



# REMOTE OR ISOLATED WORK

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## WHAT IS REMOTE OR ISOLATED WORK?

Remote or isolated work is when workers find it difficult to get help or assistance from other people because of the location, the time when the work is performed, or the nature of the work being done.

A worker may be isolated even if other people may be close by, for example, a cleaner working by themselves at night in a city office building. In other cases, a worker may be far away from populated areas, for example, on a farm.

Engaging in solitary or remote work heightens the vulnerabilities to both physical and mental well-being in any occupation. Remote or isolated work environments often pose risks such as violence exposure and limited accessibility to emergency support, which are commonly associated hazards.

Remote work or working in isolation can result in limited or absent support in various areas, including:

- Aid with demanding tasks.
- Notification of potential hazards to the worker.
- Provision of a second opinion on how to safely perform a task.
- Observation of fatigue or errors made by others.
- Assistance during challenging or hazardous situations.
- Ability to summon emergency assistance when needed.

## EXAMPLES OF REMOTE OR ISOLATED WORK

Examples of remote or isolated work can vary depending on the type of work, industry and location of the workplace.

- all-night convenience store and service station attendants
- office workers working from home
- long distance freight transport drivers
- cleaners working alone (such as at night)
- scientists, park rangers and others carrying out field work alone
- health and community workers working in isolation with members of the public.



- Being stationed in remote areas, such as sheep and cattle stations, for extended periods ranging from days to weeks.
- Operating in close proximity to others, like community nurses conducting night time clinical visits, even if there are people nearby.
- Working alongside numerous other workers in a remote location, such as employees stationed at a base camp.
- Sales representatives who spend long periods working alone (i.e. real estate agents)

### IMPACTS OF REMOTE OR ISOLATED WORK

The impacts of remote or isolated work on both workers and organisations is numerous. Some impacts to consider are:

#### ON WORKERS

**Increased Risk to Health and Safety:** Working alone or in remote locations can heighten the risks to workers' health and safety. Limited access to assistance and emergency support may make it challenging to address potential hazards or respond to emergencies promptly.

Prolonged periods of isolation, limited social interaction, and the absence of direct supervision or support may contribute to increased stress, anxiety, and mental health issues among workers.

**Heightened Feelings of Isolation and Loneliness:** Being physically separated from colleagues and working in isolation can lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation, including reduced collaboration and communication. The lack of social interaction and support networks may negatively impact mental well-being and contribute to decreased job satisfaction.

**Increased Responsibility and Self-Reliance:** Workers in remote or isolated settings often bear greater responsibility for their tasks and decision-making. They may need to rely on their own expertise and judgment without immediate input from others, which can lead to additional stress and pressure.

#### ON ORGANISATIONS

**Decreased Communication and Collaboration:** Physical separation can hinder effective communication and collaboration among team members and departments. Reduced face-to-face interactions may result in slower decision-making processes, limited knowledge sharing, and decreased synergy within the organisation.

**Challenges in Supervision and Performance Management:** Managing and supervising remote or isolated workers can present challenges. Monitoring performance, providing feedback, and ensuring accountability may become more difficult without regular in-person interactions. Potential

**Increased Reliance on Technology:** Organisations relying on remote or isolated work must heavily depend on technology for communication, collaboration, and task management. Technical issues or disruptions in connectivity can disrupt work processes and impact productivity.

**Difficulty in Onboarding and Training:** Introducing new employees to remote work settings and providing effective onboarding and training can be more challenging. Lack of face-to-face interactions and limited opportunities for hands-on training may require organisations to adapt their onboarding processes.



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**Challenges in Work-Life Balance:** Remote work can blur the boundaries between work and personal life, making it difficult for workers to establish a healthy work-life balance. Without clear separation, the risk of overworking or burnout may increase.

**Dependence on Technology:** Remote work heavily relies on technology for communication and connectivity. Technical issues, limited internet access, or disruptions in communication tools can significantly impact productivity and create frustration for workers.

**Difficulty in Disconnecting from Work:** Remote or isolated work settings may make it challenging for workers to establish boundaries between work and personal life. The constant accessibility and expectation of being available can lead to a sense of always being "on" and difficulties in disengaging from work-related responsibilities.

