

## UON Key Risk Area: KRA 2.4

### Working Alone or in Isolated Situations

#### 1. Purpose

To ensure all staff, students, contractors, conjoints and other members of the University of Newcastle (UON) community work in the safest possible manner and are aware of safe work practices when working alone or in isolated situations.

#### 2. Scope

This document applies to all Faculties, Divisions, and organisational units of the University of Newcastle and its controlled entities.

#### 3. Definitions

In the context of this document, the following definitions apply:

- **Leaders/Supervisors:** Any member of the University who is responsible for supervising staff and/or undergraduate or postgraduate students and/or for leading research projects.
- **Workers:** As defined in the NSW Work Health & Safety Act 2011, workers include employees, conjoints, students on work experience, contractors, sub-contractors and their employees. Staff, conjoints, students on work experience, and contractors may be referred to collectively as workers, or separately as staff, conjoints, students, or contractors.
- **Isolated Work:** Working where a person is unable to get immediate assistance from colleagues or other people. In some cases other people may be available on site but not in the immediate vicinity e.g. an RHD student working alone in a laboratory after hours with the UON Security Officers on patrol across the University. In other cases the worker could be in a remote location off site when there is no one around.

## **4. Responsibilities**

### **4.1 The Vice-Chancellor, University Executive Committee, and members of University Council**

- Exercise due diligence by ensuring adequate resources are in place so that the requirements of this procedure are met.

### **4.2 University Leaders/Supervisors**

- Ensure a risk assessment is conducted to identify possible hazards and risks for situations where workers are required to work alone or in isolated situations;
- Ensure Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) are developed for working alone or in isolated situations;
- Ensure workers who may be required to work alone or in isolated situations are identified and provided with information and training in the SOPs applicable to the work to ensure they have the skills and experience to work alone;
- Ensure appropriate means of communication are provided and ensure that communication is able to be maintained.

### **4.3 Health and Safety Team**

- Provide assistance to UON Leaders and Supervisors to identify situations where workers may be required to work alone or in isolated situations;
- Provide input to risk assessments when required and the development of appropriate SOPs;
- Assist with communicating the requirements for working alone and in isolated situations when required.

### **4.4 Workers**

- Ensure the SOPs for the work are followed;
- Never undertake work alone that requires more than one person;
- Maintain regular contact with the designated contact person when this is a requirement.

## **5. Procedure**

### **5.1 Identifying Work Alone or Isolated Work Situations**

All potential work situations where workers could be alone or in isolated situations will be identified with input from leaders, supervisors and the people doing the work.

When identifying these situations the following will be taken into consideration:

- The work will take place out of normal working hours e.g. on UON campuses in offices, laboratories, workshops, off site in other work locations;
- No one else will be working in the immediate area at the time;
- The location is remote and an individual or team are on their own, isolated from the assistance of others because of the time, location or nature of the work;

## **5.2 Risk Assessment**

When situations have been identified where work is conducted alone or in isolated situations a risk assessment will be conducted to determine the level of risk and to enable appropriate risk controls to be developed.

The following will be taken into consideration in consultation with the people who will be doing the work:

- The duration of the work and the hours involved taking into consideration how many hours the person has already worked in the previous 24, or days worked in the previous 7 to 28;
- Type of work e.g. handling hazardous substances or dangerous goods; using plant, tools and other equipment; work that is dangerous to perform alone such as entry into restricted areas or manual handling;
- The location of work e.g. office, laboratory, workshops, off site in other premises, off site in the field;
- The person's experience, capability and physical ability to work alone or in isolated situations;
- Existing risk controls and whether they can be applied;
- Access to food, beverages and break areas;
- Available means of communication;
- Available assistance;
- Travel arrangements e.g. travel home after working prolonged hours when fatigued; travel to remote off site and/or off road locations.

Refer to Attachment 1 for a Working Alone/Isolated Work Checklist which can be used to assist with a risk assessment.

## **5.3 Risk Controls**

Risk controls may include some or all of the following:

- Documented SOPs for all the tasks to be undertaken when working alone or in the isolated situation;
- Authorisation of workers who are competent to work alone with a register maintained of the authorised personnel. See Attachments 2 and 3 for examples of Assessments of Competency to Work Alone after Hours for Office and General Workspaces and Research Laboratories;
- Clear definition of tasks which can be undertaken in the circumstances, or which should definitely not be undertaken;
- Documented procedures for communicating with the person working alone or in isolation;
- Supply of an appropriate and reliable means of communication e.g. land line phone, mobile phone, two way radio or GPS device or satellite phone if working in a geographically remote location;
- Regular call-in arrangements for the person working alone or in isolation to report to their leader/supervisor or designated contact person;
- Arrangements for another person to physically visit the work area at regular intervals to make contact if possible e.g. UON Security Officers informed the person is working on site after hours and to visit the location every hour to make contact;
- Arrangements for access to food, beverages and break areas;
- Arrangements for safe travel home after prolonged hours when fatigue or availability of safe transport could be a consideration;
- Safe travel arrangements for remote off site work e.g. provision of suitable vehicles; off road driver training if required; additional food, water, first aid supplies and tools.

