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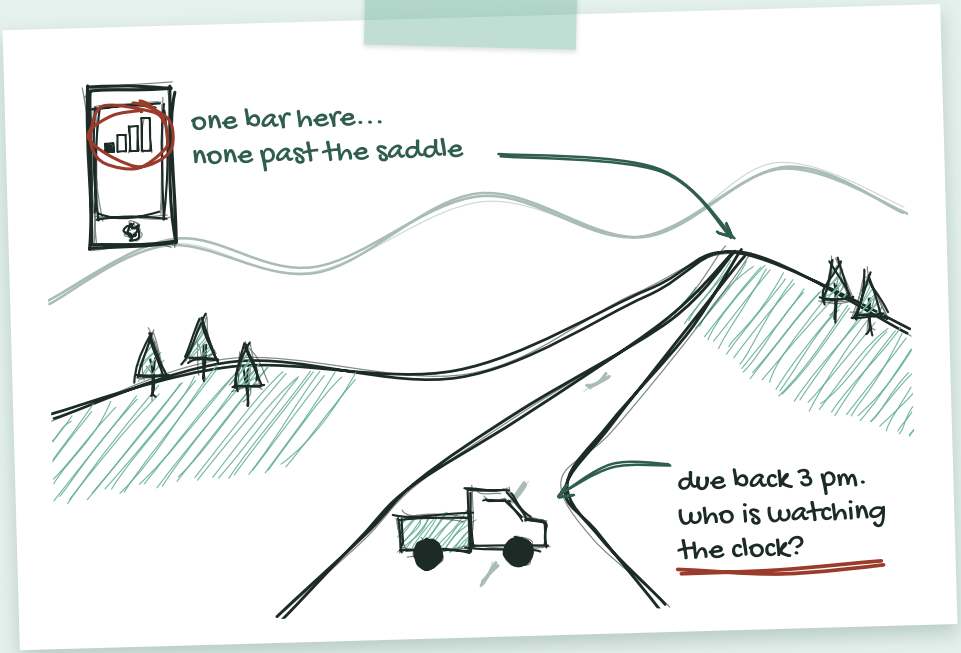
Field guide 14



Remote, isolated and lone work

Keeping in contact with people who work alone or far from help, and making sure help comes when something goes wrong.

For middle managers and senior leaders in Aotearoa New Zealand

Health and safety field guide 14
Edition 2.3
Published 27 October 2026

Down the gully

A possum trapper with more than 50 years' experience was working in a remote part of the country. His quad bike rolled down a steep gully.

He was badly hurt: seven broken ribs, torn back muscles and a badly damaged shoulder. Nobody else was there.

He survived. He credits three things: the crush protection on his bike, his helmet, and the personal locator beacon he carried, a small device that calls for rescue where phones don't work. WorkSafe told his story in August 2026, and added: "sadly many workers who are injured in remote locations are not so lucky."

What the story shows

Fifty years of skill didn't stop the roll. What saved him was planned before he left home: gear that protected him, and a way to call for help with no one in sight.

Why this guide starts here

WorkSafe says "delays in receiving assistance can increase the severity of accidents, emergencies, or threats of physical violence".

When you work alone, the clock starts the moment something goes wrong. Help starts only when someone notices. This guide is about closing that gap, for the farmer, the night-shift attendant and the care worker alike.

Experience didn't stop the roll. The beacon brought the help.

Sources WorkSafe, Remote and isolated work, safety alert (27 August 2026).

About this guide

Who it is for

Senior leaders who decide staffing levels, rosters and whether people work alone.

Middle managers who send people out, set up check-ins and respond when someone misses one.

How to use it

Read pages 2 to 8 at your own pace. Put the clock on page 11 into your own plan. Carry the pocket card on page 20. Write what you find on page 19. Key words are explained on page 21.

Field guide 1 explains the ideas behind the series. Field guide 7 covers vehicles and driving risk in more depth.

