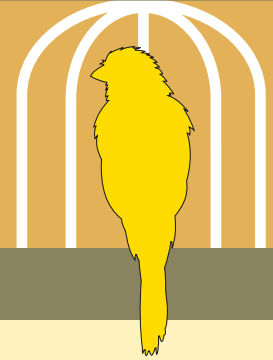


Working Alone

HEALTH AND SAFETY FACT SHEET

CUPE / Canadian Union
of Public Employees



What is working alone?

Many workers are placed at risk because they are required to work alone.

CUPE defines working alone to mean working at a worksite for any period of time as the only worker, where assistance is not readily available in the event of injury, ill health or emergency.

When working alone, a worker has no ability to call for help if incapacitated by an unexpected incident or emergency. When working alone, competent supervision and guidance is not present to ensure that appropriate controls are in place and safe procedures followed.

Many CUPE members are put at risk because employers have no policy or procedures that recognize and seek resolutions to the problem of working alone.

Why is working alone hazardous?

Many jobs require two people to be done safely. When a worker is alone in jobs where exposure to a serious hazard is part of the working conditions, there is a greater chance of serious injury. A worker can also be denied help or assistance and as a result, may suffer further injury or death. Hazards that make working alone particularly dangerous include tasks that put the worker at risk of

- Electrocutation
- Drowning
- Falling
- Traffic accidents
- Burns

- Violence
- Exposure to extreme heat or cold
- Working nights
- Using explosives
- Using pesticides
- Lifting heavy objects

What does the law say?

Employers are legally obligated to provide a healthy and safe workplace. As of January 2014, Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Quebec, Saskatchewan, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Prince Edward Island all have specific legislation in the occupational health and safety acts that deals with working alone. Though the federal jurisdiction, Ontario, and Nova Scotia don't have specific provincial legislation, government policies and procedures are widely understood to mean that working alone is a hazard to be protected against under the general duty clause.

Please check your provincial health and safety act and regulations for specific legislative requirements in your province.

What should you do about working alone?

The first step is to identify tasks that require workers to work alone. To identify these tasks, members can use the survey in the *CUPE Working Alone Guidelines*, which can be ordered online at cupe.ca/health-and-safety. It is preferable to proceed with buy-in and cooperation from the employer, however if support is not forthcoming, locals should conduct the survey on their own. Once completed, the survey results can help pinpoint potential

problem jobs and act as a basis for recommendations to the joint health and safety committee or to the employer.

Recommendations can include:

- a) Developing or re-examining employer policies regarding working alone. The policy should list all tasks with inherent dangers that should never be conducted alone, and ensure sufficient staff are available to enforce the policy. The policy should also instruct members not to attempt to perform work identified as hazardous without the assistance of a second person.
- b) Developing written procedures covering dangerous work situations:
 - 1. What to do in an emergency
 - 2. How to get help
 - 3. Reporting accidents or near misses
 - 4. Using alarms and communication equipment
 - 5. Responsibilities of supervisors.
- c) Education and training requirements ensuring all workers fully understand the policy and procedures. The education and training must also ensure workers are fully trained to recognize and deal with the hazards they face in their work. Training must be offered to all new employees, and updates to training must be provided for all workers on a regular basis.

This fact sheet is part of a more detailed CUPE guideline on working alone. Order the full guideline online at cupe.ca/health-and-safety.

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FIND MORE RESOURCES: cupe.ca/health-and-safety

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