



ANTRIM BOROUGH COUNCIL GUIDANCE ON LONE WORKING



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Antrim Borough Council is committed to ensuring, so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety of its employees whilst at work. However, this is only achievable if all involved, including senior management, line management, and individual employees, work together to develop and implement safe working systems.

1.2 Whilst personal safety at work takes many forms, and applies to all workplaces and activities, the context of this appendix encompasses three specific issues:

- a. Lone working
- b. Work-related violence
- c. Personal safety

1.3 As a corporate document it attempts to address the primary elements of these three issues as they may apply to Antrim Borough Council. It is the responsibility of senior managers, line managers, and individual employees, to identify which elements apply to their respective work places and activities, to ensure that suitable and sufficient risk assessments are undertaken, and to ensure appropriate control measures are implemented.

1.4 The Antrim Borough Council Health, Safety and Well Being Advisor is available to advise and assist as required.

2.0 DEFINITIONS

Lone Working:

2.1 Whilst health and safety legislation provides no specific definition of lone working it can be described as “work that is specifically intended to be carried out by unaccompanied persons, without direct supervision or immediate access to another person for assistance”. Lone working does not generally apply to the likes of the first or last person at work (except those with specific opening/lock-up duties), or an individual going unaccompanied to a storeroom.

Work-Related Violence:

2.2 Work-related violence can be defined as “an incident in which an employee is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work”, and will normally only apply where the aggressor is a non-employee (Antrim Borough Council grievance and disciplinary procedures apply, as appropriate, to incidents between employees, or where an employee is the aggressor against a non-employee). Work-related violence can be physical or non-physical. Basic examples of each include:

<u>Physical</u>	<u>Non-physical</u>
a. Physical assault	f. Threats and threatening gestures
b. Pushing and shoving	g. Abusive phone calls, letters, e-mails
c. Damage to personal property	h. Verbal abuse
d. Kicking, biting, punching, spitting, etc.	i. Bullying/harassment
e. Unwanted physical contact	j. Insults, innuendo, ridicule, sarcasm

Personal Safety

2.3 For the purpose of this Code of Practice “Personal Safety” can be defined as “personal precautions taken to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the safety of the individual” Personal safety overlaps both lone working and work-related violence and, to some extent, also acts a catchment for issues not directly addressed by either. Most of the personal safety guidance can be applied equally to work and/or non-work situations.

3.0 LEGISLATION

3.1 There is no specific health and safety legislation addressing lone working, work-related violence, or personal safety. However, the following legislation applies to all three issues:

The Health and Safety at Work (NI) Order 1978

3.2 The Health and Safety at Work (NI) Order 1978 places general duties on both employers and employees, which are applicable to lone working, work-related violence and personal safety.

The three primary examples being:

- a. It shall be the duty of every employer to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all his employees
- b. Employers must supply adequate information, instruction, training and supervision to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of their employees
- c. Employees must take reasonable care for their own and others safety and must co-operate with employers so far as it is necessary to enable them to meet their own obligations.

Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (NI) 2000

3.3 The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (NI) 2000 require risk assessments to be undertaken. Any lone working, violence at work and/or personal safety issues must be taken into consideration when conducting such assessments and, where any significant concerns are identified, specific risk assessments should be undertaken

4.0 LONE WORKING

4.1 Where line managers identify lone worker issues then they must ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, their safety. This should be achieved by following three clear stages:

Risk Assessment

4.2 Where work activities are likely to be undertaken by a lone worker, or outside normal working hours, then they must be subject to a risk assessment. The significant findings of such must be recorded and relayed to the individuals concerned. Consideration should be given to:

- a. The remoteness or isolation of the workplace
- b. The duration of the task(s)
- c. Equipment, machinery and tools (including those being used, worked on, and/or moved)
- d. The presence of any hazardous substances.
- e. Communication facilities, procedures and problems.
- f. The potential for violence and/or criminal activity.
- g. The nature of any possible injuries.
- h. Whether personal health and fitness is an issue.
- i. Access and egress.
- j. Emergency procedures (including evacuation routes out of normal working hours).
- k. Assessing if it is a “one man” job (taking into account all of the above, and any other relevant factors, can one person safely undertake the activity?)

