



Housing Sector: Best practice guide to protecting your lone working staff

Introduction

Every employer has a duty of care to protect their employees from workplace risks. For those working alone in the housing and property industry, lone working has become commonplace, with workers regularly carrying out house viewings or client meetings alone and away from the office.

While working alone is usually safe, housing employees face potentially difficult situations on a regular basis as they enter client's homes alone, work late hours, carry out maintenance and deliver bad news such as evictions. Such environments mean that unfortunately, violence and aggression is common within the industry. With this in mind, a recent HSE study shows how the Industries with higher than average rates of stress, depression or anxiety are in Human Health and Social Work.

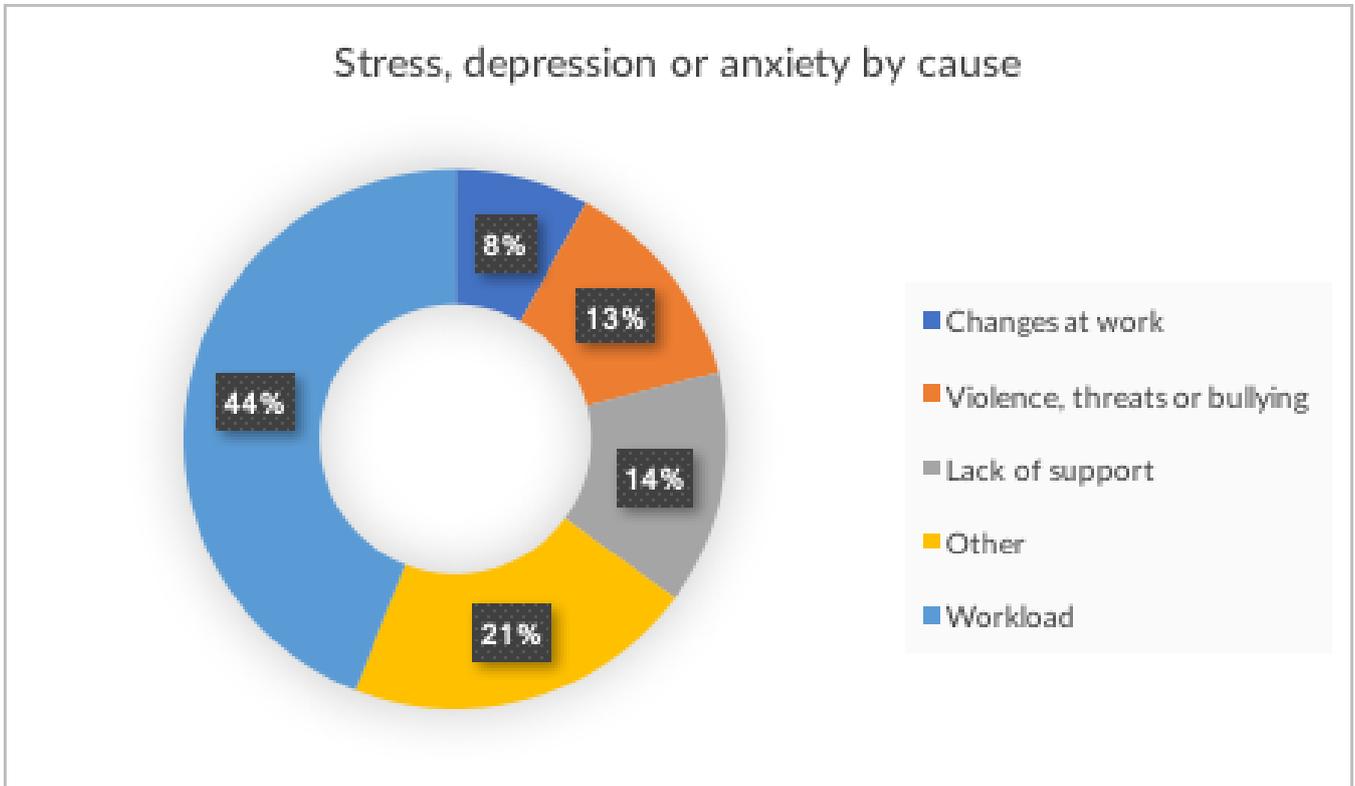
With new Sentencing Council guidelines for duty of care breaches in force since February 2016, it has never been more pertinent for employers to understand the risks such employees face on a daily basis and the steps they should be taking to reduce risk.

