

LONEALERT

Overseeing Working aLone

The news and views from one of the UK's leading providers of lone worker solutions

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Winter is here - and it's brought a whole host of hazards with it

Winter brings with it a whole host of extra hazards for lone workers. Mathew Colley, LONEALERT's Sales & Marketing Manager, discusses what employers need to consider to protect their workforce now the seasons have changed

Winter is well and truly here. The alarm clock has apparently started sounding in the middle of the night, the morning routine now includes the 10-minute rigmarole of defrosting frozen car windows and trips to and from work are conducted under a veil of darkness.

With darkness now arriving mid-afternoon, those summer evenings spent bathed in warmth and sunlight in beer gardens are nothing but a distant memory.

But these seasonal changes have far greater implications than just annoyance to the daily routine or a change in social settings - they have a huge impact on our working conditions. It is therefore vital that employers consider these increasing environmental risks when it comes to deciding how best to protect their workforce, especially those lone workers who will be carrying out their jobs and battling the elements alone.

Winter brings with it a whole host of extra risks for workers. Shorter hours of daylight increase the potential for accidents, including slips, trips and falls. When visibility is poor, there is a heightened risk of accidents in unlit areas - as well as less chance of injured workers being spotted by passers-by should an incident occur. *As an employer, if one of your lone workers fell and injured themselves, have you equipped them with the right solution to allow them to send for help immediately?* Additionally, these shortened daylight hours can increase the potential for aggressive or threatening situations to arise for some lone workers, such as those working out and about visiting clients. Take an estate agent, for example, showing potential buyers around homes. Their roles put them at a potential risk all year round, as they travel to unfamiliar locations to meet with strangers. But add in these winter conditions, which may see them having to travel through dimly-lit streets or dark alleyways to get to their meetings, and it may be that extra considerations need to be made or policies reviewed to ensure they are never left vulnerable. *Is it better to reschedule their appointment*

for the next day or pair up your staff whilst out and about rather than have them out in unfamiliar locations in the dark on their own? If a threatening situation does arise, can your lone worker discreetly call for help so help can be sent?

Temperatures are dropping rapidly and for lone workers working outside, these freezing conditions and biting winds increase fatigue and makes the use of hand-held machinery increasingly dangerous and difficult. Buildings and utilities can also suffer from frozen pipes and heating systems that break down and fail to work. *Have you ensured your lone workers*



are not facing unnecessary risks during the winter by providing them with the correct, properly maintained equipment and means to call for help if needed?

Winter brings with it more rain, snow, ice

and wind - all of which can affect lone workers, especially those travelling long distances in potentially treacherous conditions on roads or those working outside all day. As an employer, you have a duty of care to your workforce and to ensure systems are in place to protect them from harm.

Robust procedures are imperative to protect lone workers all year round, but particularly during these winter months when they are facing so many extra risks. The good news is that there are so many devices and solutions available to protect lone workers from all walks of life, whether it be the discreet ID badge that allows the wearer to raise an immediate panic alarm secretly to specially-trained operators, robust motion-sensitive devices that detect falls and raise the alarm when a worker can't or solutions that can track workers in even the remotest locations with no mobile phone signal or other means of getting help. All lone workers have the right to feel safe when they go to work, whatever their job role - and whatever the weather.

Show you care at Christmas

When you think of Christmas, you probably think of a time for giving, for sharing and for spending time with loved ones.

Whilst all families' Christmas traditions vary, it's likely that at some point you will be planning to sit down surrounded by those you love to tear open the wrapping paper on carefully-chosen gifts, sit down to tuck into a hearty freshly-cooked feast and crash in front of the TV for re-runs of Only Fools & Horses or to watch Miracle on 34th Street for at least the 34th time.

However your day pans out before the obligatory afternoon nap brought on by over-indulging on Bucks Fizz, turkey and mountains of accompaniments that don't seem to exist throughout the rest of the year (pigs in blankets, anyone?), the one thing you know is that you will be spending it in the company of those you treasure the most.

Sadly though, not everyone is looking forward to Christmas with so much cheer - their spirit saddened, no doubt, by the knowledge that they will be spending the celebrations alone. In fact, recent figures reveal that a staggering 4 million people in the UK face sitting down for Christmas dinner on their own this year, despite two thirds of us wanting to help out.

For elderly people, the reasons for being alone this Christmas are vast-ranging. Bereavement, low income, lack of public transport, loss of mobility, fear of crime and poor health are among the issues that can see an elderly or vulnerable person on their own on Christmas Day. Surveys have also suggested that, in some cases, elderly people have found themselves alone because they have refused to let anyone know of their situation with many considering themselves a burden to family members. A survey from Age UK explained that between 8 and 10% of older people will be feeling very lonely at Christmas.

And it's not just the elderly who face the festive period alone. The younger generation is certainly no more immune to the sting of spending Christmas on their own than any other, with figures suggesting that some will even choose not to socialise because they are ashamed of not having the income to lavish others with gifts or spend on celebrations to mark the festive season. A recent survey suggests that 30% of 18 - 24 year olds will feel lonely, despite not actually being alone.

Whilst you're thinking of the wonderful Christmas that awaits surrounded by love and cheer, spare a thought for those who could be alone at this emotional time of year - and maybe you can help to make a difference.

If you know of neighbours that are elderly or live alone, knock on their door and offer to help. Maybe they could do with a hand getting in some Christmas shopping? Would they perhaps appreciate some support putting up decorations? Do you have food to spare to feed an extra mouth on the day of goodwill? Or would it be too much to ask to send a Christmas card just so they know that there's someone thinking of them?