Finding your way

Before you start	2
The duty	4
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Reading these pages

A taped card with footprints: something to try at work


A small compass: the sentence or point after it is this guide's view


A pink box with a red edge: what changes from 1 April 2027


A dark box: this guide's lessons from a court case


A hatched edge with a compass: this guide's own view

A tinted box: the law, WorkSafe guidance or court facts


The foot strip: sources. Untinted tables, sketches and checklists are this guide's own


Priority dots (this guide's rating): one means watch, three means act today

In this guide, "the Act" means the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015, "s" means section and "ss" means sections. "The 2016 Regulations" means the Health and Safety at Work (General Risk and Workplace Management) Regulations 2016, and "reg" means regulation. A PCBU is a "person conducting a business or undertaking", usually an organisation. This guide gives general information. It is not legal advice. Written to the plain language standard in the Plain Language Act 2022 (s 5).

Who works alone or far from help

The law says people can be isolated by location, by time, or by the nature of the work. WorkSafe gives examples of each.

Isolated by	Examples from WorkSafe
Location	"Farmers working alone in remote locations." "Forestry workers in remote locations." "Roadside workers operating in areas with limited mobile coverage."
Time	"Construction workers working late after others have left the site." "Petrol station attendants working alone on night shift." Urgent repairs when a workplace is closed.
Nature of the work	"Care workers conducting solo home visits." "Teams working in restricted-access basements or plant rooms."

It's not just the back country

A worker alone in a city shop at night can be as isolated as a farmer in the hills. So can someone in a plant room with no signal.

Lone work and violence

WorkSafe says "lone workers – particularly those working late night shifts – may be at increased risk of confrontation or even violence". Page 12 covers this.

Sources the 2016 Regulations, reg 3; WorkSafe, Remote and isolated work (27 August 2026); Petrol station (May 2024).

What the law asks

There is a specific rule for remote or isolated work. First aid and emergency plans must also suit where people work.

Rule	What it asks of you
Manage the risk reg 21(1)	Manage risks to workers who do remote or isolated work, using the order of controls.
Keep in contact reg 21(2)	"Provide a system of work that includes effective communication with the worker."
Provide first aid reg 13	Provide adequate first aid equipment and trained people, or access to them. Consider where the work happens.
Plan for emergencies reg 14	Prepare an emergency plan that covers the response, notifying emergency services "at the earliest opportunity", and medical treatment. Test it and keep it working.
The main duty ss 30, 36	Keep workers safe so far as is reasonably practicable (what you can reasonably do, once you weigh up the risk, what you know, and the controls that exist, s 22).

What "effective" means

WorkSafe says: "A communication system that has gaps in coverage or cannot be used in an emergency is unlikely to be effective."

Sources the 2016 Regulations, regs 13, 14, 21; the Act, ss 30, 36; WorkSafe, General risk and workplace management, part 2, s 3.1.

Lone work in the new law

From 1 April 2027, remote or isolated work becomes a listed critical risk. A critical risk is a risk the law lists, or one likely to cause death or serious harm (new s 22A). (The Amendment Act became law on 9 July 2026.)

Remote or isolated work is on the list

New Schedule 1A lists "remote or isolated work (see regulation 21 of those regulations)", meaning the 2016 Regulations.

Small businesses too

Small PCBUs must manage critical risks (new s 25A). A small PCBU has fewer than 20 workers. If numbers go up and down, it is small if it expects fewer than 20 workers in at least 9 months of the financial year (new s 17(3) to (5)). So a family farm or a small shop counts. It is the size of the whole business that counts, not the size of one shift.

Reg 21 stays

Schedule 1A points to reg 21. The duty to keep effective contact still applies.

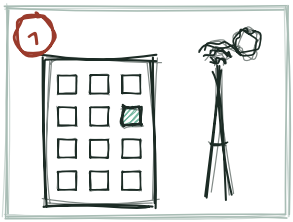
Getting ready

- [ ] List everyone who works alone, at night or out of coverage.
- [ ] Check the signal where they actually work, not at the depot.
- [ ] Run one missed check-in drill. Time how long help takes.
- [ ] Ask night staff what would help if a customer turned nasty.

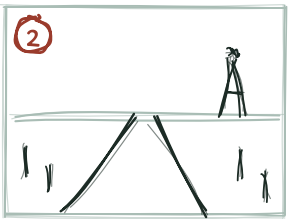
Sources the Health and Safety at Work Amendment Act 2026 (new ss 17(3) to (5), 22A, 25A and Schedule 1A); WorkSafe, Understanding the changes to health and safety law (July 2026); Am I a small or large PCBU? (September 2026).

