

Pembina Trails School Division

Work Alone Administrative Practice

This plan applies to all Division employees including administrators, support staff (secretaries, technicians, Educational Assistants and casual employees), teachers, security staff, cleaners, caretakers, shop tradesmen, truck, bus, and courier drivers, and summer students.

DEFINITION OF “WORKING ALONE”

A person is “alone” at work when they are on their own; when they cannot be seen or heard by another person; and when they cannot expect a visit from another worker.

Working alone includes all employees who may go for a period of time where they do not have direct contact with a co-worker, example: evening staff that are separated by one or two floors of a building.

“Working in isolation” means working in circumstances where assistance is not readily available in the event of injury, ill health or emergency, example: confined space entry.

1.0 IDENTIFICATION OF HAZARDS & RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH WORKING ALONE

While it is not always hazardous to work alone, it can be when other circumstances are present. Whether a situation is a high or low risk will depend on the location, type of work, interaction with the public; or the consequences of an emergency, accident, injury, etc. This wide variety of circumstances makes it important to assess each situation individually.

High Risk Activities - are those activities where the potential for accidents or injuries is deemed to be highly likely. High risk activities involve the following:

- Working at heights (e.g. On the roof)
- Work in a confined spaces (such as crawl spaces, tanks, ducts, vents, etc.)
- Work with electricity – lock out
- Work with hazardous substances or materials
- Work with hazardous equipment (such as chainsaws, unguarded equipment, etc.)
- Work with materials under pressure; or
- Others that may be identified by staff.

Other Areas of Concern – are those activities where although the potential for accidents or injuries is deemed to be highly likely, the incidents are unpredictable and need to be thoroughly thought through. These activities include:

- Staff with pre-existing medical conditions who are at an increased risk of sudden or severe illness and injury when working on the job site, inside buildings or on school grounds.

- Exposure to threats of violence or violent acts perpetrated by the public who may be in schools for legitimate school functions, permits or unauthorized intruders who are able to gain access to school buildings.

Low Risk Activities – are those activities where the potential for the occurrence of accidents and injuries is deemed to be highly unlikely and where the severity of the incident is generally thought not to have serious consequences.

Performing a Working Alone Hazard Assessment:

Supervisors and workers are required to assess the conditions or circumstances under which an employee may be working alone to determine the risks, the level of risk and the prevention measures required to reduce those identified risks to an acceptable level. The following are some points to consider when performing a hazard assessment. Each circumstance will be different:

- Length of time the person will be working alone
 - What is a reasonable length of time for the person to be alone?
 - Is it reasonable for the person to be alone at all?
 - How long will the person be alone to finish the job?
 - Is it legal for the person to be alone while doing certain activities?
 - What time of the day will the person be alone?

- Communication:
 - What forms of communication are available?
 - Is it necessary to “see” the person, or is voice communication adequate?
 - Will emergency communication systems work properly in all situations? (eg. Confined spaces)
 - If the communication systems are located in a vehicle, do you need alternative arrangements to cover the person when they are away from the vehicle?

- Location of the work:
 - Is the work in a remote or isolated location (remember that a remote location does not have to be far away. Storage rooms that are rarely used can be considered remote or isolated)
 - Does the work involve confined spaces? Or work on the roof?
 - Is transportation necessary to get there? If yes, what kind of transportation is needed?
 - Is the vehicle equipped with emergency supplies such as food and drinking water, as well as a first aid kit?
 - Will the person need to carry some or all of the emergency supplies with them when they leave the vehicle?
 - Does the person need training to be able to use the first aid equipment?
 - What are the consequences if the vehicle breaks down?

- Will the person have to leave the vehicle for long periods of time?
- Type or nature of work:
- Is there adequate training and education provided for the person to be able to work alone safely?
 - What are the tasks and hazards involved in the work to be performed?
 - Is there adequate personal protective equipment available? Is it in good working order? Have workers been trained to use the equipment?
 - What machinery, tools or equipment will be used?
 - Is there a high risk activity involved?
 - Is fatigue likely to be a factor?
 - Are there extremes of temperature?
 - Is there a risk of an animal attack, insect bite (poisonous or allergic reaction), etc.?
 - If the person is working inside a locked building, how will emergency service be able to get in? (e.g. Custodial staff in a locked and secured school)?
 - Does the work involve working with money or other valuables?
- Characteristics required by the individual who is working alone:
- Are there any pre-existing medical conditions that may increase the risk?
 - Does the person have adequate levels of experience and training? (eg. First aid, communication systems, vehicle breakdowns, relevant administrative procedures and or outdoor survival)?

