

Code of Practice No. 16 LONE WORKING

Butterfly Conservation has a responsibility for ensuring the health and safety of staff and volunteers whilst they are at work, including those occasions when they are working alone. We also have a duty of care to our contractors.

The immediate responsibility for the safety and health of a member of staff or volunteer working alone rests with line managers (or supervisors). This responsibility includes the assessment of risks arising before and during the work, and the organisation of the work to incorporate effective reporting and emergency procedures. Lone workers also have a responsibility to act in ways that do not jeopardise their own safety, or the safety of their colleagues.

Please note that lone working does not just involve work in remote areas; it can also take place where other persons are in close proximity but out of sight or contact. Conversely, the problems associated with lone working are also applicable to small groups working in remote locations.

There is no general prohibition on working alone. However, specific legal health and safety requirements stipulate that at least two people must be involved in certain work activities as part of a safe system of work. None of these activities are directly relevant to the fieldwork that staff or volunteers are normally engaged in, but if you require further information on this please contact the Health and Safety Officer.

There will be fieldwork activities where accompanied working is recommended because of the significant level of risk associated with the activity. Examples of relevance to Butterfly Conservation staff and volunteers include: working on or near cliffs and in quarries, or in hazardous environments such as mountains, marshes etc; boat work in sheltered waters and work near water (e.g. Catfield Fen). There should be no lone working with chainsaws and potentially dangerous complex tasks with mowers and brushcutters etc. Even environments that do not appear very hazardous can present unexpected natural dangers such as nest of wasp or other stinging insects, falling branches and tripping hazards with consequences made more difficult when the injured person is alone. It is recognised, however, that accompanied working will not always be achievable on these occasions, but that it should be planned for (with appropriate site and activity risk assessment), and realised as far as is practicable. It is accepted that there remain situations where staff and volunteers conventionally work alone.

The most significant risk arises from the potential for any accident to have more serious consequences due to difficulties in communication and obtaining emergency assistance. In some circumstance there may be some risk from aggressive behaviour and violence. Staff and volunteers, and especially women working alone may also be subject to increased risks from assault, and although actual incidents in the UK are comparatively few, the perception of risk may be significant.

Five main principles apply:

1. Ensure you understand and are capable of undertaking the work without assistance.
2. Make sure that you are fully aware of the risks and hazards to which you are exposed.
3. Know what to do in an emergency, or in an unforeseen/difficult situation.

4. Another person must know your whereabouts, the nature of your work, the planned time of return, and the action to be taken if you fail to return (see details of 'buddy system' below).
5. Assess the risks associated with particular sites and examine them using the risk assessment procedures outlined in Code of Practice 21.

Give consideration to the following precautions:

(These apply equally to the lone worker and their line manager /supervisor)

1. The need to plan the lone work properly, identify potential hazards, assess weather conditions and physical conditions in the area.
2. Take account of the capabilities and health of the lone worker.
3. Consider the experience of the lone worker in the work to be undertaken.
4. Consider suitable means of communication and first-aid kits.
5. The level of supervision required for the lone worker.

Recommended reporting procedures for field survey staff and volunteers undertaking lone working:

1. Use and follow the relevant standard risk assessment forms and note any additional specific risks identified at particular sites.
2. Information should be left with a 'buddy' (staff, volunteer, partner or other nominated person). Information should include:
 - the nature of the work;
 - work location(s);
 - the departure time and the estimated time of return.
3. As far as practicable, any changes to these details should be communicated to your 'buddy'.
4. Do not put yourself at risk. If you do not feel confident in a particular situation, do not proceed.

If a lone worker fails to return as agreed, the 'buddy card' explains the follow up action a 'buddy' should take. Remember to leave a 'buddy card' with your 'buddy'.

Buddy system

When working away from your normal place of work you should:

- Appoint another person (either at home or colleague) to be your buddy. If this is a regular buddy please let us know so we can update your personnel records and keep Senior Management Team (SMT) informed.
- Note your location on the Staff Movements sheet (for Regional staff this is done each week by e-mail)
- Provide your contact details, your buddy's name and your expected time of return (if known) as a comment on this sheet.
- Ensure your buddy holds full details of
 - your itinerary and location
 - your contact details
 - expected time of return
 - knows what to do in the event of your non-return
 - has a "Buddy Card" with office contact details

Buddy card

This card has the home telephone details of Senior Management Team (SMT) who all carry next of Kin and Buddy details. The Wales office has a modified card with the name of the Head of Conservation Wales in addition.

Footnote:

A **hazard** is something that can cause harm, eg electricity, chemicals, noise, stress etc.
A **risk** is the chance, high or low, that any **hazard** will actually cause somebody harm.