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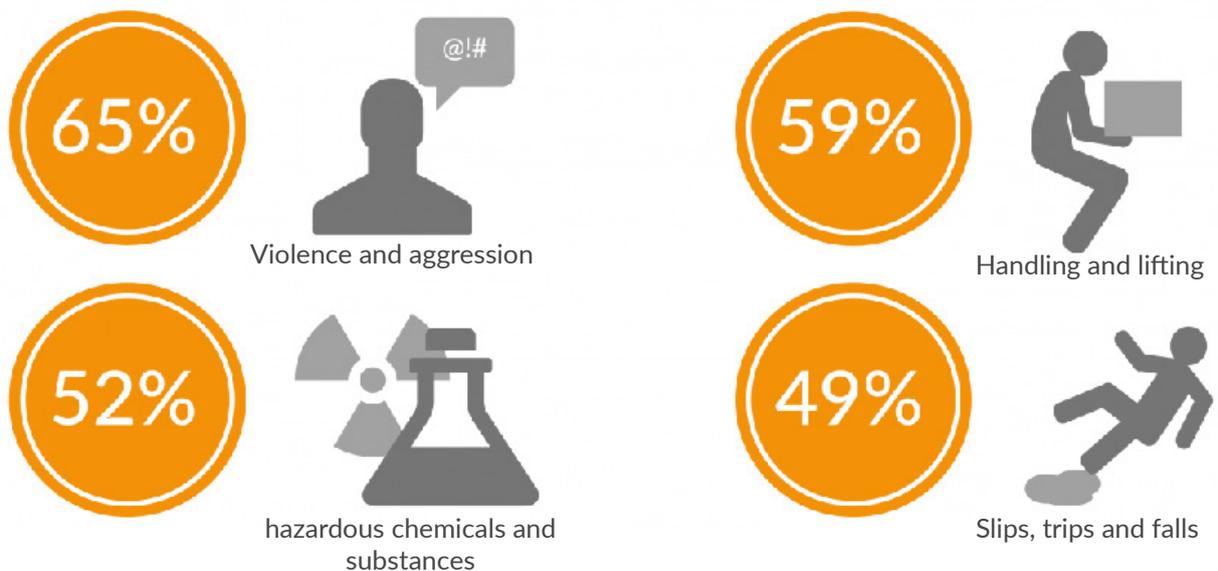
Risks in the Housing Sector

Working across a range of potentially dangerous environments and visiting a range of sites and properties with unpredictable residents, exposes housing workers to some of the top causes of workplace accidents and incidents.



*HSE (UK) 2017

Top self cited risk factors



*HSE (UK) 2015

Other risks to consider:

As well as these most common risks, Housing Sector workers are also exposed to other hazards which, if safety measures are not in place, can have detrimental consequences. For example;



Working remotely

Working in and around vacant properties, possesses environmental risks to Estate Agents, Property Developers and Surveyors, and is particularly dangerous when working alone. Inspecting premises can lead to the most common cause of workplace injury; slips, trips and falls. Working on ladders, especially if structures are unstable, presents risk of falls from height and suffocation or being crushed if there is a collapse.



Driving

Traveling on the road is one of the greatest and most uncontrollable risks workers around the world face each day. In fact, it is estimated that more than a quarter of all road traffic accidents involve someone who is at work at the time (HSE 2014). Travel risks are not always immediately considered, yet many Field Service workers regularly spend time traveling between sites or workplaces.



Human threat

When on the road and visiting properties Housing sector workers are exposed to verbal and physical abuse from strangers and residents. Incidents could worsen if substance abuse is a factor.



Working behind closed-doors

Aggression and violence is one of the top risks employees self-identified in the workplace (HSE 2016). Violence and aggression is common with client-facing roles such as those carried out by many Housing employees who are expected to visit clients and properties alone.



Lone working in the Housing Sector

Lone Working in the housing sector varies depending on the tasks and environment, which exposes workers to both environmental risk and human threat, whether it be inspecting beneath floorboards and on top of roofs, carrying out maintenance on a remote site or visiting residents at properties.

Working alone is commonplace across many sectors and with increasing pressures to enhance profits and productivity, and investment in automation and new technologies, the number of employees working alone grows year on year.