Six places people work alone

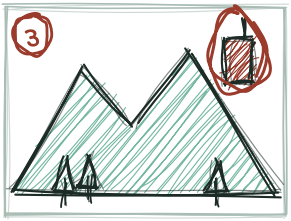
Lone work hides in plain sight. Some of it is far away. Some of it is in the back room after five.



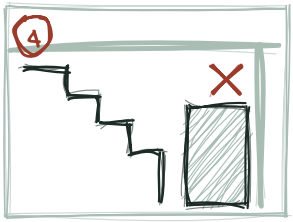
late on site:
who knows you're there?



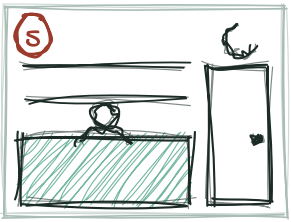
rural road: patchy.
phone + a second way



back country: no signal.
beacon or satellite



plant room: no signal.
check in first



shop at night: alone
with the public



home visit: new client.
check in after each one

The numbers match the table on the next page. Each place needs a different way to keep in contact.

Sources WorkSafe, Remote and isolated work (27 August 2026).

What to look for

	What it looks like	Why it matters, and what to do	Priority
1	Someone stays back after the others leave.	Nobody planned for them to be alone. Agree a check-out before the last person goes.	●●○
2	Patchy coverage on rural roads.	A phone that works in the yard may fail down the road. WorkSafe suggests "a secondary method of raising an alarm".	●●○
3	No coverage at all: bush, hill country, coast.	Carry a personal locator beacon or satellite device. Plan check-ins that don't rely on mobile coverage.	●●●
4	Plant rooms, basements and other restricted spaces.	Test the signal there before relying on it. Check in before going down, and again once out.	●●○
5	One person on a night shift, serving the public.	Late-night lone workers face a higher risk of confrontation or violence. See page 12.	●●●
6	Solo home visits.	WorkSafe suggests "risk profiling of clients". Check in after each visit.	●●○

Try it this week

Ask three people who work alone to show you their phone's signal where they actually work. Then ask what they would do if it showed nothing.

Sources WorkSafe, Remote and isolated work (2026); Violence at work: customer service areas (2017); Petrol station (2024).

Plan before people go

WorkSafe suggests questions to ask before anyone works alone. The first one can remove the risk.

- [ ] "Can the work be avoided or completed another way?"
- [ ] Is the task suitable for one person?
- [ ] "Is the worker competent, trained, and authorised to work unsupervised?"
- [ ] "Can a buddy system be used – working with someone else instead of alone?"

What WorkSafe says workers should do

- "Tell someone where they're going and when they expect to be back."
- "Carry reliable communication devices suitable for the location."
- "Have a secondary method of raising an alarm."
- "Carry suitable first aid supplies."

Tools that help

WorkSafe lists "radios, satellite phones, emergency alarms, personal locator beacons" and "scheduled welfare checks". It also suggests remote monitoring, such as CCTV or electronic systems, where it suits.

Match the tool to the place

A mobile phone is not a system where there is no coverage. Choose the device for the worst spot on the trip, not the best.

Sources WorkSafe, Remote and isolated work (27 August 2026).

Check-ins that work

WorkSafe describes workers who check in at set times, "with failure to check-in triggering the emergency response plan".

Part of the system	What good looks like
Before	The worker says where they are going, what they are doing and when they will check in.
During	Check-ins happen at set times. The gap between them matches the risk.
Missed contact	A named person starts the clock on page 11 as soon as a check-in is due.
After	The worker checks out when they are safely finished, or home.
Testing	Run a missed check-in drill. See how long help takes.