2.0 RESPONSIBILITIES

In order for the working alone procedures to be effective they must be implemented with reason and diligence. To achieve this, respective responsibilities have been defined to ensure those who can positively impact on the potential risks of working alone are aware of their responsibilities and have the knowledge and skill to effectively implement working alone guidelines.

A. Supervisor Responsibilities:

- Identify the risks or hazards associated with the work to be performed or the environment where the work is to be done
- Communicate the results of the risk assessment to all affected workers and others conducting similar work.
- Provide written working alone procedures for any affected workers where the plans below do not cover.

The plan must include:

- Procedures to eliminate or minimize the identified risks
- Methods of communication by which the workers can secure emergency assistance and how it will be provided in the event of an incident.
- Length of time a worker may be out of contact with a supervisor (frequency of regular communication)
- Confirmation where and when working alone is permitted.
- Utilize an effective method of communication that is related to the nature, specific type and location of work for those who may require emergency assistance.
- Document when working alone is permitted and or prohibited and ensure that it is effectively communicated to all workers.
- Schedule potentially hazardous work for times when supervisors and appropriate help will be available.
- Give copies of completed working alone plans to the employee and Safety & Health Officer. Written safety plans should be reviewed and updated annually.

B. Worker Responsibilities:

- Participate in the working alone risk assessment and risk management decisions with the supervisor
- Follow the safe work practices outlined by their supervisor and those outlined in this guideline
- Maintain regular communication as directed by supervisors.

3.0 WORKING ALONE PROHIBITED:

There are certain situations where working alone will not be permitted. Working alone will be prohibited under the following circumstances:

- Confined space entry
- Working on energized electrical conductor or equipment
- Power line hazards: use of a vehicle, crane or similar equipment near a live power line where it is possible for any part of the equipment or its load to make contact with the live power line.
- View obstruction: A vehicle, crane, mobile equipment, or similar material handling equipment where the operator does not have full view of the intended path of travel.
- The use of fall arrest equipment and scaffolds
- Any hot work applications where a fire watch is required.
- Tasks which, based on the risk assessment conducted by the supervisor, are deemed to require more than one person.

4.0 COMMUNICATION DEVICES

The working alone procedure may include the following to ensure the most practical and effective means of communication:

- Portable phone or cell phone
- Walkie – talkie
- Personal alarm or pager
- Buddy system
- Check-in system and requirement for updating an individual’s status while working alone or
- Any other method that may be considered most effective to the specific department’s safe operations.

Each working alone scenario will use these communication options, either singularly or in combination in the development of a site specific working alone communication plan.

5.0 MITIGATION OF RISKS

This plan was developed to deal with risks identified for workers who are required by the nature of their job to work alone, not in the presence of a co-worker or supervisor.

There are many steps that can be taken to help ensure the safety of the lone worker.

A. Methods to minimize risks for staff working alone include:

- All schools will be locked on weekends and evenings after 4:30pm and during early morning hours from opening until 7am to protect staff while working after normal school hours. Unauthorized persons are not permitted to remain on site after closure. Any staff wanting to work after 4:30 or prior to 7am must have their supervisor’s permission and have a working alone plan in place.
- Maintenance tradesmen, drivers, and summer students who work alone must carry a cell phone (Divisional or personal) so that they can alert supervisors and co-workers if they have a safety concern.
- Divisional cell phones have been purchased for each school so that caretakers who are required to work alone or in unsupervised areas, such as the crawl space, boiler room, roof, will be able to contact other Division personnel should difficulties arise. As an extra precaution, caretakers must also advise the school office (secretary and/or principal or his designate) when he/she is working in high risk areas and report in every 30-60 minutes. If he/she does not report back

within this time, he/she must be located. Schools may also wish to consider purchasing walkie-talkie radios for staff to use when working alone.

