



PROTECTING LONE WORKERS

Individuals whose employment requires them to work alone are more vulnerable than others, reports LORNA WEBLEY

THE RISING NUMBER of attacks and injuries suffered by lone workers is resulting in higher and more frequent compensation demands. Now, more than ever, it's important that employers make their staff feel safe and secure, wherever they are working.

In fact, for many employers it's now not just a moral obligation to protect and care for staff but a legal requirement.

Under the current Health and Safety at Work Act 1999, there is a need for UK companies to identify risk in the workplace and put measures in place to reduce or control them. The Health & Safety Executive (HSE) defines a lone worker as someone who "works by themselves without close or direct supervision".

It is estimated that around eight per cent of the UK working population – some 2.5 million people – work alone. With the introduction of the Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Act 2007, the legislation has put emphasis on companies to review their health and safety policy towards all workers.

In particular, the HSE makes special mention of the

need for procedures to monitor lone working staff to be implemented. Company directors can be held responsible for serious failings in their processes and procedures, with the potential for personal prosecution if a death in the workplace results.

The HSE estimates that it costs £17,000–£19,000 to investigate a physical assault. But it costs a lot less to prevent the assault in the first place.

Richard Fenton-Jones, managing director of G4S Secure Solutions (UK)'s Monitoring and Response division, says: "Managers have a duty of care to their employees and they are responsible for their health and safety at all times.

"Nowadays, many employees are provided with a mobile phone and expected to call the office in the event of an emergency. However, this is not a proactive approach to staff welfare and relies on the lone worker not being incapacitated and unable to raise the alarm. And, assuming their call is received, that someone will be able to locate the individual and provide a response."



Inherent risks

There have always been lone workers in certain industries – such as healthcare, security, utilities, education, social care, government and logistics – and there are several factors driving the demand for solitary employees.

The increase in the service sector, for example, has resulted in a flexible mobile workforce that can be distributed and directed to respond to specific needs. In the case of the NHS, a national initiative to treat patients in their own homes has resulted in an increase in district nurses and community care officers carrying out residential visits. Other factors include the use of technology and the need for cost-savings, both resulting in companies requiring fewer people to do the work.

In response to the duty of care legislation, G4S UK's Monitoring and Response division established a Lone Worker Protection Service earlier this year. A team of 26 people, based in its Alarm Receiving Centre in Belfast, Northern Ireland, are responsible for protecting over a thousand lone workers in the

public and private sector and that number is growing steadily.

Operating around the clock, G4S offers its customers a range of solutions – including the use of transmitting devices, communication technology and alarm monitoring equipment – all designed to support and enhance staff safety.

"There is a vast range of technology available on the market, offering varying levels of protection, functionality and suitability for each situation," explains Fenton-Jones. "G4S has selected a range of devices from mobile phones and ID card holders to wrist-based devices, including Identicom (see panel). The communication technology is predominantly GSM (mobile network) to allow alerts and audio communication."

He explains: "G4S also partners with several major mobile network providers and assists the client in selecting the most appropriate network coverage. Most devices also use GPS satellite technology to assist with positioning requests and can be sent via GPRS over a secured network.



"Whenever a red alert is triggered, all data, including audio and the operator's response, is recorded and reported back to the customer, and archived for use in any potential prosecution."

Successful prosecution

In less than a year, the G4S Lone Worker Protection Service has already been instrumental in the successful conviction of an armed attacker.

Fenton-Jones concludes: "The benefits our service offers are two-fold. Firstly, those people who work alone in potentially vulnerable situations have greater confidence to work in solitary conditions, and feel safe in the knowledge that a trained operator will listen and respond to emergencies if they arise.

"Secondly, companies are able to demonstrate a 'duty of care' towards the welfare of their staff, mitigating potential corporate manslaughter charges, reducing staff attrition due to stress or violence and, with the audio recording, improve the chances of successful convictions."

Lone working is not unique to the UK, of course.

There are reported to be one million lone workers in France, and 23 million lone workers in the US.

In Alberta, Canada, businesses are now required to regularly contact employees who are working alone. This new work-alone commitment came into effect in July 2009, aligning Alberta with British Columbia, which brought in a similar rule in February 2008.

Previously, employers had a choice: keep in touch with lone workers or give them a method, such as a mobile phone, two-way radio or an alarm, to signal for help. Now, they must do *both* based on the need to protect the employee.

The new law has already enabled a crown prosecutor to seek a tougher jail sentence for a drug-addict robber who targeted lone workers at convenience stores and off licences, threatening them with a knife, when he appeared at a Calgary courthouse in May this year,

Such legislation is likely to be introduced in other countries in the coming years, requiring a similar lone-worker protection response to that offered by G4S in the UK. ■

IDENTICOM PROTECTS POLYGRAPH EXAMINERS



NADAC is the largest privately owned polygraph company in the UK, with offices in London, Birmingham and Manchester. It also has an international presence in Europe, South Africa, US and Australia via its associate network.

It specialises in providing polygraph testing for the corporate sector, government and private individuals. An examiner will carry out tests to verify the truth or detect dishonesty in statements that are made. The nature of the work undertaken by examiners means they are often subject to threats during and following examinations.

NADAC has been involved in several high profile cases, including that of Michael Shields, the Liverpool football fan wrongly convicted of the attempted murder of a Bulgarian barman. He was sentenced to 10 years in prison in Bulgaria but Michael passed a polygraph in prison, which helped towards proving his innocence. He was later released and given a Royal Pardon.

Previously, Don Cargill, NADAC's managing director and chairman of the British and European Polygraph Association, and his business partner, Nadia Penner, often worked alone and had only a mobile phone for support.

G4S's Lone Worker Protection Service met with Don to identify the company's requirements, and recommended the Identicom i777 device (carried by his fellow director and polygraph examiner Nadia Penner, left), which allows individuals to raise an alert discreetly without increasing risk to themselves.

Its in-built GPS technology can also assist in locating individuals in an emergency situation, as well as capture audio evidence to assist with prosecutions.

Don says: "Polygraph testing can be highly dangerous work and, as an examiner, I never know when a situation may turn nasty. However, since carrying the G4S-monitored Identicom device, I feel a lot safer and more confident going into people's homes.

"I've only had to press the button once but as soon as I told my client that I was wearing an alarm, it helped to calm things down and no further assistance was needed."