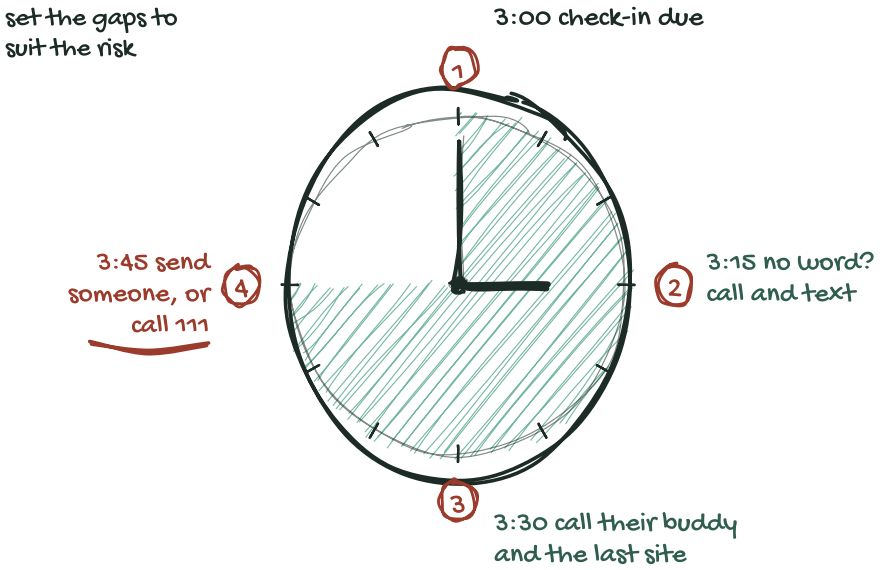
Confirmed, not assumed

WorkSafe says businesses need "a reliable check-in and check-out system". It should reflect "the level of risk", assign "responsibility for monitoring", and trigger "action if contact is missed". "Those arrangements must be confirmed—not assumed."

Sources WorkSafe, General risk and workplace management, part 2, s 3.1; media release, Lessons for forestry businesses after fatal tree felling incident (September 2026).

When a check-in is missed

Decide the times before anyone goes out, not while you wait. Here is one example for a worker due to check in at 3 pm.



Your emergency plan must cover notifying emergency services "at the earliest opportunity" (reg 14). Write your own times into it. Name who acts at each step, including nights and weekends.

The clock is for a missed check-in. A beacon alert, a duress alarm (a button a worker uses to call for help quickly and quietly) or an assault doesn't wait: call 111 straight away.

A false alarm is a good drill

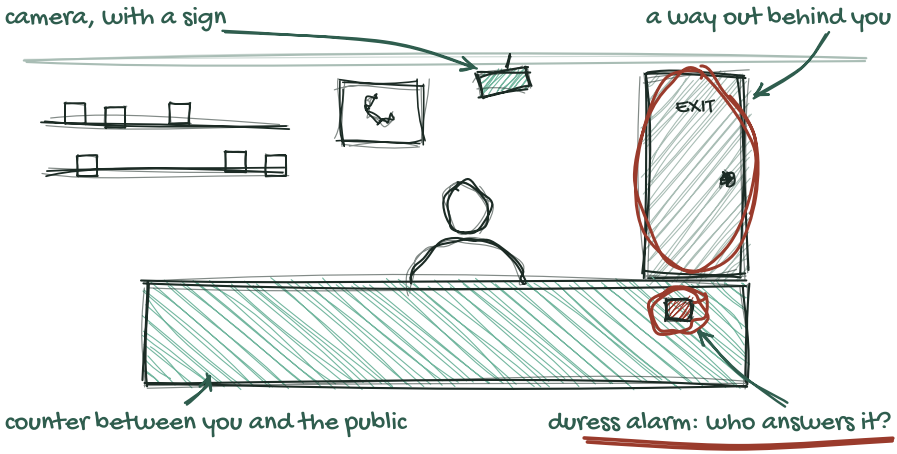
Chasing a missed check-in that turns out fine is not wasted effort. It proves the system works, and it tells everyone the clock is real.

Sources the 2016 Regulations, reg 14; WorkSafe, General risk and workplace management, part 2, s 3.1.

This guide's view The times are an example.

Alone with the public

WorkSafe says: "Violence or threats of violence are never acceptable." Lone workers can be at greater risk of threats and of verbal or physical violence.