### **Work-Life Balance and Employee Well-being:**

Organisations need to be mindful of the work-life balance and well-being of remote or isolated workers. Balancing work responsibilities with personal life can be more challenging in remote settings, leading to potential burnout, decreased job satisfaction, and increased turnover.

### **Increased Need for Remote Infrastructure and**

**Support:** Supporting remote or isolated work requires investment in the necessary infrastructure, tools, and technologies to enable seamless communication, collaboration, and access to resources. Organisations need to ensure their remote workforce has the necessary support to perform their roles effectively.

**Potential for Information Security Risks:** Remote work can introduce new challenges to information security and data protection. Organisations must implement robust cybersecurity measures to safeguard sensitive information and ensure remote workers adhere to security protocols.

## RISK MANAGEMENT

***Risk Management involves identifying potential risks, assessing their likelihood and impact, and developing strategies to mitigate or control them. It is a proactive process that seeks to prevent risks from occurring or minimise their impact if they do occur.***

No person should be injured in their workplace, including psychological injury. To meet their duties to ensure health and safety, employers must identify and eliminate or minimise psychosocial risks so far as is reasonably practicable. How long (duration), how often (frequency) and how significantly (severity) workers are exposed to psychosocial hazards impacts the level of risks. Hazards interacting or combining with each other may also impact this. Further guidance on the risk management process is available in the Code of Practice: [\*\*\*How to manage work health and safety risks.\*\*\*](#) For more information on the risk management process for psychosocial hazards, please view [\*\*\*Section 2 of the Model Code of Practice.\*\*\*](#)

Mind Your Head advocates for *prevention* – that is, identifying risk, implementing or changing systems to prevent worker harm or injury *before it occurs*.



### Examples of Risk Management Strategies for Remote or Isolate Work include:

1. **Risk Assessment:** Conduct thorough risk assessments specific to remote or isolated work environments to identify potential hazards and vulnerabilities.
2. **Policies and Procedures:** Develop and implement clear policies and procedures that address the unique risks associated with remote or isolated work, including guidelines for communication, emergency response, and work-life balance.
3. **Training and Education:** Provide comprehensive training to remote workers on safety protocols, emergency procedures, health and well-being, and remote work best practices.
4. **Communication Systems:** Establish reliable communication systems that enable real-time communication between remote workers and their supervisors or colleagues. This may include the use of mobile devices, video conferencing, and collaboration platforms.
5. **Emergency Response Plan:** Develop and communicate an emergency response plan specifically tailored to remote or isolated work scenarios. Ensure workers are aware of emergency contacts, procedures, and how to access assistance in case of emergencies.
6. **Work Schedule and Breaks:** Encourage remote workers to establish and maintain a healthy work-life balance by setting clear work schedules, promoting regular breaks, and encouraging time off to prevent burnout and promote well-being.
7. **Technology and Equipment:** Provide remote workers with reliable and appropriate technology, equipment, and tools to ensure they can perform their tasks safely and efficiently. Regular maintenance and support for remote equipment should be provided.
8. **Mental Health Support:** Implement programs and resources to support the mental health and well-being of remote workers, including access to counselling services, employee assistance programs, and virtual activities.
9. **Relocate the work:** Consider moving the work to a more suitable location to reduce the risks associated with remote or isolated environments.
10. **Ensure workers are physically and mentally fit to perform the work:** Assess and verify that workers are in good physical and mental condition to safely and effectively carry out their tasks in remote or isolated settings.
11. **Provide appropriate training about working in remote or isolated environments:** Offer comprehensive training programs that equip workers with the necessary knowledge and skills to navigate and address the unique challenges of remote or isolated work.



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12. **Avoid riskier times of the day**, such as excessive heat, cold, storms, and when the circadian rhythm wants the body to sleep. Schedule work to minimize exposure to hazardous conditions or times when workers may be more susceptible to fatigue or adverse weather conditions.

### WAYS TO MANAGE RISKS

**Consult workers and HSRs.** Establish Health and Safety Committees with at least 50% representation from workers. Encourage feedback, especially on any changes.

**Consider how long, how often and how severely workers are exposed to hazards.** The longer, more often and worse the low job control, the higher the risk that workers may be harmed.

**Utilise surveys and tools to assess psychosocial risks** in the workplace, particularly for businesses with over 20 employees who may find the People at Work assessment tool beneficial.

