



# PUBLIC TRUSTEE AND GUARDIAN

## POLICY

DOCUMENT PROPERTIES	
Name of Policy	<b>Working Alone</b>
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Authorised by	Andrew Taylor, Public Trustee and Guardian
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This policy has been prepared to raise awareness about the issues associated with staff working alone and to establish Public Trustee and Guardian (PTG) policy in the regard.

### LEGISLATION

*Work Health and Safety Act 2011*

### DEFINITIONS

'Working alone' is working anywhere a person, worker or staff member is unable to get immediate assistance from colleagues or other people.

Common examples include person/ worker/staff/PTG staff -

- visiting clients in their homes or undertaking services in the community
- on duty or interview rooms
- accompanying clients to appointments after hours
- working by themselves in the office after-hours
- attending PTG's warehouse.

### POLICY

#### Background

PTG staff who work alone face different levels of risk. For this reason, PTG has a policy that staff should avoid working on their own in certain circumstances including -

- visiting clients in their homes or undertaking services in the community,
- in Reception or Interview rooms,
- accompanying clients to appointments after hours.

#### What to look out for?

Exposure to violence and poor access to emergency assistance are the two main hazards of working alone eg a staff member visiting a client alone or inspecting a property may be a greater target for exposure to violence or hazard because they are by themselves.

Working alone can increase the likelihood and severity of workplace injuries eg should you be subject to danger or personal harm and working alone rather than with colleagues who can help.

### **What should employers do?**

The *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* requires employers to eliminate or reduce risks to health and safety, so far as is reasonably practicable.

Employers should identify and control the risks associated with the job (eg manual handling, plant and equipment, noise etc) and risks associated with working alone.

Employers must consult with health and safety representatives and workers, so far as is reasonably practicable.

Consultation must occur when an employer -

- identifies or assesses risks
- makes decisions about ways to address risks
- makes decisions about providing information and training
- plans to change the way work is done.

To eliminate or reduce the risk of working alone, consider the following safety measures -

- Buddy system – some jobs present such a level of risk that staff should not do the work alone. PTG has a buddy policy under which visits to clients' homes, inspection of properties and interviewing clients that pose a risk both within (interview rooms) and outside of office, should be undertaken in pairs. Situations involving clients with a known propensity for violence or where no information is available fall into this category.
- Environmental design – workplaces and their surrounds can be designed to reduce the likelihood of violence. Environmental design features include:
  - controlling access through installing effective barriers
  - layout of interview rooms
  - increased visibility
  - monitored CCTV.
- Communication or location systems – systems that allow workers to easily provide access to assistance. PTG provides a mobile phone for staff to use when working outside of the office to enable communication where required (e.g. calling in or checking in regularly when support workers visit clients in their homes).
- Alarms – such as duress alarms can also notify authorities of workplace emergencies. PTG's interview rooms and Reception are fitted with duress alarms. These are regularly checked.
- Movement records – It is important that staff inform their unit or Director when out of office, where they are and what they are doing or who they are visiting.
- Training – staff who deal with potentially violent clients need to be aware of the risks and be apprised of the protection kits provided in all PTG vehicles.
- Knowledge sharing – PTG staff should share information about potential hazards or risk, clients with a reputation for violence etc.

### **Protection kits**

PTG has provided and maintain personal protection kits in the boot of each PTG vehicle.

These kits provide protective clothing and basic first aid supplies that should be used as required. For example, PTG staff entering a client premises that may present a risk to their health eg unhygienic conditions, mould or long grass should take adequate precautions and use protective clothing, masks as needed.

### **Warehouse**

PTG has established a warehouse at Mitchell used to store client effects and office records. Staff attending the warehouse may do so on their own but should take a mobile phone and exercise the same caution they would in the office eg when using ladders or lifting objects.

**Attending the office after-hours**

PTG does not require staff to work overtime unless working with another person.

PTG also discourages staff from attending the office to work after hours and on weekends. Doing so presents a health/safety risk in the form of being isolated should something happen, absence of air-conditioning or failing to have an appropriate work/life balance.

**Exclusions**

The following exclusions apply -

- PTG has a practice of attending outside premises and meeting a service provider without a buddy e.g. PTG's Property Officer may be comfortable where she knows who she is meeting.
- Staff attending community or government meetings.

**END OF POLICY**