For more information on remote work and travel refer to KRA 1.3 Field Work and KRA 2.5 Travelling on University Business.

#### **5.4 Assessment of Training and Competency**

All leaders, supervisors and workers who are involved in managing or undertaking work alone or in isolated situations will receive instruction and training so they understand the requirements of this procedure. General training will include the following topics:

- Recognition of situations where work alone or in isolated areas is likely to occur;
- UON risk assessment procedures;
- SOPs for the work to be undertaken with particular reference to specific requirements for working alone or in isolated situations;

- Specific equipment and tools required for the work.

Laboratory areas have very specific requirements so each laboratory will need to determine what constitutes an expected level of competency to be able to allow staff and students to work alone. This can include developing a period of experience in which it would be reasonable to expect that staff and students had become proficient and fully aware of the safety issues and critical responses required in a number of likely scenarios, for example:

- Responses to fire alarms, freezer alarms, incubator alarms;
- Basic first aid responses to help another student or staff member;
- Familiarity with Security resources and contact numbers;
- Power failures, impacts on equipment breakdowns, contacting key supervisors;
- Safe performance of all key procedures, including full awareness of risk assessments and SOPs as appropriate.

Developing this level of competence may take 1-3 months for an office or general workplace environment and 3-6 months for a laboratory or workshop depending on the laboratory or workshop. Supervisors should evaluate staff and students by testing their responses to a number of relevant scenarios and appraising their capacity to respond and answer questions. See Attachment 2 and 3 for examples of forms that can be used to assess competency. Note that the possible time frames for assessing competency are noted on the forms.

## 6. References

[UON Health and Safety Framework](#)

[UON HSP 4.1 H&S Risk Management](#)

[UON KRA 1.3 Field Work](#)

[UON KRA 2.5 Travelling on University Business](#)

## 7. Attachments

1. Working Alone/Isolated Work Checklist
2. Assessment of Competency to Work Alone after Hours (Office and General Workspace)
3. Assessment of Competency to Work Alone after Hours (Research Laboratory)

## Document Control Table

<b>Work Alone or in Isolated Situations – KRA 2.4</b>					
<b>Date of first edition:</b>	30/6/15	<b>Date this review will take effect:</b>	N/A	<b>Date of next Review:</b>	30/6/18
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<b>Governing Legislation:</b>	NSW Work Health and Safety Act and Regulations 2011				
<b>Supporting documents &amp; forms of this procedure/guideline:</b>	UON H&S Management System Framework UON HSP 4.1 H&S Risk Management UON KRA 1.3 Field Work UON KRA 2.5 Travelling on University Business				
<b>Keywords:</b>	Health and Safety; H&S; working alone; isolation; risk assessment; risk control				
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## Attachment 1. Working Alone/Isolated Situations Checklist

<b>Faculty/Division:</b>	<b>Leader/Supervisor:</b>	
<b>Location:</b>	<b>Date:</b>	
<b>Risk Assessment Team:</b>		
<b>Name of Employee(s) Working Alone and Position:</b>		
<b>Description of Work Activities:</b>		
<p><b>General requirement:</b> If a worker is isolated from other persons because of the time, location or nature of the work then the leader/supervisor responsible for the worker and the work must ensure that:</p> <p>(a) there is an assessment of the hazards associated with the work; and</p> <p>(b) there is a means of communication available which will enable the employee to call for help in the event of an emergency; and</p> <p>(c) there is a procedure for regular contact to be made with the employee and the employee is trained in the procedure.</p>		
<b>Risk Factors – All NO answers will require risk controls</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>The Nature of the Tasks to be Carried Out</b>		
1. Is there adequate information and instruction for the person to be able to work alone safely e.g. SOPs?		
Comment:		
2. Have the hazards of the task, materials, plant, tools and equipment that may be used been assessed and controlled?		
Comment:		
3. Is there a process in place to assess whether fatigue is likely to increase risk (for example, with long hours using equipment or driving a vehicle)?		
Comment:		
4. Is there an effective system for checking that all equipment and tools are in good working order?		
Comment:		
5. Are there existing procedures for regular contact with the person who works alone?		
Comment:		
6. Have travel arrangements been considered e.g. return home after prolonged hours; travel to remote areas?		
Comment:		

