Remote or isolated work

Managing the risks of work activities that are isolated from the assistance of other people due to location, lack of communications or contact, and the time or nature of the work.

Note: This is a reformatted version of the procedure last published in December 2012 with some minor changes (refer to the change history). The procedure is under review.
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Introduction

Clause 48 of the Work Health and Safety Regulation 2017 stipulates that a person conducting a business or undertaking must manage risks to the health and safety of a worker associated with remote or isolated work, and must provide a system of work that includes effective communication with the worker.

Workers should be able to conduct their work without risk to their health or safety. They need to take necessary precautions to prevent and effectively manage any potential hazards and risks, especially during remote or isolated work.

The nature of remote or isolated work is such that workers may be isolated from the assistance of other people, due to location, time or the nature of the work being done. Assistance from other people includes medical attention, and the availability of rescue and emergency services.

Various circumstances cause workers to be isolated; they may be working in a sparsely populated area, or performing work activities alone.

Common instances of remote or isolated work include:
- Working far away from population centres
- Work-related travel, particularly over long distances
- Certain work tasks (such as working with specific types of plant or machinery)
- Shift work
- Working alone (eg in the office, alone after normal working hours)
- Other field-based work.

Purpose

Roads and Maritime’s safe systems of work aim to eliminate any exposure to risk from remote or isolated work. In locations where the risks cannot be eliminated, controls must be used to minimise the risks.

It is intended that as an outcome of this procedure:
- Risk of injury to workers is prevented
- Workers are consulted in the risk management process
- Roads and Maritime provides appropriate work health and safety training, instruction, information and supervision
- Safe systems for remote or isolated work are established, including:
  - Emergency planning
  - Emergency procedures
  - Establishing and implementing communication protocols.

1 See Definitions
Scope

This procedure applies to any worker performing remote or isolated work. It covers all workplaces and includes:

- All workers and managers
- Other duty holders who carry out work for Roads and Maritime Services
- Others (such as visitors) who are likely to be directly affected by safety issues relating to remote or isolated work.

All workers must comply with this procedure. Industry partners engaged by Roads and Maritime are required to have in place an equivalent procedure for managing risks associated with workers engaged in remote or isolated work.

Remote or isolated work refers to work activity that is isolated from the assistance of other persons due to location, lack of communications or contact, and the time or the nature of the work. For example:

- Road and bridge construction, maintenance and inspection
- Plant operation
- Equipment installation, repair, maintenance and inspection
- Surveying
- Site visits and inspections
- Working alone with the public
- Working alone after normal working hours (either in the office or in the field)
- Driving in areas where there is no effective communication.

Consultation

Roads and Maritime must consult with workers in relation to remote or isolated work. If such work is identified as a potential workplace hazard, then appropriate control measures must be used to eliminate or, where not practicable, minimise workers' exposure to these hazards.

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2 See Definitions, workplace
3 See Definitions, manager
Remote or isolated work

Once work health and safety (WHS) risks are identified, the most important step in the risk management process is to eliminate those risks. If a risk cannot be eliminated, it must be minimised as far as is reasonably practicable.

1 Identifying hazards

Managers must make sure that hazards of remote or isolated work are identified in accordance with the procedure WHS risk management.

Remote or isolated work can pose several safety hazards. The primary hazards are poor or limited access to emergency assistance and facilities, and the lack of effective communications and contact between workers and their managers.

2 Risk assessment

The following factors need to be considered when assessing the risks:

- The length of time a worker is engaged in remote or isolated work (including how long a person needs to work alone to complete a task)
- A worker’s access to effective communications with their manager and others – taking into account whether emergency communications will function properly at all times; establishing regular contact times with their manager or colleagues, and continued access to these communication tools at all times
- Location of work – keeping in mind whether emergency services can quickly and easily reach a worker, in the event of an occurrence. Additionally, provisions will need to be in place for vehicle breakdowns or similar equipment emergencies that workers may face in remote areas
- The nature of work – the level of risk inherent in a work activity, including the potential for fatigue
- The capabilities of the workers – each worker’s level of skills and abilities, and the extent of their training and work experience. Managers should also be aware if their workers have any pre-existing medical conditions and of their ability to make sound judgments about their own health and safety.

3 Risk control measures for remote or isolated work

After identifying the hazards, and the level of risk for each hazard, it is necessary to identify and implement appropriate risk controls. Where no single measure is sufficient for this, a number or combination of risk controls is usually required.