Questions WorkSafe asks

- Is there a safe way in and out, for someone working outside normal hours?
- Is this person more vulnerable, for example young, pregnant, disabled or a trainee?
- "What is the risk of violence and/or aggression?"

Controls WorkSafe suggests

- Restrict physical access to workers.
- "Panic buttons/duress alarms".
- An escape route, and CCTV with warning signs.
- Take every threat seriously. Look at past incidents.

A duress alarm is only as good as the person who answers it. Test it on a night shift.

Sources WorkSafe, Petrol station (May 2024); Violence at work: customer service areas (September 2017); Lone working (November 2017).

Long drives, long days

The job is three hours from the depot. The work ends at 5 pm. The drive home doesn't.

WorkSafe says "long travel times to remote worksites will contribute to fatigue". It warns that "micro-sleeps are potentially deadly if they occur at the wrong time".

Questions from WorkSafe's fatigue checklist

- [ ] "Does anyone have to travel more than one hour to get to their job?"
- [ ] "Does anyone consistently work or travel between midnight and 6 am?"
- [ ] "Does anyone have less than 10 hours break between each shift?"
- [ ] "Does anyone work in excess of 12 hours regularly (including overtime)?"

What helps

- Factor travel times into the schedule.
- Agree a maximum travel time before and after a shift.
- Build schedules that allow enough rest during and between shifts.

The check-out comes at home

Count the drive as part of the shift. The last check-in is when the person is home or back in coverage, not when the job ends. A night away is a control too.

Sources WorkSafe, Keeping healthy and safe while working on the road or roadside, 14.0 Impairment (2022); Fatigue quick guide (July 2017).

Felling alone, near a cliff



17 November 2023
A worker is felling trees alone on a rural property near Dannevirke.

Then
A tree limb strikes him. He falls off a nearby cliff and dies.

Then
WorkSafe finds four steps were not taken.

7 September 2026
The court sentences his employer.

The site was hard: large wind-affected trees, suspended and interlocked branches, restricted escape routes, and trees close to an eroded cliff edge.

What WorkSafe said was missing	What WorkSafe said (Nigel Formosa)
Confirming his experience, training and qualifications.	"Taking someone's word for their training or experience is not enough."
An adequate induction.	"An induction must be more than a conversation."
Appropriate supervision.	"High-risk work must not proceed simply because the usual supervisor is unavailable."
An adequate check-in and check-out procedure.	"Those arrangements must be confirmed—not assumed."

The sentence

On 7 September 2026 the Dannevirke District Court sentenced his employer, Trevor Beale. It ordered $254,740 reparation to the worker's family, a $5,000 fine and $1,000 costs. The charge was under ss 36(1)(a) and 48. If an offender can pay a fine or reparation but not both, the court must order reparation (Sentencing Act 2002, s 14).

The lesson for leaders

Build a competence check into planning, so only trained and competent people do high-risk work.

Why was the fine small? WorkSafe's release doesn't say. One likely reason is the rule above.

Sources WorkSafe media release, Lessons for forestry businesses after fatal tree felling incident (September 2026); the Act, ss 36, 48; Sentencing Act 2002, s 14.

When the work changes

The same lone job needs a different approach depending on what is happening. Field guide 1 explains why.

What is happening	How to manage it	Priority
A routine solo task, good coverage, set check-ins Clear	Keep to the schedule. Act on every missed check-in.	●○○
A new remote site, no coverage, or a high-risk task Complicated	Plan the trip. Choose the devices. Agree the escalation times first: what happens, step by step, after a missed check-in.	●●○
Weather, terrain or the public changing fast Complex	Give people the authority to stop or leave. Check in more often.	●●○
A missed check-in, a beacon alert or an assault Chaotic	Missed check-in: start the clock on page 11 now. Beacon alert or assault: call 111 straight away.	Act now
Nobody knows who is out, or where Confusion	Start a sign-out board today. Name who watches it.	●●○

Clear to Chaotic: the check-in that's always late

Check-ins often come late, so nobody reacts when one doesn't come at all.

Clear to Complex: the last one on site

The crew leaves. One person stays to finish the job. Nobody planned for them to be alone.

Sources The situation names in colour come from the Cynefin framework (Snowden and Boone, 2007, who called Clear "Simple" and Confusion "Disorder"; current names from Snowden and Friends, 2021).