**Establish a system for workers to report their concerns**, while ensuring anonymity and treating their concerns with respect and seriousness to encourage reporting.

**Observe work and behaviours**, such as prolonged work duration, excessive paperwork, or customer frustration, which may indicate low job control.

**Review available information**, including employee retention, incident reports, complaints, time-off records, injuries, incidents, and workers' compensation to identify potential hazards.

**Identify other hazards present and evaluate how they may interact or combine to create new, heightened risks.** For instance, low job control could pose a greater risk in workplaces with high job demands if workers are unable to take breaks or switch tasks to manage fatigue. Finally, consider the duration, frequency, and severity of workers' exposure to hazards, as prolonged and severe exposure to low job control could increase the risk of harm.

### CONTROL MEASURES

***Control measures are specific actions or procedures that are put in place to manage or mitigate identified risks. They are reactive measures that are implemented after risks have been identified and assessed as part of the risk management process. Control measures are designed to reduce the likelihood or impact of risks, and they can take many forms, including administrative controls, engineering controls, and personal protective equipment.***

**Provide vehicles, equipment, tools, and communication equipment suitable for use in the terrain:** Supply workers with appropriate vehicles, tools, equipment, and communication devices that are specifically designed for the conditions and challenges of the remote or isolated work environment.



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**Have at least two workers in remote locations:** Ensure that remote locations have a minimum of two workers present to enhance safety, provide support, and mitigate risks associated with working alone.

**Ensure adequate facilities for workers:** Establish proper facilities and amenities to meet the basic needs of workers, promoting their well-being and comfort in remote or isolated locations, including toilets, drinking water, eating facilities, and personal storage.

**Provide accommodation:** Arrange suitable living accommodations for workers in remote or isolated areas, ensuring their safety, comfort, and ability to rest.

**Regular Check-Ins:** Establish a system for regular check-ins between remote workers and their supervisors or colleagues to maintain communication, monitor well-being, and address any concerns or challenges. Consider a system where workers are required to regularly communicate with a designated point of contact to confirm their well-being and maintain effective communication.

**Have an emergency response plan if workers fail to report in at allotted times:** Develop a comprehensive plan to address potential emergencies or incidents where workers fail to check-in, including protocols for initiating emergency response and ensuring their safety and well-being.

**Lone Worker Safety Measures:** Implement measures to enhance the safety of lone workers, such as providing personal safety devices (e.g., panic buttons), ensuring workers have access to emergency contact information, and setting up protocols for regular check-ins.

**Task Assessment and Planning:** Assess tasks and work activities in remote or isolated environments to identify potential risks and develop safe work procedures. Provide clear guidelines and instructions on how to perform tasks safely.

**Remote Worksite Security:** Implement security measures to protect remote worksites, including physical security, cybersecurity protocols, and data protection measures to safeguard sensitive information.

**Ergonomics and Workstation Setup:** Provide guidance on ergonomic practices and workstation setup for remote workers to prevent musculoskeletal injuries and promote comfort and productivity. Adequate

**Regular Training Updates:** Conduct periodic refresher training sessions to reinforce safety practices, update remote workers on any changes or new risks, and provide opportunities for sharing experiences and lessons learned.

**Incident Reporting and Investigation:** Establish a clear procedure for remote workers to report incidents, near-misses, or safety concerns. Investigate incidents promptly and take appropriate actions to prevent future occurrences.



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### DO

Establish a communication system for workers in remote or isolated areas.

Implement alternative communication systems, such as satellite phones, radios, or EPERBs, as backup options.

Maintain regular check-ins with workers who are in remote or isolated locations.

Clearly define the communication responsibilities, including who will communicate with remote or isolated workers, the frequency of communication, and contingency plans in case of communication difficulties.

Ensure that field vehicles carrying workers in remote or isolated areas are equipped with essential provisions like water, spare tires, and first aid equipment.

### DO NOT

Do not rely solely on workers to initiate contact with the business as they may face obstacles that prevent them from doing so.

Avoid assuming that others will automatically know the appropriate steps to take if workers cannot be reached. It is crucial for all workers and managers to have a comprehensive understanding of the communication systems in use and the emergency protocols in place.

When feasible, consider allowing workers to operate in remote or isolated conditions independently.