- The school-based cell phones will also be carried by one of the night staff and use them to alert their supervisor (or other Divisional Facilities and Operations Supervisors) or co-workers in other schools if they have a security or safety problem. Evening custodial staff must follow the following procedure:
 - Call supervisor
 - Call other school(s) cell phones
 - Call XL Alarms (they have Divisional contact phone numbers)
 - Call 911, schools will be locked but there are external key boxes at each school (to be completed by the end of 2013) that the fire department & police have a master key to.
 - Pull the fire-alarm - Night staff that suspects their safety is in immediate danger should pull the nearest fire alarm and if possible proceed to the school entrance where the fire alarm panel is located. Employees should familiarize themselves with this location. This is an extreme measure and should only be taken if immediate assistance is required, the employee is in severe distress and they believe they cannot wait for assistance from their supervisor and cannot make a call on their own to 911.
 - When the Night Custodial Supervisor is not on duty, the Daytime Custodial Supervisor shall notify evening workers of alternate persons to contact.

- Night staff in a building with other co-workers present should ensure that they check on each other every hour during their shift (or at breaks). In multi-staffed schools workers frequently are employed some distance apart and only one of the workers will have the cell phone. Each caretaker must check to ensure all co-workers are out of the building before the alarm is set at the end of the shift.

- Night staff, weekend security staff, weekend boiler checkers, and tradesman on callout should keep to a prearranged communication routine with their supervisor or evening custodial supervisor. Staff should check in with any onsite custodial staff (where applicable) when they arrive; periodically throughout their visit to the school and prior to leaving the school.

- Head caretakers working alone during the early morning hours are required to carry their cell phone for use in the event of an emergency. XL Alarms has been instructed that where an employee fails to open the building within 15 minutes of their opening time (varies from school to school) they will:
 - Phone the school-based cell phone to verify the safety of the employee. If no response;
 - Contact Divisional facilities and operations supervisor(s) and notify them of the failure to disarm the alarm. If no response;

- Contact the security responder (Securitas) to make an on-site inspection of the parking lot and school until they are satisfied that the employee is safe or not on site. (The employee may be suffering from a medical emergency), and
 - Notify the facilities and operations supervisor once it has been determined that the employee is safe or not on site.
 - Supervisor will continue to try and locate the employee if it is determined that they did not arrive at work.
- As an extra measure of general safety for night staff who work alone, XL Alarms has been instructed that where an employee fails to re-arm the building within 15 minutes after the end of the shift they will:
- Phone the school-based cell phone to verify the safety of the employee and if no response;
 - Contact Divisional facilities and operations supervisor(s) and notify them of the failure to alarm;
 - Contact the security responder (Securitas) to make an on-site inspection of the parking lot and school until they are satisfied that no employee is still at the site and that the building is safe to be alarmed. (The employee may be suffering from a medical emergency), and
 - Re-arm the system once it has been determined that the employee is safe.
- Casual employees placed in work alone situations must also be trained on call-in procedures.
- Custodial or facilities staff conducting work in crawlspaces must arrange to do so during regular daytime hours of work. Staff entering crawlspaces must employ a means of communication that works effectively in the crawlspace. The communication system includes the buddy system which uses a two way radio, cell phone or the use of a two person entry. The type of system chosen **MUST WORK EFFECTIVELY** in the crawlspace area otherwise a two person entry will be required: one person to stay at the entrance of the crawlspace and one person to enter and conduct the work. Once work is completed staff must communicate with their buddy to let them know that work has been completed.
- Custodial or facilities staff conducting work on roof tops must arrange to do so during regular daytime hours of work. Staff working on roof tops must employ a means of communication while working on the roof. Staff must check in with the office and head caretaker prior to accessing the roof area. Staff must keep in constant communication during the work with either the office or head caretaker during any work on the roof top. Once work has been completed staff are required to communicate with the office or caretaker to let them know that work has been completed and that they are leaving the school.

□ **Stripping floors & Moving Furniture:**

- **Stripping floors:** Although stripping floors, when performed following proper procedure, is relatively safe there is always the risk of a slip and fall resulting in bodily injury or concussion. As a result any custodial staff stripping floors while working alone must:
 - Contact their supervisor for direction or additional help
 - If other staff (such as secretaries, teachers or principals) are working in the building - use the buddy system and let them know you are stripping floors and have to check in with them every 30-60 minutes as part of your working alone plan.
 - If no staff are available, the call in system must be used. Staff must call in to their supervisor or be called by their supervisor every 30-60 minutes, to ensure their safety.

- **Moving Heavy Furniture:** When working alone in a building custodial, custodial staff are not allowed to lift heavy furniture. Light weight lifting, such as stacks of chairs, student desks, individual tables, etc. can occur. However a two person lift is required for lifting heavy items such as large teacher / principal desks, book cases, shelving, couches, large tables, large arm chairs, fridges, stoves, washers, dryers, etc. and no attempts to lift these items alone should be made.