Signs worth a closer look

Most of these signs show up in rosters, check-in records and staff chat. Each one is worth a question.

What you might see or hear	What to do	Priority
Check-ins often late or missed, with no follow-up.	Reset the rule. Act on every miss.	●●●
Reports of abuse or threats from customers or clients.	Review alarms, staffing and layout. Support the worker.	●●●
"No signal out there."	Provide a second way to raise the alarm.	●●○
People staying back alone to finish jobs.	Plan it, or stop it. Set a check-out.	●●○
Long drives added to long days.	Put travel in the roster. Offer a night away.	●●○
Nobody can say who is out today.	Start a sign-out system. Name an owner.	●●○

The flat-battery test

Pick one lone worker. Ask the person who monitors them: "If their phone died at 2 pm, when would you know, and what would you do?" Listen for a time and a name.

Running the work

It's 4:10 on a wet Friday. The field technician was due to check in at 3:30. The office is emptying, and everyone assumes someone else has heard from her.

Before work starts

- [ ] Know who is working alone, where, and until when.
- [ ] Check devices are charged and work in that place.
- [ ] Agree check-in times and who acts on a miss.

While work is happening

- [ ] Act on every missed check-in, every time.
- [ ] Back people who stop or leave because conditions change.
- [ ] Keep high-risk tasks out of lone work unless there is a plan.

Afterwards

- [ ] Confirm everyone has checked out safely.
- [ ] Talk about close calls and late check-ins.
- [ ] Fix the coverage and equipment gaps people raise.

What to say when someone's late

"I haven't heard from her. I'm calling now." Say it out loud, so everyone knows the clock is running.

Take these to your next meeting

Senior leaders and officers

- [ ] Who in our business works alone, and when?
- [ ] Could any of that work be done in pairs?
- [ ] Do our check-ins cover every lone worker?
- [ ] Have we tested a missed check-in?
- [ ] Do staffing levels force people to work alone?
- [ ] Do lone workers face threats from the public?
- [ ] Do rosters count the drive home?
- [ ] Is remote work on our critical risk list?
- [ ] As an officer, how do I check for myself that check-ins are in place and missed ones followed up? (s **44**)

Middle managers

- [ ] Who is out alone today, and where?
- [ ] When is each person due to check in?
- [ ] Who acts if they don't?
- [ ] Does every device work where people are?
- [ ] Is anyone doing a high-risk task alone?
- [ ] Has anyone missed a check-in this month?
- [ ] Do first aid kits suit remote sites?

Two measures a board can track: missed check-ins this month, and how long until someone acted; lone workers without a tested way to raise the alarm where they work.

Who would be first to notice that one of our people hadn't come back, and how would they know?

Notes

Field notes

Back of your pocket card

My critical risks here:	Who to call:

ideas for this page:

- who's out alone this week, and where
- places with no signal
- a check-in that came late, and why
- how long help took in a drill
- what a lone worker asked for

→ write it down here

Pocket card

Cut out and fold in half.

Before you go alone

1. Tell someone where you're going and when you'll be back.
2. Check your device works there.
3. Carry a second way to raise the alarm.
4. Carry first aid supplies.
5. Agree your check-in times.

No signal? Don't rely on the phone.

If a check-in is missed

1. Call and text them.
2. Call their buddy and the last site.
3. Tell the person in charge.
4. Send someone, or call **111**.
5. Follow the times in your plan.

Don't wait for the next check-in.

Card text from pages 9 and 11. Field guide 14, Vimes Consulting.

Key words

The words people use about working alone, in plain English.

