

Working Alone Procedure

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Office of the Chief Risk Officer

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Version Control Table

Version Number	Owner	Approver	Change Summary	Status
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1. Document Background

Purpose and scope of document

The Working Alone Procedure (hereafter known as “the procedure”) outlines the University of Ottawa (also known as “uOttawa”) procedure to be followed by any uOttawa personnel working alone on behalf of the University, within and outside uOttawa premises.

The procedure applies to uOttawa employees and is extended as a reference for stakeholders at uOttawa.

The procedure does not outline all the independent requirements and potential risks or challenges specific to any projects, workspaces, or situations, but rather is intended to serve as a framework to build a fit-for-purpose approach for managing the applicable risks. Specific workplaces, projects, and areas may have additional safety needs that should be accounted for, above and beyond the guidance provided within this procedure.

Terms and definitions

Refer to the [OHS Glossary](#) for the OHS terms and definitions that apply to the documents within the management system.

Additional terms and definitions specific to this procedure are listed below.

“Working alone” – a situation where a worker (or other applicable person) is working in isolation or cannot be seen or heard by another person or where assistance may not be immediately and readily available to the individual if an emergency, injury, or illness arises. The terms “working alone” and “working in isolation” may be used interchangeably.

Responsibilities

The responsibilities of supervisors and workers that apply to this procedure are detailed in the [General OHS Program Manual](#) and [Administrative Procedure 14-1](#) (Internal Responsibility Procedure for Health and Safety Issues).

In addition to the roles and responsibilities outlined in Procedure 14-1, additional responsibilities applicable to this procedure include:

Supervisors

- Approve or reject requests to work alone, including reviewing hazard identification and risk assessment (HIRA), training records, nature of work being performed, and proposed methods of communication and check-in/monitoring plan
- Remain available to be contacted, or designate an alternate contact, while the work is being performed alone, and if applicable, periodically observe or communicate with individuals working in isolation using pre-established means of communication
- Debrief the workers for whom they are responsible after the work activity is complete

Workers/Students

- Must seek approval from their supervisor to work alone before starting such work activities

- Must comply with the decision of their supervisor
- Take training provided and implement it
- Download and initialize the [SecurUO \(WorkAlone\)](#) application prior to starting work alone
- Use proper equipment and personal protective equipment, as required
- Check in with the designated contact (as applicable)
- Debrief their supervisor after completing the work activity

Reference documents

- [General OHS Program Manual](#)
- [Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment Procedure](#)

2. Procedure

Procedural Steps

The following procedural steps **must be followed** when planning or performing work that is executed alone:

1. Conduct hazard identification and risk assessment (HIRA)
2. Check in and monitor workers/students working alone
3. Debrief after completing the work

Additional steps may be required based on the project or work scope.

STEP 1 Conduct hazard identification and risk assessment (HIRA)

Key activities

- Conduct a hazard identification and risk assessment
- Identify the work hazards present, including reviewing existing hazard identification and risk assessments and standard procedures in place
- If the hazard(s) of the specific work have not been previously assessed by completing a HIRA or equipment/activity specific procedure (that includes the outcome of a HIRA), conduct a HIRA with reference to the [Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment Procedure](#)
- Define appropriate measures to effectively eliminate or mitigate identified hazards and risks using the appropriate methodology
- Identify requirements for appropriately working alone
- Have a supervisor review and approve the assessment, address any issues they identify, and request approval prior to starting work

Contextual Details

Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (HIRA)

Supervisors of projects or workspaces at uOttawa shall identify current and potential hazards and risks of working alone by applying the HIRA process outlined in the [Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment Procedure](#) through a preliminary qualitative survey. The survey shall consult workers and relevant committee(s) to identify additional hazards that may be present.

Based on the findings of the preliminary hazard survey, the hazards identified shall be addressed by:

1. Identifying an existing assessment of the work hazard(s), reviewing the HIRA and associated standard procedure to mitigate the hazard risks.
2. If an assessment or standard procedure does not exist already, a HIRA must be conducted based on the HIRA process outlined in the [Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment Procedure](#)

The assessment shall include an evaluation of the hazards of working alone, including but not limited to:

- Type of work being conducted alone (including the risk of workplace violence and risks of amplified hazards)
- Length of time that work will be done alone/in isolation
- Location of work being conducted alone
- Methods of communication while working along
- Characteristics of the individual working alone

Working alone is strongly discouraged. Nevertheless, the University recognizes that, in unique or special circumstances, individuals may need to work in isolation. Working alone is not in and of itself hazardous; however, working alone can increase the risk associated with particular hazards in the workplace. The risks associated with working alone will vary depending on the workplace, work location, type of work conducted, interactions with the public or other people, or the possible consequences of an emergency, accident, incident, injury, etc.