Control Measures

4.3 Measures must be designed and implemented to eliminate and/or minimise any significant risks identified, so far as is reasonably practicable. Such control Measures will often comprise a combination of approaches, and consideration should be given to the following:

- a. Can the need for lone working be eliminated (doubling up, changing shift patterns, etc.)
- b. Authorisation systems for lone working/out of hours working (including monitoring and permit to work procedures, etc.)

- c. Pre-inspection of work places to ensure emergency provisions are in place (escape routes, fire extinguishers, first aid equipment, etc.)
- d. Communications procedures including booking in and out, callback systems, alarm facilities, arrangements for periodic checks, and any equipment requirements such as radios, personal alerts, mobile phones, etc.
- e. Medicals (where personal health and fitness may be an issue)
- f. Safe systems of work (specific procedures and method statements).
- g. Information and training

Monitor and Review

4.4 Any lone working procedures and safe systems of work implemented must be subject to regular monitoring and reviewing to ensure effectiveness. This should take the form of both informal monitoring on a day-to-day basis, and more formally, via safety inspections.

4.5 Risk assessments must be reviewed at regular intervals (annually is the recommended minimum), and whenever there is any reason to suspect they are no longer valid.

4.6 Employees are responsible for adhering to procedures and should report any incidents or concerns relating to the safety and effectiveness of such procedures, and general working arrangements, to their respective line managers as soon as is practicable.

5.0 WORK-RELATED VIOLENCE

5.1 One risk associated with lone working is an increased susceptibility to work-related violence. However, many other Antrim Borough Council staff are potentially at risk from work-related violence, such as receptionists, enforcement officers, park workers, dog wardens, cleansing staff, etc. It must be stressed that work-related violence includes non-physical violence such as threats, harassment, intimidation, sectarianism, etc., as well as physical violence such as assault, and that groups of 2-3 employees can be equally at risk from work-related violence as the lone worker.

5.2 Where potential work-related violence is identified then the same three basic stages should be followed, though the contents take a slightly different form.

Risk Assessment

5.3 The primary aim of the work-related violence risk assessment is to identify if there is a problem. There are two main methods of doing this:

- a. Employee consultation
- b. Incident reporting

5.4 Analysis of the results of either and/or both should identify whether there is a potential problem.

Employee Consultation

5.5 Many employers may not perceive that they have work-related violence issues, or think that work-related violence is rare, but the employees' views may differ. The easiest way to find out is to ask them. This can be done informally via managers, supervisors and/or safety representatives, or can take the form of a short questionnaire. Ensure feedback is provided and any survey results are acknowledged.

Incident reporting

5.6 All work-related violence incidents must be reported to Line Managers, who must ensure they are reported to the Health, Safety and Well Being Advisor and Assistant Director of Human Resources using the work-related violence report form.

5.7 The Health, Safety and Well Being Advisor will classify and collate all such data, which will be included in monthly accident and incident statistics. This is essential in confirming those at risk, identifying trends, and assists in predicting potential future developments.

Analysis

5.8 Analysing staff feedback and incident report data should facilitate the identification of those at risk. Existing control measures must then be assessed for effectiveness and further control measures identified and implemented if and as required.

Control Measures

5.9 The emphasis must be firmly on preventative measures, and these will take three main forms:

- a. Job design.
- b. The workplace environment.
- c. Training.

5.10 However, consideration must also be given to post incident procedures where work-related violence has occurred.

Job design

5.11 Whilst operational needs and constraints will have a significant impact on job design, consideration should be given to whether there are procedural changes that can be introduced that would reduce the risk of work-related violence. Examples include:

- a. Eliminating lone workers by doubling up.
- b. Increasing staff levels at high-risk times.