<b>Risk Factors</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
7. Is there a way for emergency services to gain access to a person if an emergency arises e.g. working inside a locked building?		
Comment:		
<b>The Duration of the Tasks to be Carried Out</b>		
8. Will the person need to be alone for less than two hours to finish this job?		
Comment:		
9. Is it reasonable and safe for the person to be alone in view of the work to be done?		
Comment:		
10. Is there a process in place to consider the risk at certain times of day?		
Comment:		
<b>The Availability, Ease of Use and Reliability of Means of Communication</b>		
11. Does the person have access to a telephone, intercom or other form of voice communication?		
Comment:		
12. Are there other forms of communication available if voice communication is not possible?		
Comment:		
13. Will the other forms of communication work properly in all situations?		
Comment:		
14. Are there arrangements to cover a person when they are out of range of the communication system?		
Comment:		
<b>The Location of the Work</b>		
15. Have the risks of the normal work location been taken into account for the work alone to be conducted?		
Comment:		
16. Have the risks of a remote, separate location been taken into consideration?		
Comment:		
17. Have the risks associated with travel and transportation been considered e.g. off road travel; use of forklifts?		
Comment:		
18. Is first aid equipment available for immediate treatment?		
Comment:		
19. Is the level of first aid training appropriate for the any likely injuries that may occur?		
Comment:		



Risk Factors		YES	NO
<b>The Competencies and Characteristics of the Individuals involved in the Planned Work</b>			
20. Is the person able to contact someone in an emergency?			
Comment:			
21. Is the person's general behaviour and level of psychological maturity appropriate for working alone or isolated work?			
Comment:			
22. Is the person physically capable of completing all work activity alone?			
Comment:			
23. Is the person likely to make sound judgments about his or her own safety and cope in unexpected and stressful situations?			
Comment:			
24. Does the person have the required level of work experience?			
Comment:			
25. Has the person had training to prepare them for work alone and, where applicable, in remote locations? (e.g. first aid training, vehicle breakdowns procedures, radio communications systems)			
Comment:			
26. Have other factors been considered that may impact a person's ability to conduct the work safely?			
Comment:			
<b>Risk Control Plan: All risk control measures should follow the hierarchy of controls</b>			
Ref No:	Risk Factors	Risk Control Actions	
Assessor's Name		Signature	Date

## Attachment 2. Assessment of Competency to Work Alone Out of Hours – Office and General Workspace

<b>Faculty/School</b>			
<b>Office Area Name</b>		<b>Location ID</b>	
<b>Office Area Manager</b>			
<b>Applicant</b>	<b>Name:</b>  <b>Mobile:</b>  <b>Email:</b>		

Competency assessment of work outside normal working hours in the prescribed area. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This must be completed for registration as an approved staff/student to work outside normal working hours.</li> <li>This must be completed for application for key or card access outside normal working hours.</li> <li>NOTE: Developing this level of competence may take 1-3 months depending on the nature of the work and the staff/student's familiarity with the workplace.</li> </ul>	
The applicant has received appropriate induction and training in the specified location and has been assessed as competent in the following proficiencies:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enacting critical responses for key work areas, equipment and activities in your location</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can respond to fire alarms and power failures as appropriate for your area</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A knowledge of emergency procedures for out of hours operation             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Includes an appropriate working knowledge of the area to handle an emergency event in the absence of senior staff,</li> <li>– Includes familiarity with emergency protocols and strategies for contacting senior staff out of hours and security staff as appropriate,</li> <li>– Includes provision of emergency contact details for senior staff out of hours and security staff</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

**Supervisor Signature:**

**Date:**

## Attachment 3. Assessment of Competency to Work Alone after Hours – Research Laboratory

<b>Faculty/School</b>			
<b>Laboratory Name</b>		<b>Location ID</b>	
<b>Laboratory Manager</b>			
<b>Applicant</b>	<b>Name:</b>  <b>Mobile:</b>  <b>Email:</b>		
<p>Competency assessment of work outside normal working hours in the prescribed area.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This must be completed for registration as an approved staff/student to work outside normal working hours.</li> <li>This must be completed for application for key or card access outside normal working hours</li> <li>NOTE: Developing this level of competence may take 3-6 months depending on the laboratory</li> </ul>			
The applicant has received appropriate induction and training in the specified location and has been assessed as competent in the following proficiencies:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enacting critical responses for key work areas, equipment and activities in your location</li> </ul>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Basic first aid and decontamination procedures for critical areas as appropriate</li> </ul>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can respond to alarms as appropriate for your area such as fire alarms, equipment alarms, power failures and equipment malfunctions.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Includes appropriate training to clean up accidental spills and know when to call for help.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A knowledge of emergency procedures for out of hours operation               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Includes an appropriate working knowledge of the area to handle an emergency event in the absence of senior staff,</li> <li>– Includes familiarity with emergency protocols and strategies for contacting senior staff out of hours and security staff as appropriate,</li> <li>– Includes provision of emergency contact details for senior staff out of hours and security staff</li> </ul> </li> </ul>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appropriate training on equipment to avoid damage and spillage               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Includes an acceptable working knowledge of other surrounding equipment and facilities in the area so as to react appropriately should an alarm or mishap occur</li> </ul> </li> </ul>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acknowledgment that staff/students should not work alone in laboratory areas outside normal working hours.</li> </ul>			

**Supervisor Signature:**

**Date:**