It is also important to consider high-hazard situations or high-risk activities that have the potential to incapacitate an individual. It is recommended that tasks in such situations and such activities be strictly forbidden when a worker is working in isolation. Some examples of high-risk hazards include those with the potential to cause head injury, loss of consciousness, burns, etc. Some examples of high-risk activities when working alone include:

- Handling money, prescription drugs, and valuable items
- Working off site (locations off uOttawa campus)
- Working with patients and other activities involving the risk of violence
- Working with heavy machinery with moving parts
- Working with highly hazardous materials

For additional information regarding the risk of workplace violence, refer to Appendix 1.

The requirements for working alone that are identified during the assessment shall be documented and communicated to the appropriate parties. Documentation shall meet the requirements outlined in the [General OHS Program Manual](#).

Individuals performing work alone must first present the completed HIRA to their supervisor to obtain approval for working alone. The supervisor must take reasonable and appropriate actions to ensure the worker's health and safety during the execution of the work. This includes supervisor verification that key activities have been completed and documented prior to working alone.

STEP 2 Check In and monitor workers/students working alone

Key activities

- Develop and implement a check-in/monitoring plan for any individual working alone
- Activate follow-up actions if an employee does not respond to check-in or during monitoring

Contextual Details

When working alone is unavoidable and the work presents inherent hazards, it is strongly recommended that a check-in/monitoring plan be implemented. The most common examples of situations at uOttawa where a check-in/monitoring activity should be implemented are:

- Working alone in a laboratory environment (e.g., on a weekend when nobody else is present)
- Working in an isolated area on campus
- Working in an isolated area off campus (e.g., group field work)

Check-in and monitoring require that an individual performing work in isolation communicate with a second individual to confirm they are not in danger. If an individual working in isolation fails to check in, the second individual must then take a predetermined action. The interval at which workers should check in will vary, depending on the hazards and risks associated with the work. For example:

- In situations of elevated risk due to the use of hazardous chemicals, a worker may be required to check in at least once every hour
- In situations of minimal risk, such as in an office setting requiring a key card for access, a worker may only need to check in at the beginning and end of their shift

Supervisors should consider the results of the risk assessment when determining the check-in/monitoring frequency.

Refer to Appendix 2 for a sample working alone check-in form.

Check-in Plan

If the working alone hazards and mitigation measures presented are appropriate and work is approved by the supervisor, a check-in/monitoring plan shall be created. The plan will set out and document:

- The designated contacts for check-in/monitoring activities or emergency situations
- The type of check-in/monitoring activity (periodically visiting the worker or regularly communicating with the worker via phone, email, etc.)
- The frequency or intervals of check-in/monitoring activities
- Follow-up actions if an employee does not respond to check-in/monitoring activities

If a worker has a previously reported medical condition(s) that may affect their ability to work alone, the supervisor should seek advice from Health and Wellness staff, who can help assess the situation professionally and confidentially.

STEP 3 Debrief after completing the work

Key activities

- Perform a debrief that includes supervisor and worker
- Report and investigate any incidents that occurred during the work completed alone (if applicable)

Contextual Details

Debrief Activities

After the work alone is completed, the worker and supervisor should carry out a debrief during which both parties will discuss any issues that may have arisen. During the debrief, the worker and supervisor should also:

- Review the risk assessment done prior to the work alone to determine if any changes are needed, especially if the work will be performed alone in future
- Review the check-in form (if applicable) and investigate any suspicious or troublesome events (e.g., no check-in for an extended period, missed check-in)
- Review and investigate any reported events (accident, incident, near miss, etc.)
- Take reasonable corrective actions
- Record key findings or conclusions

It is recommended that the supervisor maintain all relevant documentation, including risk assessments, check-in logs, etc.

3. Emergency Procedures

Individuals working alone on projects or in workspaces at uOttawa shall, at a minimum, refer to and follow the requirements and procedures defined in uOttawa's [Emergency plan/information](#) or regulatory standards, whichever is more stringent.

The University of Ottawa has implemented an Emergency Notification System (ENS) to alert individuals of any emergencies, in the form of an application called [SecurUO](#).