□ **School Permits:**

While working alone, any custodial or teaching staff should seek out the permit site supervisor to initiate contact and establish that the PTSD permit policies have been communicated. If at any time staff working alone should feel uncomfortable or threatened (verbally or physically) by a permit user (permit participant / parent / student), an attempt to resolve the situation by speaking with the supervisor of the permit should take place first. In the event this is not possible or a resolution is not eminent, staff should immediately find a safe / secure location (lockable office or room) and:

- Contact their supervisor for direction (custodial staff supervisors: Day Supervisor Terry Salt, cell#981-4215 or Evening Supervisor Barry Hamilton cell # 612-5910
- If you can't reach your supervisor, contact XL alarms to request assistance from Security #231-1072
- Contact the police if it is a serious threat (use of a weapon or assault)

Any harassment, verbal abuse or violence directed towards Pembina Trails School Division staff will not be tolerated and will result in termination of the permit and may prohibit any future use of school facilities.

Once the situation has ended staff must complete the online violent incident report form as soon as possible (same day) following the incident. The custodial supervisor and the school principal together will complete the investigation of the incident including protective measures for staff and preventative measures to ensure the incident isn't repeated.

B. Methods to minimize risks for support staff, teachers and administrators:

- Support staff (secretaries, EA's, technicians and casual employees) teachers and administrators working alone in the school after regular hours or during the summer should always carry a cell phone or school based radio so that they can contact the caretaker for help if they have a safety concern.
- Staff working after hours are NOT allowed to prop open outside doors or let in family, friends or members of the public into the building. If someone is at the door, contact the school caretaker.
- When working during irregular hours it is the staff members responsibility to check in with the caretaker when they arrive; frequently throughout their stay at pre-arranged times; and prior to leaving the school. If there is an urgent situation workers should call 911. Support staff, administrators and teachers should also ensure their routines are known by immediate family members or friends and arrange to arrive home on a pre-arranged basis. Staff are required to ensure that family members have a number to call in the case of an emergency (e.g. supervisors' number, principal's number, or numbers from the Divisional office).
- Staff that feel their safety is in immediate danger should trigger the fire alarm and, if possible, proceed to the school entrance where the fire alarm enunciator panel is located. Employees should familiarize themselves with this location. This is an extreme measure and should only be taken if immediate assistance is required. If the employee is in severe distress and they believe they cannot wait for assistance from an adjacent school or make a call on their own to 911 they should go to the nearest pull station and trigger the fire alarm.
- Staff that are working with a student that has or may have the potential for violent behavior must have a means of immediate communication available to them at all times. This may include: panic button, walkie-talkie, call button, etc. The receiving end of the communication tool must have another staff member available to respond with help at all times.

C. Methods to minimize risks to staff traveling during school hours:

For Support staff and teachers traveling during school hours, for work purposes:

A check-in procedure must be in place at each school. A sign in book must be maintained and staff must check in and out as they leave or return to the school during the day either in person or by phone. If staff are required to leave during the day, for school business, their destination should be noted in the check-in book.

When travelling out of the office, the main contact person should know the following details:

- Destination
- Estimated time of arrival
- Return time or date
- Contact information
- Mode of travel (public transit, car, plane, etc.) and
- Alternate plan in the event of bad weather, traffic problems, etc.

In the event that a person does not meet their final destination, the main contact person should attempt to contact the worker every 5 - 10 minutes. If they cannot be reached family members should be contacted to determine if the worker has had any contact or a change of plans. If the worker still cannot be contacted, the school division should be notified and will take any further action required.

High Risk/Violent Students - Any staff traveling with students that may be high risk / that has or may have the potential for violent behavior must employ a two person system. This means that two staff members must be present in the vehicle during transportation. One staff member is required to sit with the student in the back seat directly behind the driver. Staff must also have a means of communication to summon assistance if an emergency situation arises.

Any staff traveling in their personal vehicles with a student with special needs should have a sign on their dashboard indicating what school they work for and the contact number in the event of a motor vehicle accident.

For Facilities & Operations Staff traveling during regular work hours:

Where employees are traveling alone and in high risk situations (at night, outside of the city, in treacherous weather) they should ensure that their supervisor and one or more contact people, (e.g. family members) are aware of the following details:

- Destination

- Estimated time of arrival
- Return time or date
- Contact information (cell phone number)
- Mode of travel (public transit, car, plane, etc.) and
- Alternate plan in the event of bad weather, traffic problems, etc.

