LONE WORKER SAFETY IN A TIME OF UNCERTAINTY

Emergence of COVID-19

To 'flatten the curve' of the COVID-19 outbreak and ease the burden on healthcare systems on the frontlines of this battle, countries around the world have enacted physical distancing measures. Simultaneously, governments are developing programs to support their economies and secure their supply channels by designating many businesses as 'essential,' including Blackline Safety. These businesses generally fall within the healthcare, financial, retail, manufacturing, utilities, telecom, energy and logistics sectors.

While these businesses are essential, the global pandemic has forced them to adjust their operations. Many businesses are now operating with a reduced workforce and split shifts where multiple teams share daily workflows, keeping physical separations in place as they work to ensure the continued flow of raw materials, finished goods, food, power, clean water and a broad range of services. As a result, more people are working alone than ever before.

WHO ARE LONE WORKERS?

Lone workers are those personnel working in isolation, beyond the sight and sound of others where no one is available to lend a hand. This may be for short periods of time, continuously, intermittently, as well as in remote locations or during callouts and off-hours work.

Some countries, such as Canada, United Kingdom and Australia, have enacted legislation to further define and establish criteria for monitoring lone workers. Others like the United States have no broad requirements for lone worker monitoring. Regardless of legislation, the visibility of lone worker safety has become an increasingly critical topic for businesses around the world and the global pandemic will further accelerate this trend.

COVID-19 HAS INCREASED THE SEPARATION BETWEEN WORKERS

With the global COVID-19 outbreak, the topic of lone worker safety has pushed to the forefront for many of our clients with a reduced number of personnel in the field, throughout facilities and on the road. With the need for physical distancing in all aspects of our lives, the rate of lone work for many businesses has increased significantly.

In many cases, personnel travel alone in vehicles and they work alone or at a distance from others. In other cases, a reduced workforce means that one worker is keeping operations running while proactive maintenance is being deferred. In each of these cases, the risk to personnel is that someone may not be nearby to help should a health or safety incident occur. Organizations need a proactive method to detect and communicate that an incident occurred to protect their lone workers.

HOW TO PROTECT LONE WORKERS WHILE PRACTICING PHYSICAL DISTANCING

With today being World Day for Safety and Health at Work, it feels appropriate to bring greater awareness to the importance of protecting the hundreds of millions of hard-working individuals who remain in the field during this challenging time, putting the delivery of essential goods and services for others above themselves. As leaders in essential industries, it's our job to protect them and keep them safe.

Fortunately, we don't have to start from square one. The connected safety space has evolved over the last several years and lone worker monitoring solutions are becoming commonplace and habitual for many businesses.

The safety industry has designed and manufactured cutting-edge products and solutions, such as connected safety wearables and cloud-hosted software, to help organizations ranging from small businesses to Fortune 500 companies keep lone workers safe. They offer a broad range of capabilities, including lone worker monitoring, gas detection, location technology and employee communications solutions, which help combat the added challenges essential businesses face in today's unique landscape.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LIVE MONITORING

First and foremost, the ability to monitor lone workers in real-time is critical. Every organization that employs isolated personnel must establish a live monitoring team with documented response protocols, employee contact information, escalation paths and alert preferences. Online mapping makes it easy to have full situational awareness for every scenario that may occur — seeing an employee's location and any nearby coworkers that can be dispatched quickly.

CROSS-TEAM COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION

Organizations with lone workers must also implement a robust system of communication that operates without interruption in the event of an incident. Safety products exist that work similarly to a walkie-talkie, enabling personnel to communicate directly in real-time with others, including a live monitoring team, on the same channel. Often, there's no local infrastructure required.

These tools help expand and enhance your communication methods, especially in a time where there are more workers operating in isolation than ever before and response to an incident must be seamless.

LONE WORKER DEVICE CHECKLIST

To help better monitor and protect your lone workers in the field, the following is a comprehensive checklist of technology, applications and safety measures that can help ensure you are proactively enacting every precaution that is relevant to your business to ensure your workers remain safe.

ENSURING SAFETY FOR LONE WORKERS

For organizations that are deemed essential, lone workers are often the reason the world can continue to deliver and receive goods and services that help keep people safe and the economy operating. It's up to us to ensure our isolated personnel can confidently get their job done and return home unharmed.

On World Day for Safety and Health at Work, now is the perfect time to adopt and begin implementing many of the above applications and processes. Together, we can monitor threats and manage every incident from receipt to resolution efficiently, protecting our essential lone workers during this unprecedented time.

Real-time wireless communication	Continuous, bi-directional communication ensures employees can call for help confidently, knowing that their safety is being monitored
No reliance on facility power or Wi-Fi	Continues to work with a facility power or Wi-Fi networking failure
Cloud-hosted infrastructure and monitoring portal	Cloud-hosted monitoring software does not require on-premise software installation and maintenance
Software with documented response protocols	Ensure that every alert type, for every worker role and scenario are managed the right way, by documenting your response protocol
Software with user access controls	Data is more important than ever — ensure that the right people, in the right roles, have access to the software features and data they need to get the job done
Two-way voice calling with lone workers	Monitoring personnel should be able to speak with lone workers via speakerphone
Two-way employee messaging	Monitoring personnel should be able to communicate with lone workers via messaging, (especially important for satellite-based systems)
Automatic fall detection	Detect slips, trips and falls as differentiated from other activity
Automatic no-motion detection	Detect when an employee is no longer moving and may need help
Automatic scheduled worker check-ins	Check-in to confirm that the employee is present and safe but should be used as a last resort. Automated systems ensure you are not relying on employees or managers to "remember" to check in
Option for gas detection and sensors	Detect toxic, asphyxiating and explosive gases that can contribute to the lone worker in distress. Having more information at your fingertips ensures an appropriate response
SOS latch that makes it easy to call for help	Allow employees to call for help without looking, unlike an SOS button that may be difficult to trigger if vision is impaired
Intrinsically safe design	For hazardous locations, electronic devices must be intrinsically safe and not able to trigger a potentially explosive atmosphere
Durability and ingress protection	A device should be rugged and protected from water and dust
Location technology	Assisted-GPS technology provides accurate locations outdoors while location proximity beacons provide accurate indoor locations where GPS signals may be weak or unavailable
Floor and site plans	Locate employees working indoors on a map, in context of their surroundings
Employee mass notifications	Employees should be notified of hazards, events and event weather alerts
Evacuation management	Monitoring personnel should be able to evacuate personnel and account for their progress to muster points
High configurability with wireless updates	Lone worker devices must be configurable for a broad range of scenarios and worker roles

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