- c. Altering shifts to avoid high-risk times.
- d. Eliminating or minimising the handling of cash, or other 'attractive' items.
- e. Allocating known 'difficult' customers to more experienced staff.
- f. Changing the way customers make enquiries or gain information.
- g. Systems for monitoring/communicating with personnel when away from the workplace (booking in and out boards, regular checks, telephone procedures, etc.)

The workplace environment

5.12 This centres on the physical aspects of the workplace. Examples include:

- a. Use of close circuit television (CCTV).
- b. Controlled access.
- c. Improving lighting in appropriate areas.
- d. Removing potential weapons from the workplace, including innocuous items such as plant pots.
- e. Employing, re-allocating, re-scheduling and/or re-positioning of security guards.
- f. Fitting protective screens (though these can also antagonise customers and should only be considered where the risk assessment justifies such).
- g. Providing panic buttons/alarms.
- h. Making waiting areas amenable: Comfortable chairs, pastel colours, scenic pictures, magazines to read, etc.
- i. Making sure washrooms are within a reasonable distance, sign posted and clean.

Staff Training

5.13 Training programmes need to ensure staff awareness of personal safety procedures and work-related violence reporting systems, relevant personnel must be made aware of risk assessment findings. In addition relevant staff must be trained in reducing the risk of a violent incident, coping with a violent incident, and to be aware of the likely aftermath of a violent incident in terms of their own reactions and that of others.

Post incident action and support

5.14 Individuals are the priority, where a physical assault has taken place; the primary concern must be first aid and/or hospital treatment as required. However, even where a physical assault has not occurred there is still potentially a need for support, and suitable procedures must be designed and put in place. Consideration should be made of the following:

- a. First line debriefing: Carried out as soon as practicable after the incident, normally by the immediate line manager or equivalent, with all or some of the following aims:
- b. To provide relevant individuals with the opportunity to talk through their experience.
- c. To establish details of the incident.
- d. To assess the effectiveness of existing policies, procedures, etc.
- e. To identify individuals who may need further support.

5.15 The primary aim is to re-establish a safe working environment as soon as is practicable.

- a. Available support: All employees involved in any such incidents should be advised of the availability of the Councils Employee Counselling/Welfare service which is Carecall Counselling Services (phone Carecall Free on 0800 389 5362), and of how to avail of such. Line managers, who are uncertain as to whether individuals may need further support, or as to how much support a particular incident may warrant, should contact the Employee Counsellor for advice and guidance. Please contact the Human Resources Section for more details.
- b. Professional debriefing and/or critical incident stress debriefing (CISD): Can only be provided by appropriately trained personnel, such as Carecall Counselling Services (phone Carecall Free on 0800 389 5362). This must be provided as soon as practicable after the incident to be effective.
- c. Time off work: Should be considered for significant incidents, with duration based on the seriousness of the incident and on the individual (different people will be affected to different degrees). GP's may make recommendations, but remember that individuals may also need time to see solicitors, insurers, etc.
- d. Legal assistance: In serious cases legal help/advice may be appropriate. Whilst the Council's Legal Services Department are not in a position to act on behalf of an employee, they may be available to provide initial advice via a management referral. Remember colleagues who may have been witnesses, or who could also have been affected
- e. General support: Ensure the workplace is sensitive to what has occurred, and that other employees react appropriately/support the victim.

- f. Feedback: Ensure the individual is kept apprised of any relevant developments, particularly with regards to actions initiated to prevent recurrence.

5.16 All work-related violence incidents must be reported through line management to the Health, Safety and Well Being Advisor, who will initiate formal investigations where applicable.

Monitor and Review

5.17 Work-related violence procedures and safe systems of work must be subject to regular monitoring and reviewing to ensure effectiveness. This should take the form of both informal monitoring on a day-to-day basis, and, more formally, via safety inspections.

