

OCCUPATIONAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL SAFETY & HEALTH OPERATIONAL PROCEDURE

Subject: Working Alone or in Isolation

Effective Date: May 2009 (Version 1) **Supercedes:** New

Review Date: 3 years or legislation or job changes

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1.0 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- 1.1 In keeping with the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority (WRHA) commitment to providing a safe and healthy workplace as noted in the WRHA 'Workplace Safety and Health' policy (20.10.080), the following Operational Procedure has been developed to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare of WRHA staff when working alone or in isolation.
 - 1.2 This operational procedure is also designed to ensure that when followed the minimum requirements of Manitoba Workplace Safety and Health legislation is complied with and where possible exceeded.
 - 1.3 As with all matters relating to the Safety and Health of workers the Workplace Safety and Health Committee should be consulted for their input.
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2.0 DEFINITIONS

- 2.1 **The Act:** The Workplace Safety and Health Act W210 of Manitoba.
- 2.2 **Committee:** Means a workplace (occupational) safety and health committee established under section 40 of the Workplace Safety and Health Act.
- 2.3 **Employer:**
 - 2.3.1 Every person who, by himself or his agent or representative employs or engages one or more workers,
 - 2.3.2 and The Crown and every agency of the government.
- 2.4 **Supervisor:** Means a person who has charge of a workplace or authority over a worker.
- 2.5 **Worker:**
 - 2.5.1 Any person who is employed by an employer to perform a service whether for gain or reward, or hope of gain or reward or not.
 - 2.5.2 Any person engaged by another person to perform services, whether under a contract of employment or not

- 2.5.3 Any person undergoing training or serving an apprenticeship at an education institution or at any other place.
- 2.6 **Director** – means the person administratively responsible for the department or unit. Director includes heads of departments.
- 2.7 **OESH** - means the Occupational and Environmental Safety and Health Unit
- 2.8 **Working Alone** – means the performance of any work function by a worker who:
- 2.8.1 Is the only worker for that employer at that workplace at any time
 - 2.8.2 Is not directly supervised by the employer, or another person designated as a supervisor by the employer, at any time.
- 2.9 **Working in Isolation** – means working in circumstances where assistance is not readily available in the event of injury, ill health or emergency.
- 2.10 **Workplace** – means any area or worksite where duties are performed. Can be off WRHA/facility/site/program property.
- 2.11 **Off-Site** – work situations that may put workers at risk include, but are not limited to, the following:
- 2.11.1 Driving alone in an isolated or infrequently traveled area.
 - 2.11.2 Isolated work with patients/resident/clients during examination and/or treatment which make the patient/resident/client nervous or agitated.
 - 2.11.3 Working alone in remote locations such as a client home, hospital, clinic or accident scenes, etc.
 - 2.11.4 Traveling to and from work meetings.
- 2.12 **On Site** – work situations that may put workers at risk include, but are not limited to, the following:
- 2.12.1 Working alone in remote locations such as tunnels, clinics, or buildings, etc.
 - 2.12.2 Working alone where there is the availability of drugs and other medicines, such as at a hospital, clinic, and pharmacy or in emergency response vehicles as the area may be more prone to break-ins, robbery or such actions.
 - 2.12.3 Working alone or in isolation where assistance is not readily available, where there is 24 hour access by the public, in a hospital or clinic, in isolation or during evening and night shifts when staffing is often reduced
 - 2.12.4 Working alone or in isolation where assistance is not readily available with patients/residents/client with a history of aggression or violence.
 - 2.12.5 Working alone or in isolation and performing a work function that presents high risk hazards such as:
 - 2.12.5.1 Entering a confined space
 - 2.12.5.2 Working with high energy materials, toxic gases, high voltage electrical systems, or moving equipment.
 - 2.12.5.3 Laboratory functions

3.0 OPERATIONAL PROCEDURE

- 3.1 Perform an assessment of the site/program/facility to determine which, if any employees work alone or in isolation using WRHA Job Hazard Analysis Form 1, Section D – Working Alone

