

Safety and health alert

11/09 Workers killed while working alone

Incident

Recent fatalities have highlighted the dangers associated with working alone and the importance of having regular communications with isolated workers. In the first incident, a self-employed man was working alone and servicing some machinery. His mobile telephone was in his ute which was parked approximately ten metres away. The machinery fell onto the man, trapping him underneath and he was unable to reach his ute. He did not have any procedure for regular contact with anyone so no one realised anything was wrong and the man subsequently died under the machinery. His body was found several days later.

In the second incident, a farm worker was working alone and the workplace had a procedure of regular contact with isolated workers. There was no requirement to communicate with workers at the end of a working day. The farm manager had spoken with the farm worker over the phone at 2pm. Sometime after this phone call, the worker collided with a cocky's gate (wire gate) across the road, when he was driving an All Terrain Vehicle (ATV). The ATV rolled over and the worker sustained serious head injuries. The worker had been provided with a mobile phone, but was unconscious and unable to call anyone. He lay on the ground all night until a colleague found him the next morning. He died in hospital the next day.

Factors to consider

- The workers had a means of communication with them (mobile telephone).
- In the first incident the worker was trapped and unable to reach his phone. In the second the worker was rendered unconscious by the accident and could not use his phone.
- In the first incident the worker did not have any procedure for regular contact with anyone.
- In the second incident, there was a procedure for regular contact with the isolated worker, but this did not include contact with him at the end of the day's work. The worker was injured sometime after the phone call at 2pm.

Recommendations

1. Persons working alone must have an effective means of communication available at all times (for example mobile telephone, two-way radio, emergency beacon, etc).
2. There must be a procedure for regular contact with the isolated worker. This needs to include regular contact throughout the day as well as contact at the end of the day to confirm the worker has safely completed work.
3. The procedure must include what action to take in the event that contact cannot be made with the isolated worker.

Further information

- WorkSafe Guidance Note – Working Alone
- Safety & Health Alert 02/09 – Farm worker killed in All Terrain Vehicle incident
- Safety & Health Alert 03/08 – Farmer crushed by load

Further information can be obtained from WorkSafe's internet site www.worksafe.wa.gov.au or by contacting customer service on 1300 307 877 or email safety@commerce.wa.gov.au

Date: May 2009