In the event that a person does not arrive at their final destination, their supervisor should attempt to contact the worker every 5 - 10 minutes. If they cannot be reached, family members should be contacted to determine if the worker has had any contact or a change of plans. If the worker still cannot be contacted, the school division should be notified and will take any further action required.

D. Methods to minimize risks for Bus Drivers working alone:

Bus drivers that are still driving after office staff have left for the day (after 5:00pm) or on weekends must:

- If only one driver is on a field trip: when leaving the bus compound to go home the driver MUST call the designated phone number. The driver must ensure they receive the number from dispatch before leaving for the field trip. A cell phone will be provided if needed.
- If there is more than one driver on a field trip: upon completion of their trips, ALL drivers are to wait for each other and leave the compound together. Drivers must receive a contact phone number from dispatch before leaving on their field trip but are not required to call unless there is an emergency.

All staff must report situations, incidents or near misses to their supervisor where working alone increased the severity of the situation. This information will be analyzed and changes will be made to the guideline where necessary.

Higher risk tasks (example: confined space, roof work, etc.) are only allowed to be conducted during normal business hours or during an emergency when second worker capable of helping.

Note: If a staff member feels that a particular work situation is not safe they have the right to refuse the task and notify their supervisor to investigate the situation.

Examples of Working Alone Risks

IT & Facilities	Working Alone Situation	Minimum Protective Measures
Low Risk Tasks	Traveling alone in a vehicle	All staff are required to carry divisional cell phones and should have a pre-arranged personal contact
High Risk Tasks	Working in a confined space or crawl space.	All staff must comply with the crawl space safe work procedure and have a buddy system in place with a means of communication
	Working with hazardous materials; high pressure systems; moving equipment or machinery	Buddy system must be used, scheduled personal contact or two way radio
	Working at heights or on scaffolding (e.g. painting, roofing, etc.)	Buddy system must be used, frequent scheduled personal contact or two way radio
	Working outside in extreme weather conditions (e.g. snow clearance, outside maintenance work, etc.)	Buddy system must be used, frequent scheduled personal contact or two way radio

Bus Drivers	Working Alone Situation	Minimum Protective Measures
Low Risk	Traveling alone in a vehicle during day time hours	Use of the bus radio, pre-arranged personal contact or the ability to make contact by cell phone
	Traveling after hours	Use of divisional transportation cell phone with emergency contact number to call from their supervisor. Pre-arranged meet time with other bus drivers.
	Extreme weather conditions	Use of the bus radio, pre-arranged personal contact or the ability to make contact by cell phone

Caretaking Staff	Working Alone Situation	Minimum Protective Measures
Low Risk Tasks	Working alone after normal hours of work.	Staff must carry a divisional cell phone at all times. Pre-arranged personal contact.
High Risk Tasks	Working in a confined space / crawl space.	All staff must comply with the crawl space safe work procedure and have a buddy system in place with a means of communication
	Working with hazardous materials; high pressure systems; moving equipment or machinery	Buddy system must be used, scheduled personal contact or two way radio
	Working at heights or on scaffolding (e.g. painting, roofing, etc.)	Buddy system must be used, frequent scheduled personal contact or two way radio
	Working outside in extreme weather conditions (e.g. snow clearance, outside maintenance work, etc.)	Buddy system must be used, frequent scheduled personal contact or two way radio

Instructional / Administrative Staff	Working Alone Situation	Minimum Protective Measures
Low Risk Tasks	Working alone after normal hours of work.	Pre-arranged personal contact with the caretaker or the ability to make personal contact with the caretaker by phone or two way radio.
	Traveling alone in a vehicle	Log book check – staff member has checked in /out and indicated their destination and time.
	Traveling alone with a student with special needs that may be high risk / that has or may have the potential for violent behaviour.	Requires two people at all times.
	Traveling after hours.	Pre-arranged personal contact or the ability to make contact by phone or two way radio.

Staff Assigned to Call Outs	Working Alone Situation	Minimum Protective Measures
High Risk	Intrusion alarms call out.	Maintain pre-arranged contact via phone with their supervisor.
	Emergency work	Maintain pre-arranged contact via cell phone with their supervisor.

****Note:** If a staff member feels that a particular work situation is not safe they have the right to refuse the task and notify their supervisor to investigate the situation.