5.18 Risk assessments must be reviewed at regular intervals (annually is the recommended minimum), and whenever there is any reason to suspect they are no longer valid.

5.19 Employees are responsible for adhering to procedures and should report any incidents or concerns relating to the safety and effectiveness of procedures, and general working arrangements, to their respective line managers as soon as is practicable.

6.0 PERSONAL SAFETY

6.1 Being in control and avoiding risky situations are the best forms of defence. Whilst no policy or procedure can guarantee the safety of every individual in every situation, there are numerous sensible precautions that can be taken to increase levels of personal safety, some of which are listed below.

6.2 These can be applied both at work and out of work; they also apply to lone worker safety and to reducing the risks of work-related violence. Individuals should conduct risk assessments by assessing personal procedures and activities, and identifying where safety issues exist.

6.3 Never assume that 'it won't happen to you'. Trust your instincts - if you feel scared or uneasy then act on it immediately. Your primary aim should be to get away to a place of safety if you feel threatened.

Interacting with Customers and the Public

6.4 Staff interacting with customers and the public should:

- Look confident - but not arrogant: Confident people are less likely to be attacked.
- Smile and make frequent eye contact: A pleasant attitude makes a difference.
- Be honest: Give reliable information, admit uncertainties, delays, etc., when they exist and don't hesitate to apologise if a mistake has been made.
- Be consistent and fair: All customers should be treated equally and fairly.
- Be efficient: Avoid keeping people waiting, if unavoidable keep them informed. Ensure that all customers are kept advised on how their individual issues are being addressed.

- Avoid giving out personal information - be wary of people asking personal questions.
- Establish a rapport with them.

Dealing with Aggressive People

6.4 Staff who find persons with whom they are dealing becoming aggressive should:

- Stay, or at least appear calm - breathe slowly.
- Be aware of your posture - try and appear relaxed, avoid folding your arms, hands on hips, pointing, or other body language that could be interpreted as aggressive.
- Avoid prolonged eye contact - do not try to 'out stare' them
- Keep your distance - avoid any physical contact.
- Speak slowly, avoid long sentences, and keep your tone calm but confident.
- Listen! The main problem may well be due to poor communication.
- Negotiate where possible. Consider suggesting going to see a colleague if applicable.
- Where applicable/practicable try to change the subject.
- Call your supervisor/line manager if situation is deteriorating.
- Report the incident if warranted.

Dealing with Abusive Phone Calls

6.5 When a phone call becomes abusive staff should:

- Advise the caller that it is Council policy not to prolong calls if abuse continues.
- Ask caller for name and telephone number and arrange to call back at an agreed time.
- Report incident if warranted

Meeting and Interviewing

6.6 Staff who are required to meet or interview should:

- Avoid meeting people alone where possible.
- Keep waiting times to a minimum, if there is a delay keep the visitor informed.
- Make sure that someone knows who and where you are meeting/interviewing and the expected duration of the meeting/interview make visitor aware that this information has been passed on.
- Try and select a room that is visible to others, i.e. with windows, glass panels, and that is well lit. If you cannot be seen in the room devise a checking system with a colleague.
- If you accompany a visitor to a room walk level with him/her, go in front when walking upstairs, and behind when walking downstairs.
- Avoid standing while the person is seated during the interview/meeting - it gives an impression of crowding or superiority.
- Avoid sitting directly opposite or at a higher level, which can be seen as confrontational.

- Site your chair nearest the door, do not 'corner' yourself - if possible use a room with two doors.
- Make sure the person is returned to a public area following the meeting/interview.