- 3.2 Identify the risks arising from the conditions and circumstances of the worker's work using WRHA Job Hazard Analysis Form 1, Section D – Working Alone.
 - 3.3 Assess the risks as identified in 3.2 using WRHA Job Hazard Analysis Form 1, Section D – Working Alone.
 - 3.4 Develop and implement written safe work procedures to eliminate or reduce the identified risks to workers working alone or in isolation which could represent control methods to minimize risks, ways to get help in an emergency or a combination of both. They will include:
 - 3.4.1 The establishment of an effective communication system that consists of:
 - 3.4.1.1 Radio communication
 - 3.4.1.2 Telephone or cellular phone communication
 - 3.4.1.3 Any other means that provides effective communication given the risks involved.
 - 3.4.2 Any of the following
 - 3.4.2.1 A system of regular contact by the employer with the worker working alone or in isolation
 - 3.4.2.2 Limitations on or prohibitions of specified activities
 - 3.4.2.3 The establishment of training requirements
 - 3.5 Where applicable,
 - 3.5.1 provide emergency supplies for use in travelling or working under conditions of extreme cold or other inclement weather conditions.
 - 3.5.2 Ensure a personal first aid kit meeting the requirements of the regulation is provided to a worker who works alone and does not have ready access to a first aid kit required to be provided as per the regulation.
 - 3.6 Train workers in the safe work procedures.
 - 3.7 Ensure that workers comply with the safe work procedures.
 - 3.8 Post a copy of the safe work procedures in a conspicuous place at the workplace.
 - 3.9 Review and revise the procedures not less than every three years or sooner if circumstances at a workplace change in a way that poses a risk to the safety and health of a worker working alone or in isolation.
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4.0 RESPONSIBILITIES

4.1 Employer

- 4.1.1 Act in accordance with the objects and purposes of the Act by ensuring, so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety, health and welfare at work of all his workers, and complying with the Act and regulations.
- 4.1.2 Ensure that all his workers, and particularly his supervisors, foremen, chargehands or similar persons, are acquainted with any safety or health hazards which may be encountered by the workers in the course of their service, and that workers are familiar with the use of all devices or equipment provided for their protection

4.2 Facility/Program Executive Team

- 4.2.1 Assign responsibilities to staff within the facility/program to ensure the implementation of this operational procedure.
- 4.2.2 Ensure resources (information, training, tool, equipment and time) are available to provide / maintain 4.2.1
- 4.2.3 Support the Operational Procedure throughout the facility/program.

4.3 **Directors/Managers/Supervisors**

- 4.3.1 Ensure compliance with all aspects of the regulations. *The department director is responsible for ensuring that their area of responsibility complies with all aspects of the regulations and this operational procedure.*
- 4.3.2 Identify situations where workers work alone or in isolation either on site or off site.
- 4.3.3 Conduct a hazard assessment of the identified situation. This may include the job, the site and the patient/resident/client. ON or OFF SITE: When assigning a worker to conditions or circumstances where they will be working alone or in isolation at the place of employment, the employer shall assess the risk(s), taking into consideration the following:
 - 4.3.3.1 Client behaviour
 - 4.3.3.2 Location (unsafe area, isolation, poor lighting, unlit parking, unsafe building)
 - 4.3.3.3 Presence of dangerous items (weapons, vicious pets)
 - 4.3.3.4 Availability of emergency assistance
- 4.3.4 Eliminate or reduce the risk(s) by implementing hazard controls. All reasonably practicable steps will be taken to eliminate or reduce the risk(s) to workers arising from working alone or in isolation. Such steps may include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - 4.3.4.1 Implementation of a “buddy system” where arrangements are made for a second person to accompany the employee in a high-risk situation
 - 4.3.4.2 Arrangement to meet the client at an alternate safe location
 - 4.3.4.3 Use of security services
 - 4.3.4.4 Defer service until proper safety measures can be implemented
 - 4.3.4.5 Have a contingency plan for service provision in case of inclement weather, labour actions, etc.
 - 4.3.4.6 Train workers to be able to deal with unexpected circumstances
 - 4.3.4.7 Provide required safety equipment
- 4.3.5 Managers shall establish an effective means of communication. An effective communication plan for workers who are working alone or in isolation will be developed for each situation and shall include:
 - 4.3.5.1 Provision of an appropriate communication device (cell phone if no land-line accessible, personal protective devices, or other means, etc.)
 - 4.3.5.2 The phone number of a primary contact person
 - 4.3.5.3 Procedures for phoning a designated person prior to and after leaving the situation (before and after check-in procedures)
 - 4.3.5.4 Decision-making criteria for actions the worker is to take if the situation becomes unsafe
 - 4.3.5.5 Emergency procedures to track a worker’s whereabouts if unable to contact the worker or if the worker fails to check in

