

TIP sheet

Remote and isolated work

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RTA minimum requirements

Managers & supervisors must implement measures to control & minimise the health & safety risks associated with remote and isolated work. People working alone or 2 or more persons working together can be involved in remote and isolated work.

RTA worksites shall ensure that all work tasks undertaken in an isolated work area or tasks undertaken by a single worker working alone are identified and risk assessed.

Remote and isolated work

Remote and isolated areas work can occur in potentially hazardous locations where help is not easily obtained in the event of illness, injury, incapacity, extreme & inclement weather, violence, animal/insect attack or other emergency, and can involve the following tasks:

- Road / plant operations, maintenance, repair or inspection.
- Surveys, inspection & site visits, working alone with the public.
- Driving long distances for work.

A person may find themselves working alone in the following situations:

- Work at a depot with no other staff.
- Working after hours on 'callout' or when others have gone home.
- Driving long distances for work.
- Inspecting or maintaining infrastructure at remote localities.

Risk assessment

A remote and isolated work risk assessment and SWMS facilitates the implementation of appropriate control measures, induction & training, monitoring & workplace surveillance. Risk Assessments shall be specific to the:

- Task(s) undertaken.
- Work task location & local environment.
- Scheduling of work times.
- Duration of the work task.
- Available means of communication.
- Available assistance.

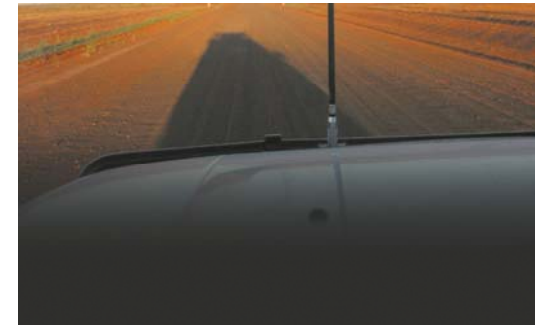
The Risk Assessment for Remote and Isolated Work shall comply with the RTA Risk Management Procedure and the RTA Policy – Remote or Isolated Work.

In areas with high crime rates, they shall be observed by a 'buddy' and/or other Standby Persons where required and not work alone under any circumstances.

Control the risk

The most effective method to control the risk is to eliminate the task. If this is not possible, then reduce (minimise) the risk by working down the hierarchy of control. Using more than one of these controls in combination is usually necessary.

1. A documented SWMS is developed for all tasks undertaken in the isolated area & while working alone.
2. A 'Buddy' system is utilised for high risk tasks undertaken in remote or potentially hostile locations.
3. An immediate supervisor or manager is aware of travel itineraries, current locations & what tasks are being undertaken in the isolated area & while working alone.
4. A clear definition of tasks not to be undertaken while working in isolation or working alone, is compiled.
5. A documented procedure is developed for regular contact with people working remotely or in isolation, which outlines the frequency, nominated time, and method of contact appropriate for the work location and conditions.
6. An emergency response procedure is developed & followed by the works depot or office if staff fail to make contact at the nominated time.
7. All staff are appraised for required competencies & for any pre-existing medical conditions before they work alone or in isolated locations.
8. Sufficient water, food, fuel & supplies are taken as per the risk assessment.
9. Vehicles used for remote work are appropriate and fit for purpose, regularly maintained & have adequate spare parts such as tyres and hoses.
10. Mobile & satellite phones and/or EPIRB where used are fit for purpose, tested before departure & phones have spare, fully charged batteries.
11. All safety equipment including first aid & vehicle breakdown/rescue/tool kits & fire extinguisher(s) are checked before departure, fit for purpose, and regularly maintained.