Visiting People at Home or at Other Premises

6.7 Staff whose job involves visiting homes or other premises should consider the following:

- Is it necessary to go to them? Can they not visit you on Council premises?
- Where possible make an appointment - confirm by letter/telephone
- Where possible check the persons history prior to the appointment
- Assess whether two people should go instead of one, or whether police support may be required (either physically or at least via notification)
- Record the appointment, including details of person being visited and likely duration of visit, in the office diary, schedule plus, etc., ensuring others know where this is kept
- Follow any relevant procedures for monitoring movements outside the office (white board listing, charged mobile phones with emergency phone numbers programmed in, phone checks, personal alarms, etc.)
- Wear appropriate clothing and footwear (suitable image whilst avoiding tight clothing, high heels etc., that could hinder movement if a "fast escape" were required)
- Do not take unnecessary bags, cases, etc.
- Conduct visit/appointment during normal working hours if possible
- If driving find a safe place to park (facing out of a cul-de-sac, near a light after dark, etc.) close to where you are visiting
- Ensure you have your staff ID and, if necessary, your appointment letter
- Assess the situation as you approach. If in doubt – get out.
- Check the name of the person and introduce yourself properly, clearly indicating where you're from and the nature of the visit/appointment. If person you are supposed to meet is not available then do not enter – arrange to call back.
- Do not enter if met with aggression at front door, or if person appears to be under the influence of drink, drugs or appears unstable.
- Try and conduct meeting at entrance or front of building/front room - always be aware of nearest escape route. Try and check how the door locks if you enter.
- Stay alert. Leave if there is a change of mood towards aggression or any sort of threat is sensed - trust your intuition. Do not respond to aggression with aggression – leave.
- If another person enters the room re-assess the situation. If you are uncomfortable the politely terminate the visit the visit and leave.
- Where possible avoid going from premises to somewhere else with a stranger. If unavoidable inform the office and/or a colleague of the changes, including details of the new destination, duration, etc.

Driving

6.8 The following considerations should be taken by all staff when driving either Council or private vehicles at work or out of working hours.

- Keep your vehicle serviced and check the tyres (including the spare), oil, petrol, etc., especially before a long journey.
- Lock all the car doors on entry.
- Carry a torch, and consider carrying some warm, waterproof and/or high visibility clothing in the boot
- Have enough fuel to complete your journey or fill up at a “known” service station. Consider carrying a spare can of fuel.
- Consider joining a national breakdown organisation
- Consider communications - ideally have a fully charged mobile phone, if not, at least have some change and/or a phonecard along with a list of emergency numbers.
- Plan your route in advance, have the necessary maps if applicable
- Keep doors locked and windows/sunroofs closed as far as possible - especially when in slow traffic, approaching traffic lights, junctions, etc.
- Keep bags, briefcases, mobile phones and other valuables out of sight
- Do not pick up hitchhikers, and avoid taking customers/other new contacts where possible
- If you see an incident, or someone tries to flag you down, don't stop without first thinking of your own safety.
- If approached when stopped, stay in your vehicle, keep the doors locked and engine running (if engine is off - start it), and only open the window enough to talk through
- If you think you are being followed try to alert other drivers by flashing your lights and sounding your horn, remain in, or drive to, the nearest built up area, and head for the nearest police station
- When parking select a spot, so far as is reasonably practicable, that will allow easy egress (don't “nosey park”, etc.), and is in a busy, well-lit place. Park as close to where you are visiting as possible. If parking in daylight consider what it will be like after dark.
- Always lock your car, even if only in a garage forecourt paying for petrol, and secure any valuables in the boot. Leave no ‘attractive’ items on display.
- Approach your car with your keys in your hand so as to avoid being distracted by having to search for them.
- Always quickly check the inside of your car before opening the door.
- Do not approach your car if you think it has been tampered with, go to a public place and call the police.

Travelling on Foot

6.9 When a pedestrian the following personal safety measures should be observed:

- Consider other means of getting to your destination e.g. Taxi.
- Always be alert and aware of your surroundings - walk confidently.
- As far as possible know where you are going - avoid taking shortcuts in unfamiliar areas
- Try and avoid walking alone at night.
- Keep to busy, well lit, streets as far as possible. Avoid alleys, subways, parks etc.