Word	What it means
Remote or isolated work	"Work that is isolated from the assistance of other persons because of location, time, or the nature of the work". reg 3
Lone worker	Someone working without other people nearby to help. They may be in a city shop, not just the back country.
Check-in, check-out	Contact at agreed times: when work starts, during it, and when the person is safely finished.
Escalation	What happens, step by step and by when, after a check-in is missed.
Buddy system	Working with someone else, or having a named person who keeps track of you.
Personal locator beacon	A small device you set off in an emergency to call for rescue where phones don't work.
Duress alarm	A button or device a worker uses to call for help quickly and quietly.
Effective communication	What the law asks for. A system "that has gaps in coverage or cannot be used in an emergency is unlikely to be effective" (WorkSafe). reg 21
Reasonably practicable	What you can reasonably do, once you weigh up the risk, what you know, and the controls that exist. Cost is weighed last. It can rule a step out only if it is grossly disproportionate to the risk. s 22
Critical risk	From 1 April 2027, a risk the law lists, or one likely to cause death or serious harm. Remote or isolated work is listed. new s 22A

Sources the 2016 Regulations, regs 3, 21; the Act, s 22; the Health and Safety at Work Amendment Act 2026, new s 22A; WorkSafe, General risk and workplace management, part 2, s 3.1.

Check it yourself

How this guide was checked

Every statement of law or fact in this guide was checked against a primary source before printing: the Act, the regulations, the Amendment Act 2026 as passed, WorkSafe guidance, or WorkSafe's case reports. Each check is recorded in a claims register, with the source and date checked. Statements that could not be checked were removed. Facts checked on 12, 22, 23 and 24 October 2026.

Law

1. Health and Safety at Work Act 2015, ss 22, 30, 36, 44, 48. legislation.govt.nz
2. Health and Safety at Work (General Risk and Workplace Management) Regulations 2016, regs 3, 13, 14, 21.
3. Health and Safety at Work Amendment Act 2026 (became law on 9 July 2026): new ss 17(3) to (5), 22A, 25A and Schedule 1A.
4. Sentencing Act 2002, s 14. Plain Language Act 2022, s 5.

WorkSafe guidance

5. Remote and isolated work, safety alert (27 August 2026); General risk and workplace management, part 2.
6. Lone working (November 2017); Violence at work: customer service areas (September 2017); Petrol station (May 2024).
7. Keeping healthy and safe while working on the road or roadside, 14.0 Impairment (2022); Fatigue quick guide (July 2017).
8. Media release, Lessons for forestry businesses after fatal tree felling incident (September 2026).
9. Understanding the changes to health and safety law (July 2026); Am I a small or large PCBU? (September 2026). worksafe.govt.nz

Research

10. Snowden, D. J., and Boone, M. E. (2007). A leader's framework for decision making. Harvard Business Review, 85(11), 68 to 76. The framework behind the situation names on page 15 (it called Clear 'Simple' and Confusion 'Disorder').
11. Snowden, D., and Friends (2021). *Cynefin: Weaving sense-making into the fabric of our world*. Cognitive Edge, The Cynefin Co. The current situation names.

Other guides that help

Lone work sits on top of other risks.

Guide	Read it for
1	Leading health and safety, and why the same task needs a different approach in different situations.
3	Shared duties, when contractors or other businesses send people out alone.
5	When things go wrong. What to do in the first hour after someone is hurt.
6	Critical risks and critical controls, in full.
7	Vehicles, mobile plant and traffic, including quad bikes and driving.
9	Psychosocial risk, including aggression from customers and clients.

The whole series

1 Leading health and safety · 2 Trust and verify · 3 Shared duties · 4 Worker voice · 5 When things go wrong · 6 Critical risks and critical controls · 7 Vehicles, mobile plant and traffic · 8 Working at height · 9 Psychosocial risk and mental health · 10 Work-related health · 11 Hazardous substances · 12 Asbestos · 13 Machinery, plant and energy isolation · **14 Remote, isolated and lone work**

Sources

Lone work in one minute

- Alone, help starts only when someone notices.
- Ask first: does this need to be done alone?
- Match the device to the place. A phone with no signal is not a system.
- Check in at set times, and act on every missed check-in.
- Plan for threats from the public and for the drive home, not just the task.
- Test the system. A false alarm is a good drill.

The field guides

1 Leading health and safety
2 Trust and verify
3 Shared duties
4 Worker voice
5 When things go wrong
6 Critical risks and critical controls
7 Vehicles, mobile plant and traffic
8 Working at height
9 Psychosocial risk and mental health
10 Work-related health
11 Hazardous substances
12 Asbestos
13 Machinery, plant and energy isolation
14 **Remote, isolated and lone work**



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