Competency based training

Staff undertaking remote or isolated work shall be trained in the management of the associated risks including the procedures adopted for:

- Undertaking specific isolated tasks.
- The operation of plant and equipment associated with the task, including safety & communication devices.
- Managing remote site conditions.
- Emergency response.
- Regular/emergency communications.
- Vehicle breakdown & incapacitation.
- Coping with the onset of extreme temperatures and inclement weather.
- Safe driving - on & off road where applicable.
- First aid, including dealing with injuries & bites from insects, reptiles etc.
- Conflict resolution, where applicable.

Refresher Training shall be undertaken at least once every 2 years.

A Risk Assessment & SWMS must only be completed by a trained, qualified & technically competent person for activities involving remote & isolated work.

Review

Risk Assessments, SWMS, and work procedures must be reviewed & revised when there is evidence that:

- The original assessment is no longer valid or older than 3 years.
- Exposure results in injury/illness.
- A significant change is proposed to work practices or procedures or the place of work to which the assessment relates.

Buddy system

Where the Risk Assessment has identified high risk tasks, the 'buddy' system may be utilised where a second person's presence is required at all times.

Where there is a probability of serious consequence, both people should not be exposed to the hazard simultaneously. The second person should be within sight, but safely removed from the immediate area.

The 'buddy' must be trained in the specific activities the worker he/she is observing for, is undertaking, be properly equipped with emergency equipment, and be capable of undertaking pre-planned rescue or emergency operations where needed.

Monitoring and communication

An effective means of regular communication to the main office or depot shall be established and frequency and type of contact communication defined.

One or more of the following methods for monitoring the condition of the lone &/or isolated person shall be used, as applicable:

- Periodic visits by the supervisor.
- Regular contact by radio, telephone or other agreed method.

Regular communication

The person shall contact the main office, depot or contact point when he/she:

- Has arrived on site.
- Has completed the task(s) allocated.
- Is due to leave the site to return to the depot.
- Realises that the expected completion time of the task has to be extended.
- Experiences any unexpected difficulties or emergency situation at the site.

- Is due to contact the main office, depot or contact point in accordance with the frequency of scheduled communication defined within the established procedure.

Emergency communication

2-way radios and/or mobile phones and/or automatic warning devices such as a 'man down alarm' (activated if specific signals are not received periodically) should be utilised for use within known coverage areas and satellite phones and/or EPIRB (Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacons) should be utilised in other areas to indicate emergencies affecting persons to their responsible supervisor and/or emergency services.

Where mobile phones are utilised, care shall be taken to ensure that they are not transferred to voicemail or message bank, etc.

In the event of an emergency

An emergency response procedure shall be prepared in consultation with persons at the workplace & emergency services where appropriate. The procedure shall include the following actions where the remote worker has failed to make the scheduled regular contact or scheduled 'return time' at the nominated time:

- Attempt to contact the person on his/her satellite/mobile phone &/or radio channel.
- If this fails, attempt to contact the person at his/her motel if applicable &/or last known location and/or contact point.
- If uncontactable, arrange for an appropriate person to visit the last known location of the missing person, where practicable.

If contact has not been established within 2 hours, inform the police at the closest station and/or town to the work site and provide the following information:

- Name of missing person.

- Contact phone number / radio channel.
- Vehicle registration number.
- Vehicle type and colour.
- Time, date & last known location of contact.
- Motel/Hotel last stayed in, if applicable.

Use of an EPIRB

If contact cannot be made by 2-way radio or phone and there is a grave and imminent danger to life situation then the EPIRB should be deployed at the remote location. When activated it will emit continuously a distinctive radio signal for up to 4 days on the 121.5 and 243 MHz international distress frequencies.

The EPIRB must remain activated until rescue has been completed.

References

- NSW OHS Act 2000 & OHS Regulation 2001.
- AS 1470 Health and safety at work – Principles and Practice.
- RTA Risk Assessment Policy 2.0.
- RTA OHS Policy 2.15 Remote & isolated Work.
- RTA Technology Directorate Pavements Branch (2000) 'Procedure for Officers Working in Remote Locations Alone'.
- Worksafe Western Australia Commission (1999) Working Alone Guidance Note.