

## Safety Note 75

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# WORKING IN VERY LOW-OCCUPANCY BUILDINGS DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC



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## Summary

Due to government restrictions some staff will continue to undertake essential work in buildings with a very low occupancy. The following document provides guidance on reducing risk when working isolated from other people.

Existing risk assessments may have assumed buildings would be largely occupied and staffed with first aiders, fire wardens, etc. Security may be reduced in numbers and may not be able to provide its normal level of service. Consequently, Heads of Schools/Functions should try to minimise lone working while balancing that with the need to maintain social distancing. Where work is essential they should ensure those working alone are aware of the following.

No-one should work alone on University premises where such activities involve a significant risk of injury, ill-health, fire, personal security risk or other emergency.

## Duties of those lone working

Those working alone should ensure that they are aware of:

- What the fire alarm sounds like
- The evacuation routes
- The location of fire alarm call points
- How they will contact the Emergency Services & Security
- First aid arrangements

Individuals should inform their line manager if they have any medical or health problem or disability that could place them at additional risk when lone working or which would mean that they require assistance to evacuate. If they already have a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP) the line manager should consult with the staff member on whether it requires amendment. Contact H&S Services Fire Safety for advice should a PEEP be required [safety@reading.ac.uk](mailto:safety@reading.ac.uk) , telephone 0118 378 8888. Advice can also be sought from Occupational Health by line manager referral.

Lone workers should, if possible, always carry a mobile phone at all times and add the following numbers

- Security's non-emergency telephone number 0118 378 7799
- Security's emergency telephone number 0118 378 6300
- Maintenance Helpdesk 0118 378 7000

Anyone requiring the emergency services should contact them directly, then inform University Security so they can direct the emergency services when they arrive on campus.

## High risk work

"High risk work" is activities that by their nature could lead to personal injury or fire. Decisions on what activities constitute high risk work must be taken as part of the risk assessment process, led by Head of School/Function.

The minimum requirement for carrying out high risk work on University premises is that there must be at least one other person who can monitor the safety of the person doing the work - occasional visual checks are required, rather than relying on a person being able to call for help. Ideally high risk work will be conducted in pairs keeping a minimum distance of 2m apart. This is mandatory where immediate emergency assistance may be required.

## Sleeping

University non-residential premises are not designed for sleeping overnight and may not have the necessary fire precautions that are required for sleeping accommodation. Therefore, sleeping overnight in non-residential buildings is not permitted at any time.

## Registering presence in a building

Where possible, every person lone working should register their presence in the building by signing-in to a book kept in the main entrance/foyer area of the building. The book should detail:

- The date;
- The name of the person;
- Building location (i.e. room(s) number(s));
- Signing-in time;
- Anticipated departure time; and
- Signing-out time.

In current circumstances people should use their own pens and follow guidance on handwashing.

## Phone in and out procedures

In some areas it may not be practicable to set up signing-in and signing-out procedures. In such circumstances a phone-in/phone-out system should be implemented.

The person carrying out the work should phone a pre-arranged contact prior to commencing work quoting name, location and anticipated time of departure. Upon completion of the work a phone out call is made stating that the work has been completed safely and the worker has left the building. An action plan must be agreed with the contact in the event of the worker failing to phone at the agreed time.

It is good practice for anyone lone working to make this known to family/partners/friends at home, and to give them contact details for the University Security Control 0118 378 6300, and their line manager. If there is concern that the worker has failed to arrive home, contact should be made with Security Control so that the worker's location can be checked.

## Lifts

Staff should be aware that not all lifts can be routinely maintained at present and so should not be used unless this has been specifically agreed with Maintenance Services – contact Roberta

Windmill. People should not ride in goods lifts. Where a lift is used there may be a long delay before an engineer is available to release any lift entrapments.

## First aid

It may be necessary for the lone worker to relocate the building first aid kit or carry a first aid kit with them. Should a first aid kit be relocated, it must be returned to its original position when the work is completed.

It is recommended that Heads of Schools/Functions review their First Aid Needs Assessment and the task-specific risk assessment to consider whether specialist first aid training is required to support the work activity. If so, seek further advice from the local Health & Safety Co-ordinator, or if they are not available then contact Health & Safety Services.

## Contractors

Where it is necessary for contractors to carry out lone working, the person contracting the work on behalf of the University should instruct the contractor(s) not to work alone on high risk activities, and to sign-in and sign-out in the Building Occupants Register/use the same phone in/out process as UoR staff. They should be told of any residual risks within the building, the location(s) of emergency phone(s) and the action they should take in an emergency. Arrangements for the provision of first aid and supervision should be agreed with the UoR contracting manager.

## Further advice and information

Further advice can be obtained from Health and Safety Services – Tel 0118 378 8888