- Walk on the right hand footpath facing oncoming traffic.
- Conceal 'attractive' items such as mobile phones, and consider what jewellery (including watches) are on display.
- Avoid wearing personal radios/stereos - they reduce awareness and are attractive items.
- Don't carry excessive cash - carry wallets/purses securely (inside pockets, etc.)
- Consider your clothing - does it stand out? Can you run in it (high heels, etc.)?
- Be wary of stationary vehicles with the engines running and people sat in them.
- Ensure fastenings on any bags or cases are secure.
- Trust your instincts and avoid crowds or groups, which may feel threatening.
- Try and wait in a public well-lit area.

Using Public Transport

6.10 When using public transport:

- Have the correct change for the fare.
- Know where you are going and which stop you need to get off at.
- Avoid using buses and trains on your own at night where possible.
- Where you do have to wait for a bus at night stand in a well-lit place, preferably near other people, and, once on the bus, sit near the driver.
- If alone on a train at night move and sit near other people, avoid empty compartments and compartments that have no access to corridors or other parts of the train, and if uncomfortable either get off at the next stop or switch carriages.
- When getting off a bus or train late at night, or in an unfamiliar area, try and attach yourself to groups of people and walk purposefully towards your destination - better still, get someone to meet you.

WHEN USING TAXIS:

6.11 The following precautions should be observed when using taxis:

- Use a reputable/recommended taxi company, or hail a licensed cab.
- When possible book by phone - consider getting the drivers name and/or vehicle details.
- Confirm it is your taxi (Driver knows your name/destination).
- Do not get into a cab you haven't asked for.
- If possible share a cab with a friend - it's both safer and cheaper.
- Always sit in the back.
- Have the fare ready before you reach the destination so that you can pay quickly.
- If going home have your door key ready so that you can enter immediately.
- Ask the taxi driver to watch and ensure you enter your destination safely.

Monitor and Review

6.12 Take a few minutes every week or so to review your individual procedures and activities, to assess any potential personal safety implications, and to consider

possible precautions. Pay particular attention where significant changes occur, such as a change in procedure, a new task, a new area, etc.

- Do you set 'patterns' that make you an easy target i.e. always walk home by the same route at the same time past a poorly lit alleyway?
- Do you do your shopping at the same time/place every week?
- Do you check visitors ID before letting them in?
- Have you considered getting your friend and family to phone prior to calling at your home? This allows you to be more aware/guarded towards unannounced visitors.
- Would you be aware if you were being followed or watched?
- Have you considered installing an alarm, security lights and timer switched for lights?
- Considered how you would react to different scenarios (fight, flight or co-operate)?

7.0 SUMMARY

7.1 The topics addressed by this Code of Practice are varied and potentially complex i.e. risks to 'lone workers' can equally apply to pairs of workers, work-related violence can take many forms, and personal safety is subject to seasonal and environmental factors. It is difficult to provide general advice that will address individual scenarios and needs, therefore it is essential that individual line managers carry out risk assessments and implement control measures as required, and that individuals are aware of their own personal safety and employ basic precautions as appropriate.

7.2 The complexities and variations inherent in personal safety can make it difficult to determine which precautions should be applied at which times and under which circumstances. As a general guide remember the acronym '**SAFER**' which stands for:

S : Safety first and foremost - at all times

A : Assess the risk - before you start

F : Fear is a survival technique - trust your instincts

E : Environments matter - react to changes in risk

R : Report all incidents that leave you feeling threatened

7.3 Contact the Health, Safety and Well Being Advisor if you require further advice or guidance, arrange training or for assistance with risk assessments etc.

7.4 Contact details are: Telephone: 028 9446 3113 extension: 1390

E-mail: diane.irwin@antrim.gov.uk