

HS322 - Working Alone or After-Hours Guideline

Introduction

This document provides guidelines to assist areas in developing their own local Working Alone or After-hours Protocol. Adequate health and safety risk controls must be established where workers work regularly outside the University of New South Wales (UNSW) core working hours or work regularly alone at any time of the day.

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1. Scope

It applies to all UNSW workers and may be used to control the activities of workers, students, visitors and others at UNSW workplaces or undertaking UNSW work.

This does not address:

- Issues of flexitime, overtime, or other paid work matters.
- Fieldwork: See HS406 Fieldwork Guideline.
- Contractors: For contractor safety contact your Client Facility Manager (Customer Service phone ext. 55111) or refer to HS801 Contractor Safety Management Guideline.

2. Responsibility for managing alone and after-hours work

2.1. Head of school or business unit

The Head of the work area is responsible for ensuring that there is a local Working Alone or After-hours Protocol if there is a possibility that people in their workplace may require after-hours access or to work alone at any time of the day.

2.2. Supervisors

All Supervisors who authorise after hour's access to a UNSW workplace are responsible for the implementation of the local Working After-hours Protocol.

2.3. Workers

Workers are required to follow the local Working After-hours Protocol and any other additional requirements set by the work area. They are responsible for taking all reasonably practicable steps to ensure their own safety and security when working after-hours.

3. Managing alone and after-hours work

When working alone or after hours, poor access to emergency assistance and exposure to violence are the main hazards. The risks of other hazards may be increased due to the reduction in immediate assistance.

In the event of an accident or incident, or medical condition occurring outside of UNSW core working hours the UNSW security emergency and first aid response may take longer after-hours than the local area response during normal working hours such as building wardens, first aiders, health centre. If a worker is alone, they may not be able to seek emergency assistance (i.e. they may have an incident resulting in them not being able to reach a phone to contact security/ emergency services).

4. Approving the work

Unless the work has been deemed low risk, all working alone, or after-hours work must be approved. Before authorising a worker to work alone or after-hours, the work must be approved. This can only be done if:

1. Thorough Risk Management has been completed for the task
2. The worker has received all appropriate training
3. The worker has been assessed as competent for the activity (see HS320 Training Procedure)
4. An appropriate level of supervision has been set and/or agreed communication process to ensure worker is contactable.
5. There is compliance with enterprise agreements (see section 10)

5. Risk management

Risk management of the proposed work or activity must either be carried out, or the existing risk management documentation is reviewed and revised to include any changed circumstances of the after-hours or alone work.

Use HS703 Work Alone or After-Hours Approval Form for recording, approving and managing working alone or after-hours work. Use HS329 Risk Management Procedure to assist with identifying the level of risk for each hazard in the task or process e.g., low, medium, high, very high. This rating is used to determine:

- whether approval can be granted
- the type of approval required
- the level of supervision required
- any additional training or controls



- additional support/communication requirements

The following issues must be considered as part of the risk management process for any alone or after-hours work:

Competency

- Competency and level of experience, skill and training of the individual undertaking the work.
- For after-hours work: the number of people, and their level of experience, working in the area (this might vary on a day-to-day basis).
- Normal level of supervision required for workers to complete the task or process.
- Whether the worker is able to make sound judgements about their own safety.
- Work process / activity
- Whether the substance, equipment or work is too hazardous or dangerous to be used or done alone or after-hours.
- Consequences of unattended experiments or equipment.
- How long it will take to carry out the task.
- Possibility of exposure to violence or aggressive members of the public (e.g., during out-reach work or interviews).
- The time of day the activity will be undertaken.
- Consequences of a vehicle breakdown.
- Whether high risk activities are involved (see section 6.1).
- Whether fatigue is likely to increase risk (e.g., driving for long hours or over time).
- Whether there is a risk of attack by an animal, including reptiles, insects and sea creatures

Communication

- Procedure for regular contact with the worker e.g., a “buddy” system: The buddy and the worker maintain regular communication (e.g., visit/call/text every hour) and if communication cannot be made with the worker, the buddy follows a pre-determined response (e.g., go to site/ contact security).
- Access to a method of communication (landline phone, mobile phone, or duress alarm).
- Ability of communication equipment to work in all foreseeable situations
- Emergency assistance
- The possible increase in risk because of reduced immediate assistance e.g., UNSW emergency services.
- Security in the area where work is being undertaken.
- Any pre-existing medical condition of the worker.
- The level of UNSW emergency/security personnel assistance available after-hours in the event of an incident.
- The journey to and from where the work is being conducted and the mode of transport.

All risk management must be documented and include any additional controls and requirements. This may be done in the SWP/Risk Management or the HS703 Work Alone and After-Hours Approval Form. Risk controls must be reviewed on a regular basis, when new information becomes available, if there is an incident or when something changes in relation to the work.

5.1. Assessing competency of the worker

The supervisor must determine that the worker working alone or after hours is competent to undertake the work.