When working alone, the danger for Housing workers is further heightened, as support is less accessible in the case of an emergency. Due to the high-risk and varied nature of the hazards present within the sector, receiving immediate support or medical help could literally be the difference between a minor injury and a life-changing or even fatal one.

The Figures

156 Lone workers physically and verbally attacked every day in the UK alone

69% Reported being assaulted verbally or physically in the last year

10 Physical assaults ported by Housing workers every week

36% Of assaults go unreported

18% Of all assaults on Housing workers are physical



Real life examples

Beverly Carter: USA 2014

Realtor Beverly Carter was kidnapped and murdered while showing a house to a man she believed was a potential buyer. Her husband reported her missing when she failed to contact him following the appointment.

Five days later, Carter's body was found in a shallow grave by the roadside. The man responsible for her death, Arron M. Lewis, later admitted to the kidnapping, claiming he targeted Carter for being female and working alone.

Double shooting: UK 2013

A housing officer and bailiff were shot by a tenant during an eviction. The pair, along with a locksmith, entered the flat of Mr Stephenson when he emerged from the kitchen and began shooting. While the bailiff was shot in the flat, the housing officer was chased into the street before being shot in the knee.

Murder plot: USA 2012

Frank Yeager plotted to carry out his fantasy of raping and murdering a woman before taking his own life. He kept a list of 200 possible victims before deciding on a real estate agent. After months of planning, Yeager approached the estate agent in her office and asked to be shown around a secluded model home.

Fortunately, the estate agent noticed him acting strangely and instructed him to go to the property alone. He later returned and reported a leak at the property, asking her to come with him to take a look. When a male colleague entered the room, Yeager panicked and fled.

The agent later visited the house where she found the curtains had all been drawn, the lights were out and there was no leak. Yeager was reported to the police who searched his home and truck, finding a diary outlining his rape and murder plan along with rope, chains, guns and duct tape. He was convicted of attempted rape in 2013.

Suzy Lamplugh: UK 1986

Suzy Lamplugh is one of the most well-known missing person's cases in the UK. Estate agent, Lamplugh disappeared on 28th July 1986, after attending a house viewing with a man named as 'Mr Kipper' in her work diary. Her car was discovered later that evening close to the original viewing. Her purse was found inside the car but there was no trace of Lamplugh.

In 1994, Lamplugh was officially declared dead, presumed murdered, but her disappearance remains unsolved and the identity of the man she met with was never discovered.

Legal responsibility to lone workers

While there are few pieces of legislation that focus specifically on lone working rules, the duty of care remains the same as with other employees – to ensure, as far as is reasonably possible, the health, safety and welfare of all employees.

Under most lone working regulations around the world, the employer's basic responsibility includes;

- Conducting thorough lone worker risk assessments
- Producing a written health and safety policy and ensuring all employees understand it
- Taking steps to reduce or eliminate risk in order to create a safe working environment
- Providing information, instruction, lone worker training and supervision where appropriate
- Regularly reviewing and improving upon lone worker risk assessments and policies

Failure to comply with health and safety legislation can cost the business greatly both short and long term. Some of the costs associated with an unsafe workplace include;

- Covering or replacing staff
- Sick pay
- Lower levels of productivity
- Lost time due to stop work orders
- Time and costs spent investigating an accident
- Compensation
- Legal fines (reaching the millions)
- Loss of business reputation
- Loss of contracts/clients
- Damage to property or equipment
- Other legal costs
- Excess on any insurance claims



Tips to Keeping your Lone Workers Safe

Every employer has a legal responsibility to create a safe work environment for their employees. Operating within changing work environments including client homes and building sites, poses a range of challenges as hazards become harder to control. However, this also means that additional steps must be taken to safeguard lone working employees in the property industry.

- Send your employees in pairs when meeting with new clients, delivering bad news or discussing sensitive and possibly upsetting information
- If working in pairs is not viable, consider meeting clients at the office, or in a public space, so they are seen by multiple people and any signs of aggression can be identified early on
- Ensure there is always an up to date log of who your employees are meeting with and where
- Implement a check-in policy so that if something happens, someone will be alerted even if the employee is unable to raise the alarm
- Carry out risk assessments to identify any possible hazards or areas/clients where lone working may not be safe
- Provide training for your employees on conflict resolution and personal safety
- Consider implementing a lone worker monitoring system. As lone workers are not directly supervised, procedures should be put in place for monitoring their safety and regularly checking in to make sure they are ok
- Lone workers should also be equipped with a way to signal for help in an emergency. A panic button will allow them to send an alert at any time while man down alerts will detect a fall and automatically send an alert on the employees behalf

How can StaySafe protect your lone workers?