Appendix 1: Workplace Violence

Workplace violence

It is important to recognize that workplace violence can occur in any workplace setting. Members of the uOttawa community must understand what workplace violence entails and how to prevent it. This is particularly important for individuals working in isolation because their working conditions can increase their risk of workplace violence when compared to individuals working in group settings. Jobs involving lab work, security patrols, use of point-of-sale terminals, and teaching are other examples of positions where individuals are at higher risk. In addition, because the University of Ottawa is located in a downtown area, additional security measures should be implemented to ensure the safety of individuals working alone on campus.

Identifying Workplace Violence

The *Occupational Health and Safety Act* defines workplace violence as:

- The exercise of physical force by a person against a worker, in a workplace, that causes or could cause physical injury to the worker
- An attempt to exercise physical force against a worker, in a workplace, that could cause physical injury to the worker, or
- A statement or behavior that it is reasonable for a worker to interpret as a threat to exercise physical force against the worker, in a workplace, that could cause physical injury to the worker

Violence can take many forms, including:

- Robbery or assault
- Theft
- Aggression or hostility
- Sexual harassment

Indicators of Workplace Violence

It is important to be aware of signs or cues in the workplace that could be indicators of the potential for violent behavior. Key warning signs include a sudden change in the way an individual behaves, and concerning behaviours such as:

- Tension of the body, clenched fists and jaw
- Changes in voice (volume, speed, tone)
- Restless movements, pacing around
- Abusive and offensive language
- Violating the personal space of others
- Shaking, shortened breathing
- Absenteeism, disengagement or avoidance
- Anxiety or emotional distress
- History of violence and substance abuse

Avoiding Violent Encounters

Workers and supervisors, and particularly those who may work in isolation, should be aware of how to minimize the risks of encountering violent situations.

Tips for workers

- Complete violence prevention training
- Remain calm and try not to engage with an individual demonstrating aggressive behavior
- If possible, remove yourself from the situation
- Stay in contact with another team member or family member or friend, and inform them of what you're doing and where you're located. If this is not possible or no other staff members are on site, check in with Protection Services.
- Avoid restricted and enclosed spaces and areas with low lighting, especially in unfamiliar locations
- Follow established work protocols and ask for assistance if in doubt
- Avoid displaying valuables (expensive apparel, electronics, etc.) and refrain from bringing valuable items to the workplace
- Make use of the communication tools available (emergency phones, emergency or panic buttons, two-way radios, etc.)

Tips for supervisors

- Document visitors to the workplace using a sign-in/sign-out procedure
- Ensure that staff members are aware of violence prevention resources (Protection Services, violence prevention training, etc.)
- Promote a culture where staff are encouraged to report incidents or concerns of workplace violence
- Conduct regular check-ins with off-site staff and provide immediate assistance when necessary
- Implement and maintain on-site emergency and security measures (key or access card for entry, etc.)
- In the event of an incident of workplace violence, conduct follow-up and provide additional assistance following the investigation

Additional Resources

Protection Services

141 Louis-Pasteur
613-562-5411 (emergencies)
613-562-5499 (non-urgent)
protect@uOttawa.ca

Office of the Chief Risk Officer

265-139 Louis-Pasteur
sst-ohs@uOttawa.ca

Human Resources
550 Cumberland (019)
613-562-5832
infohr@uOttawa.ca

Human Rights Office
121-1 Stewart
613-562-2222
respect@uOttawa.ca

If you or someone you know is experiencing workplace violence, report the situation immediately to Protection Services (ext. 5411 or 613-562-5411) or call 911. Complete an [Accident, Incident, Occupational Disease or Near Miss Form](#) once it is possible to do so.

You can also refer to on the University's [Policy 66 – Violence Prevention](#) and complete the [violence prevention training course](#).

Appendix 2: Sample of a Working Alone Check-in Form

Note: the form below is only a sample; contact your supervisor for the most recent or preferred working alone check-in form.

Worker in isolation

Name:
Work location :
Phone at location :
Cell number :
Shift start :
Shift end :

Supervisor

Name :
Phone at location :
Cell number :

Worker at safe location (if other than supervisor)

Name :
Phone at location :
Cell number :

The University recommends that supervisors of workers who are working alone maintain a separate form for each working-alone activity

Check-in table

Scheduled Check-in Time	Actual Check-in Time	Notes

Alternate / emergency plans
