worker and for the person responsible for implementing the emergency procedures.
- *Regular system reviews* – including consultation with lone workers, even if there have been no reported incidents.

Management systems for building based lone workers

- At least two workers in the building/on the same floor (dependent on size of building).
- At least two workers start and finish work in the building at the same time with agreed procedures for ensuring that no-one is left alone in the building or ‘locked in’.
- Specific systems for work in remote areas of the building/site eg storage areas, plant rooms, workshops.

Management systems for all lone workers working away from their workplace

- Ensure relevant lone working information is left with line manager or responsible person including – time of visit, address(es) to be visited, nature of visit etc...
- Check journey details before leaving.
- Ensure mobile phone app and/or personal safety devices are in good working order.
- Set up a ‘check in’, ‘check out’ system with a responsible person if appropriate.

Advice for lone workers making home visits

- Eliminate lone worker home visits if possible.
- Before entering a building:
 - Assess the outside – if it looks unsuitable for a lone worker to enter, walk away and recommend alternative arrangements for a future site visit with a co-worker.
 - Ensure that personal safety alarm is readily accessible but not obvious.

- Conducting a home visit:
 - Avoid sitting in the kitchen or conducting an interview when a dog is present.
 - Do not get too comfortable.
 - Keep on the door side of the client so that it is easy to leave in an emergency.
 - Encourage clients to sit and then sit facing them during the interview.
 - Demeanour: adopt a calm and self-assured manner, be respectful and avoid confrontational body language.
 - Content: explain the limits of your authority to make decisions, give choices (if possible), and be patient.

Management systems for lone worker incidents

- Lone worker:
 - If it is a serious incident use personal alarm and/or activate back-up plan if possible.
 - Seek passer-by help if appropriate and possible.
 - Make a note of what you remember of the incident, however trivial, ASAP.
 - Provide line manager with a report about what happened ASAP.
- Responsible person
 - Activate 'back-up' plan if alerted by lone worker, or, if lone worker does not activate agreed 'check out' system by the agreed time.
 - Record relevant information ASAP.
 - Assist with incident review.
- Employer/manager
 - Initiate incident review.
 - Report as RIDDOR incident if necessary.
 - Ensure that appropriate lone worker support systems are in place especially for workers who have experienced violence and/or aggression.
 - Update task *Lone Working Risk Assessment* if necessary.

Arup's presentation raised several interesting discussion points that are not easy to resolve such as:

- Whether or not employees will be prepared to share medical information especially if they are afraid that providing accurate information might result in them losing their job.
- Problems associated with relying on mobile phone apps in areas where there is a poor mobile signal.
- Ensuring that the 'back-up' system will be activated if it has not been used for long periods of time (complacency syndrome).

Gary McAteer, Vice Chairman, *South Cumbria & North Lancashire IOSH Branch* thanked Arup for making such a worthwhile presentation and initiating some useful discussion. He then presented him with a small token of members' appreciation and encouraged attendees to network with one another and Arup, over tea or coffee and biscuits.

Lone working information web sites recommended by Arup:

Suzie Lamplugh Trust web site: www.suzylamplugh.org

HSE web friendly leaflet working alone: www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg73.pdf

Other HSE web site links:

Controlling risk at work: lone working: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/workers/lone.htm>

Lone working: risk of violence: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/violence/loneworkers.htm>

Violence case studies by sector: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/violence/experience.htm>

Key lone working violence considerations: <http://www.hse.gov.uk/violence/conclusions.htm>