Our intuitive app provides a robust and effective way to monitor your lone workers and provide them with a way to signal for help in any situation.

The app monitors the location of lone workers in real-time and allows them to check-in safely once they have finished a lone working or travel session, or signal for help.

The cloud-based monitoring Hub provides an accurate location and up to date safety status so that you can keep an eye on all of your employees in one place.

Plus you will be notified of an alert only when you need to be – via SMS, email and optionally, a phone call.

StaySafe offers a wide range of features to ensure lone workers remain protected no matter what challenges they face. For those working within the housing industry, the discreet panic provides a way to signal for help without aggravating a tense situation, while the Duress PIN provides a way to send an alert when being forced to close the app.



Timed Sessions

Trigger location monitoring by starting a timed-session.



Session Check-in

Check-in at set intervals to confirm safety.



Panic

Send a panic at any time when in need of assistance.



Discreet Panic

Panic out of view using the phone's power button.



Duress PIN

Enter a false pin to 'end' a session/alert when confronted.



Non-Movement Alert

Automatic alerts when a period of non-movement is detected.



Low Signal Mode

The app will continue to operate without mobile data.



Low Battery Warning

Remind an employee to charge their device.



Pair with wearable technology

For quick and discreet check-ins and panic as well as fall detection.



Text & Email Notifications

Receive alert notifications via text and email.



Phone Call Notifications

Receive alerts over the phone through an automated message.



Two-way Audio

Listen in to verify an alert and communicate with the employee.



Keep an Audit Trail

Add notes on actions taken to resolve an alert.



Set Response Procedures

Save business guidelines in the Hub for monitors to refer to.



Reporting

Run and schedule session and alert reports.



SMS Broadcast

Communicate with an entire team from within the Hub.



Third Party Monitoring

Optional 24/7 monitoring and response on your behalf.

StaySafe in action

A number of companies operating within the Housing sector currently use StaySafe to monitor and protect their lone workers. Operating in different areas of the world and across varying job roles, user feedback is testament to the easy to use and flexible nature of the StaySafe solution.



“The safety of our lone workers is always our prime concern and we value StaySafe for its positive and encouraging solution which provides security and peace of mind to our lone workers. Not only have we found StaySafe easy to roll out, our users have also adapted quickly to using the app. The check-in sessions and hub really help us to meet our duty of care to our workers in the way we can efficiently monitor them in-house to know that they are safe at all times when travelling offsite and visiting properties. We no longer need to wait on calls from workers to notify us that they are safe, as we can now locate them instantly.”

- Paul Cutbill, Countrywide



“StaySafe has been very well received by our staff and has proven to be excellent value for money. Our employees already carry smartphones for work, so they have found the app easy and convenient to use. StaySafe appealed to us as the app has a huge range of features and offers all the functionality we need in one place. As we have multiple workers visiting many properties and client’s homes being able to see their location on a live map is imperative and the ability to prompt staff to check in safely at regular intervals means we get positive affirmation they are safe throughout the day”.

- HR Business Partner at Aspire, Clare Godbold



“We are impressed by the versatility of the StaySafe app and broad range of features which tackle the issues we were previously facing. Switching to the StaySafe solution has proven more reliable, more user friendly and much more efficient for lone workers and their managers. We now feel assured and wise to where our staff are which is of utmost importance as schedules can change last minute, and our staff are regularly in contact with members of the public that they have never met with before.

- Nerys Eldridge, Project Officer, Hafod Housing Association

Conclusion

Those working within the Housing and Property sector come against a range of risks on a daily basis. Working alone in such environments poses a new set of risks which require additional safety measures to be put in place.

While risk assessments and training allow businesses to comply to basic legal requirements, providing your employees with lone worker specific equipment and procedures will provide robust protection for your employees while allowing you as a business to fully meet your legal duty of care - protecting you from potentially devastating legal proceedings and financial costs.

StaySafe's lone worker solution is a cost effective and reliable way to provide a much needed layer of protection to your lone workers.

For more information, [visit our website](#) or [get in contact](#).



Easy to use



Flexible & customisable



Always available



Low cost & scalable