Evidence of competency includes:

- direct observation.



- examining the individuals training records such as for on-the-job training, training in Safe Work Procedures (SWPs) for particular processes or equipment, formal training courses, licenses.
- results of competency assessments.
- appropriate answers to process-related questions.

The supervisor should check evidence of competency e.g., by checking the list of authorised persons for equipment (evidence of such competency should have already been demonstrated for normal work conditions).

5.2. Student supervision

Undergraduate students (other than competent honours students or equivalent), must not work alone or after-hours unless the activity is:

- Purely administrative in nature e.g., work in computer laboratories, study areas, and libraries.
- In areas of equivalent low hazard as determined by assessment of the risks;
- Supervised by a competent person authorised by the Head of the work area.
- Postgraduate students (and competent honours students or equivalent) may be authorised to work alone or after-hours following thorough risk assessment in which:
 - The level of supervision is determined, and consideration is given to the level of training and experience, the nature of the work and the degree of assessed competence.
 - The level of supervision is documented in the risk management plan and complies with the relevant local After-hours Protocol.
 - The level of supervision might range from very little (e.g., occasional check-ins) to fully supervised.

6. Approval to undertake the work

Provided the risk assessment deems it appropriate and the worker has been assessed as competent, the supervisor may grant approval to undertake the work. The approval may be for a one-off event, for a specific period, or ongoing. The Working Alone or After-hours Approval form (HS703) is a tool that may be used to assist with this process and may be modified by the local area as needed.

Suggested standard types of approval and supervision for work alone or after hours		
After-hours/Alone Risk Level	Suggested type of approval required	Example(s)
Low	No approval necessary.	Administrative-type work e.g. office, library, study area or computer laboratory
Med	Approval is necessary but no supervision is required. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A "buddy" system for monitoring the worker is recommended 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with chemicals assessed as low risk e.g. buffers in a lab environment where access to materials or equipment of greater risk is prevented. • Use of Risk Group 1 biological agents in a PC1 facility. • Feeding and watering of animals, where the worker does not enter pens or handle the animals. • Sample deposit and retrieval from cryogenic storage rooms with air monitoring alarms. • Work with small volumes of hazardous substances where the risk is assessed as medium.



Suggested standard types of approval and supervision for work alone or after hours		
After-hours/Alone Risk Level	Suggested type of approval required	Example(s)
High	<p>Approval and supervision are required.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The competency of the worker is considered on a case-by-case basis. Supervision is by a competent, authorised person who is present at the workplace. The risks must be controlled to the lowest level achievable. Approval must be by Head of School/unit (or higher) The operation of class 3b and above lasers will require approval through the radiation safety committee. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of Risk Group 1 biological agents in a PC2 or greater facility** Use of Risk Group 2 or greater biological agents** Handling a large animal / entering a pen Work with power tools Sample deposit and retrieval from cryogenic storage rooms without air monitoring alarms Entry into -20 (and lower) freezer rooms High Risk Hazards listed in AS2243.1 (see section 3.5.1) as long as, when risk assessed they are not assessed as 'very high' risk, according to the Risk Rating Methodology and Matrix (HS329).
Very High	No approval can be given. Work is prohibited after-hours and/or alone.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any hazards or activities conducted after hours or while working alone that have been rated high risk, in accordance with the Risk Rating Methodology and Matrix in HS329 Risk Management Procedure, is prohibited and no approval can be given.

** An exemption to the requirement for direct supervision may be possible subject to a risk assessment for the specific activity (e.g., there is no injection risks, no work with Bunsen burners and ethanol, no work with equipment that could cause physical injury and taking into account the competency of the individual worker for that activity. No laboratory worker should work more than 12 hours in a 24-hour period.

6.1. List of High-Risk Hazards (AS2243.1)

High-risk hazard areas or activities, that may be encountered, include the following:

- Operating equipment or machinery, including workshop machinery, capable of inflicting serious injury, such as chainsaws, firearms, lathes and power saws.
- Handling venomous reptiles, insects, arthropods or fish.
- Working with large animals other than for the purpose of feeding or observation.
- Working with, or near, toxic or corrosive substances where there is a significant risk of exposure to the substance, taking into account the volume and concentration used.
- Using apparatus that could result in explosion, implosion, or the release of high energy fragments or significant amounts of toxic or environmentally damaging hazardous material.
- Climbing towers or high ladders.
- Working with exposed energized electrical or electronic systems with nominal voltages exceeding 50 V a.c. or 120 V ripple-free d.c. NOTE: These limits are for dry, indoor conditions and a more conservative approach should be taken in other conditions.
- Working with radionuclides requiring a high level laboratory in accordance with AS 2243.4 for Australia and the National Radiation Laboratory Code of safe practice for the use of unsealed radioactive materials, NRL C1, for New Zealand.