- 4.3.6 Establish written safe work procedures based on the above. See Operational Procedure – Safe Work Procedure.
- 4.3.7 Managers shall ensure workers are properly trained and competent to:
 - 4.3.7.1 Perform their job(s) safely
 - 4.3.7.2 Work alone safely
 - 4.3.7.3 Know and comply with safe working alone procedures
 - 4.3.7.4 Recognize potentially violent situations
 - 4.3.7.5 Make decisions about actions the worker is to take if the situation becomes unsafe
 - 4.3.7.6 Take appropriate action if the situation becomes unsafe i.e. back away/notify someone.
 - 4.3.7.7 Use a non-violent response to threatening situations
 - 4.3.7.8 Use communication devices appropriately
 - 4.3.7.9 Follow the employer's safe work procedures when meeting clients at their premises
 - 4.3.7.10 Workers who work in high-risk areas will receive additional training in assessment techniques.
- 4.3.8 Manager shall ensure that workers receive required safety and/or communication equipment.
- 4.3.9 Managers shall ensure that workers comply with working alone or in isolation safe work procedures.
- 4.4 **Worker**
 - 4.4.1 Report any occupational health and safety concerns to their supervisor.
 - 4.4.2 Participate in the identification of risks related to working alone or in isolation and in the development of safe work practices.
 - 4.4.3 Follow safe work practices and procedures.
- 4.5 **Department/Facility/Program Workplace Safety and Health Committees**
 - 4.5.1 Consult with the facility/site/program on the development and implementation of this operational procedure.
 - 4.5.2 Review and monitor the effectiveness of this operational procedure.
 - 4.5.3 Assist employer to identify risks arising from conditions and circumstances where workers are required to work alone
 - 4.5.4 Assist employer to develop accepted safe work procedures for working alone.
 - 4.5.5 Respond to workers' safety concerns.
- 4.6 **Occupational and Environmental Safety & Health**
 - 4.6.1 Consult with the facility/site/program on all aspects of this operational procedure.
 - 4.6.2 Assist the facility/program/site to in the assessment of the site/program/facility to determine which, if any employees work alone or in isolation.
 - 4.6.3 Assist the facility/program/site identify the risks arising from the conditions and circumstances of the worker's work.
 - 4.6.4 Assist the facility/program/site assess the risks identified in 4.6.2

- 4.6.5 Assist the facility/program/site develop and implement written safe work procedures to eliminate or reduce the identified risks to workers working alone or in isolation.
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5.0 TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

- 5.1 The training program must be workplace specific, effective and reviewed every three years or when changes which may affect the procedure are introduced in the workplace.
- 5.2 Training must involve understanding of:
- 5.2.1 Working Alone or in Isolation
 - 5.2.2 Operational Procedure and applicable Safe Work Procedures
 - 5.2.3 Recognizing potentially unsafe situations
 - 5.2.4 Decision making if a situation becomes unsafe
 - 5.2.5 Action to take in an unsafe situation
 - 5.2.6 Use of non violent response
 - 5.2.7 Communication Devices (where applicable)
- 5.3 All training must be documented. Records must be kept as required by the Workplace Safety and Health Act and Regulations.
- 5.4 Retraining will be offered if necessary or upon request.
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REFERENCES:

Government of Manitoba. (2002). *The Workplace Safety and Health Act – W210*. Winnipeg: Queen's Printer. www.safemanitoba.com

Government of Manitoba. (2006). *The Workplace Safety and Health Regulation – 217/2006*. Winnipeg: Queen's Printer. www.safemanitoba.com

Winnipeg Regional Health Authority – Operational Procedure – Job Hazard Analysis

Winnipeg Regional Health Authority – Operational Procedure – Safe Work Procedures

Winnipeg Regional Health Authority – Operational Procedure – Working Alone or in Isolation for Community Health and Social Services