Potential risk control measures include:

- Developing safe work method statements (SWMS) for remote or isolated work
- Ensuring workers develop travel itineraries and give copies to their managers
- Establish contact procedures for when workers arrive at their work destinations in remote areas, including agreed emergency procedures to be activated if contact is not made within agreed timeframes
• Providing workers with satellite phones and or global positioning systems (GPS) that have an optional tracking feature

• Ensuring that workers are not fatigued, by providing ample rest breaks and recovery time, when they are travelling long distances, especially to remote work locations

• Consulting with workers to ensure they have considered and prepared sufficient quantities of water and food to sustain proper hydration and sustenance, appropriate to the remote or isolated location and work being planned.
Roles and responsibilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roads and Maritime (through its managers from the executive to the front line)</td>
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</table>
- Comply with the legislation and ensure that systems are in place to manage potential workplace health and safety (WHS) risks arising for workers from remote or isolated work  
- Ensure that WHS responsibilities are appropriately defined and that appropriate resources (including financial and time) are provided to ensure effective hazard and risk management for workers. |
| Managers must: | Ensure workplace risk is minimised so far as is reasonably practicable for workers and others by:  
- Providing effective communication tools or devices for workers performing remote or isolated work  
- Providing safe systems of work, including developing safe work method statements (SWMS), travel itineraries, emergency procedures and training in the use of emergency equipment  
- Providing and maintaining safe plant and structures  
- Providing adequate facilities for the welfare at work of workers carrying out remote or isolated work  
- Providing advice, information, training, instruction or supervision that is necessary to protect all persons from risks to their health and safety, arising from remote or isolated work  
- Ensuring the conditions at the workplace are monitored for the purpose of preventing illness or injury to workers  
- Making sure that workers are consulted when determining effective controls  
- Complying with safe systems for remote or isolated work. |
| Workers must: |  
- Ensure they maintain regular contact and communications with their managers, if working from remote areas or in isolation  
- Maintain movement records, if travelling in or between remote areas  
- Make sure they receive adequate training, especially if they are working in isolation with specialist equipment  
- Comply with all instructions provided, including the information in this procedure  
- Comply with Roads and Maritime’s safe systems of work.  
- Participate in the development of SWMS and emergency procedures contact arrangements  
- Ensure that work is undertaken in compliance with approved SWMS. |
| Contractors must: |  
- Ensure that systems are in place to eliminate or minimise WHS risks to workers engaged in remote or isolated work  
- Comply with this procedure. |
| Designers must: |  
- Ensure that any plant, substance or structure is designed without WHS risks, in relation to remote or isolated work. |
Definitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>Consultation</td>
<td>The two-way exchange of information about health and safety. It gives workers a reasonable opportunity to express their views about a health and safety matter, to be taken into account when decisions are made. Note that agreement does not have to be reached. However, opinions must be considered when making decisions that affect a worker’s health, safety or welfare.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hazard</td>
<td>A situation, condition or source that has the potential to lead to negative consequences, harm or loss. A hazard is not the negative outcome itself.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>A person responsible for planning and directing the work of a worker or group of workers, monitoring their work, and taking corrective action.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Occurrence</td>
<td>A series of events and conditions that results in, or has the potential to result in, a non-trivial amount of damage or injury. An occurrence that could have resulted in damage or injury but did not is generally referred to as a near-miss.</td>
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<td>Other duty holders</td>
<td>Refers to persons with a shared WHS responsibility for a work activity, including contractors and subcontractors.</td>
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<tr>
<td>WHS reporting line</td>
<td>The 24-hour telephone service for reporting hazards and occurrences at Roads and Maritime. The number is 1300 131 469.</td>
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<td>Worker</td>
<td>Any person who carries out work in any capacity at a Roads and Maritime workplace – Roads and Maritime employees (including labour hire, apprentices and trainees); professional services contractors and consultants; contractors, subcontractors and their employees; outworkers; students gaining work experience and volunteers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace</td>
<td>A place where work is carried out for Roads and Maritime’s business or undertaking and includes any place where a worker goes or is likely to be, while at work.</td>
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References

Roads and Maritime documents

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<th>Doc no</th>
<th>Procedure</th>
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<td>WHS risk management</td>
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<td>PN066P11</td>
<td>Procedure</td>
<td>Safe work method statements</td>
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External documents

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<td>Safe Work Australia</td>
<td>Code of practice</td>
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<td><a href="http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au">www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au</a></td>
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Document control

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Change history

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<th>Issue</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description of change</th>
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<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>01/09/2017</td>
<td>Updated following WHS Regulation 2017 superseding WHS Regulation 2011. No other changes.</td>
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| 2.1   | 12/08/2016 | Reformatted to current WHS procedure template  
|       |            | Updated definitions  
|       |            | Referred to WHS Regulation clause 48  
|       |            | Included Code of practice in references |
| 2.0   | 12/12/2012 | No change history information is available |

Feedback

Contact WHS Branch with feedback on this document at: onermssms@rms.nsw.gov.au