- Working with microorganisms of Risk Group 3 and higher, or which require the use of a Containment Level 3 facility or higher containment level in accordance with AS/NZS 2243.3.
- Operating lasers of Class 3 and above.
- Working in environments not at atmospheric pressure.
- Anything else that has the potential for causing serious injury or death.

For other area-specific hazards consult your workplace hazard and risk register.

7. Documentation and Record Keeping

The approval must be documented and should specify:

- the name(s) of the person(s) to which the approval applies
- the name(s) of the supervisor authorising the worker (s), student(s) or visitor (s).
- the date from which point approval applies
- duration of approval (if applicable)
- procedure, equipment, chemicals and areas that can be accessed/used
- tasks that can be undertaken
- tasks that cannot be undertaken
- communication methods
- that risks have been controlled to an acceptable level
- any additional precautions that must be taken
- any emergency shutdown procedures.

The records of working alone or after-hours approval must be kept for a period of time as determined by the School/Unit see Schools Record Disposal Guide.

8. Additional Requirements

- No unauthorised persons are permitted in UNSW buildings
- All workers authorised to work alone, or after-hours must carry their UNSW identification card. Any persons found without their UNSW identification card or appropriate authority from the Head of work area will be asked to vacate the area by Security.

9. Compliance with enterprise agreements

The supervisor and worker will ensure that any requirements of the applicable enterprise agreement are complied with when work is undertaken out of core business hours (such as maximum daily hours of work, shift penalties, meal allowance, overtime or time in lieu of overtime etc.).

References

[Work Health and Safety Act 2011](#)

[Work Health and Safety Regulation 2017 | SafeWork NSW](#)

Appendix A: Definitions

After-hours: Refers to any time between the hours of 8:00pm to 8:00am Monday to Friday and all-day Saturday, Sunday, public holidays and University holidays / shutdown periods. *Note: your work area may have hours that differ from the above period. You need to consult with the manager of the area to determine the after-hours period.*

Working alone: Means work that is isolated from the assistance of other persons because of location or nature of the work. Assistance from other people includes rescue, medical assistance and emergency services. This may be on or off UNSW campus.



Low Risk Workplaces: UNSW workplaces where low risk activities are undertaken, or the workplace is designated as low risk. The risk classification may change depending on the risk controls applied at different times e.g., a workplace classified as medium risk during normal work hours may be classified as low risk when activities are restricted by isolating medium or high-risk equipment. (See section 6)

Medium risk workplaces: UNSW workplaces where medium risk activities are undertaken, or the workplace is designated as medium risk. This includes but is not limited to PC2 laboratories, animal holding facilities, low level radiation laboratories, workshops, construction sites, class 3 laser laboratories and general chemistry laboratories. *Note- These areas may become high risk workplaces when accessed after-hours or alone (see section 6)*

High risk workplaces: UNSW workplaces where high risk activities are undertaken, or the workplace is designated as high risk. This includes but is not limited to PC3 and PC4 laboratories, medium level radiation laboratories, class 4 laser laboratories and high-risk workshops which operate equipment or machinery capable of inflicting serious injury or death. *Note- These areas may become very high-risk workplaces when accessed after-hours or alone (See 6 and 6.1)*

Local unit: The School/Centre/Unit/ responsible for the supervision of the worker, students or visitors undertaking the work.

Supervisor: For HS purposes, any worker who oversees and directs others in the workplace and has others reporting to them.

Work: Any activity undertaken by a worker on behalf of UNSW.

Worker: A person is a worker if the person carries out work in any capacity for a person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU), including work as: an employee, contractor or subcontractor, an employee of a contractor or subcontractor, or an employee of a labour hire company assigned to work for a PCBU, an outworker, an apprentice or trainee, a student gaining work experience, volunteer.

Appendix B: Version control

Version	Authorised by	Approval Date	Effective Date	Sections modified
1.0		14/07/2010	14/07/2010	Made into a guideline onto UNSW guideline template.
1.1	Director, Human Resources	14/07/2010	14/07/2010	Remove hyperlinks from body, clarify examples of high risk in table 3.4
1.2	Director, Human Resources	1/04/2011	1/04/2011	Add new clause 3.4, renew the numbering of section 3.
1.3	Director, Human Resources	15/12/2011	15/12/2011	Amendment to table 3.5 to clarify direct supervision requirements
1.4	Director, Human Resources	18/04/2013	18/04/2013	Updated legislation reference. Section 3.4 added examples of control measures. Added reference to working alone.
1.5	Director, UNSW Safety and Sustainability	30 April 2014	30 April 2014	Reviewed for administrative updates
1.6	Director, UNSW Safety and Sustainability	3 March 2016	3 March 2016	Reviewed for administrative updates. Updated table in section 3.5. Definitions were updated.
2.0	Director, Risk & Safety Management	8 August 2022	8 August 2022	Updated template and administrative updates, removed from Governance.
2.1	Director, Health & Safety	31 October 2024	31 October 2024	After Hours amended.

Any suggestions, recommendations or updates to this document should be emailed to safety@unsw.edu.au.

