



Lone Working – Have You Considered The Risks?

A simple risk assessment could have saved the life of a gamekeeper according to a recent investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

A fatal accident inquiry heard that it took 52 hours for the gamekeeper to be reported missing and he was subsequently found dead, having had an accident on his quad bike. He suffered a fractured pelvis and internal bleeding caused by the quad bike he was using rolling on top of him. A search was only launched when the regular gamekeeper, who was at home, realised he had not heard the motorcycle pass his house as normal.

The inquiry heard that the gamekeeper might have survived his injuries if he could have summoned for help right away or if there had been some sort of 'buddy system' to highlight to others that he was missing.

Are You At Risk?

This case highlights the need for employers to assess the risks faced by lone workers in the countryside. A simple risk assessment would identify when and for how long individuals may be alone and have highlighted the need for adequate communication to be provided. Ensuring your staff have mobile phones may well be a perfectly adequate means of ensuring contact can be made, but in certain circumstances where isolation risks are higher, further measures may be needed, such as requiring notification of entering a high risk area or situation. A simple call back on a regular basis from another member of staff could be a sensible measure to ensure awareness of a person's well-being.

In the instance noted above, the Trustees of the estate were fined £3,000 after admitting a health and safety breach in connection with the death. They pleaded guilty to failing to provide means of communication or carrying out a risk assessment for a lone worker to report in at the end of the shift.

What Do I Need to Do?

All employers should carefully consider the risks to staff who may potentially work alone and should bear in mind that this may be a one-off or a regular occurrence. Often the isolated incidents are the ones that are overlooked by the employer, but these may well represent a higher risk due to the lack of precautionary measures.

The HSE has produced an advice publication INDG73 'Working Alone in Safety' which provides guidance on safe working arrangements for lone workers. This can be found <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg73.pdf>

Also see our 4Warned 27 from April 2006, which includes a simple flow diagram for the assessment of lone working.

If you require assistance in preparing or reviewing risk assessments for lone working or require further information please contact 4See Risk Management Limited on 01327 811822.