A simple phone call to check someone is ok can make the world of difference, whilst charities and food banks are crying out for donations to spread some festive cheer to those less fortunate. Christmas is not a time to be alone, so don't let anybody you know be lonely this Christmas. Show some real festive spirit and let them know there's somebody who cares.

Stay safe during the festive period

As the famous song goes, 'tis the season to be jolly! But it's a fact that at this time of year our threat levels increase - whether it be from risks of accidents due to plummeting temperatures, sockets filled with twinkling lights overheating or stairwells crammed with gifts.

Here's some tips to make sure you and your home are safe and secure this Christmas so you can concentrate on having fun:

1. Don't overload sockets: Transforming your home into a magical winter wonderland with hundreds of twinkling fairy lights, candles and festive decorations is one of the highlights of the festive season. But make sure you don't underestimate the devastating damage these festive favourites can cause. It can take less than a minute for decorations to go up in flames - a statistic fire services across the UK are sadly familiar with every Christmas season. Take simple steps to make sure your beautiful displays don't end in devastation - never overload plug sockets and extension cables with strings of lights, keep flammable decorations away from naked flames and make sure all lights are turned off and candles blown out when you leave the house or go to bed at night.

2. Don't water the Christmas tree: Water and lights linked to an electric supply are not a happy mix.

3. Don't tempt the burglars: Burglary rates rise over the Christmas period as opportunist thieves hijack the season to get their hands on your hard-earned gifts. Reduce your chances of becoming a burglary victim by making sure you don't advertise the presents being stored in your home by leaving them on show. There's not many things as tempting to a thief as a treasure trove of festive goodies left out for the taking.

4. Take late-night shopping trips with friends: With the Christmas season now in full flow, shops are increasing their opening hours to make the most of the last-minute purchases. Late-night shopping can be a huge help for busy mums and workers whose shifts often make it difficult for them to get to the shops before the shutters come down. But, shopping into the late hours can leave some feeling vulnerable. If possible, try to go late-night shopping with a friend or relative so you aren't an easy target for thieves as you walk back to your car alone under the weight of Christmas presents. Make sure you tell people where you are and what time you're due back.

5. Wear practical clothing: The bikinis, shorts and sandals have been well and truly demoted to the back of the wardrobe as the summer sunshine (what we saw of it) is replaced by below-zero temperatures and night-time arriving in the afternoon. And now as the winter weather really kicks in make sure you think practical - not fashionable - when it comes to clothing and footwear this winter period. Think wellies, hats, scarves, gloves, wooly coats and body warmers. Stilettos and polished shoes are not going to keep you on your feet if ol' Jack Frost has been to visit - however good you think they make your outfit look.

6. Stay vigilant at Christmas parties: Christmas parties are all about letting your hair down and having fun - but, with the alcohol on tap and spirits at a festive high, there's potential hazards at every turn. Keep your wits about you by making preparations to get home and sticking with friends. (see our full Christmas party tips list separately)

7. Plan car journeys in advance: Make sure to plan ahead when taking car journeys. Keep supplies of water, food and blankets in your car in case of a breakdown so you never find yourself dehydrated, hungry or cold whilst you wait for your knight in the form of a shining recovery truck to arrive.

8. It's better to be late than never: We've all been there - work starts in 10 minutes and the journey there takes nine-and-a-half minutes. You know this because you've calculated it precisely to the second to give yourself maximum time in bed before the working day starts. Sadly, all carefully made calculations go straight out of the window when the winter weather hits. It takes longer to get dressed with three added layers, the run to the car is replaced by a slow, tentative tip toe to avoid falling and when you get there you find it is completely frozen. The clock's ticking and the thought's crossing your mind to create a mini peep hole on the windscreen to see through the ice and snow. Don't do it! It's better to be a few minutes late but at least be safe. Thoroughly de-ice your car before setting off - and just remember to start out a few minutes earlier in future.

9. De-clutter when you can: When it comes to Christmas Day itself the home can quickly become a zone filled with hazards. Wrapping paper has been ripped to shreds and strewn over the floor and where there was once floor there is now a sea of toys and gifts. Make sure to keep areas of the home clutter-free to avoid trips and falls, especially the staircase, which can be particularly dangerous. Nobody wants to spend Christmas in A&E with a broken bone.

10. Keep your wits about you in the kitchen: Everyone knows the kitchen is the heart of the home at Christmas. No Christmas would be truly complete without the smell of turkey, fresh veg and festive pudding wafting through the house - but don't forget that this magical hub of tasty treats is also filled with hazards. Pots bubbling with boiling water, a hot oven and the gas stove on the go to name a few - there's plenty of accidents waiting to happen if you're not careful.



Lonely at work this Christmas

From retailers to beauticians, hospital workers and emergency service staff, Christmas is the busiest time of year. But that doesn't mean it can't be lonely, says Lone Alert's Sales & Marketing Manager, Mathew Colley.

For many, winter heralds a time for celebrations and get togethers with loved ones. But with ever-increasing seasonal pressures, extended opening hours and skeleton shift rotas - coupled with dark nights rolling in and plummeting temperatures - Christmas can be a lonely and exhausting time for workers from a full spectrum of industries.

Whether it be the hairdresser and beautician working late in the salon alone to cater for the extra clientele demanding to look their best for Christmas celebrations, the cleaner tasked with tidying up the office block after the festive party before the morning shift arrives, the factory worker keeping the business ticking over during shut down or the worker out in the field ensuring the crop of Christmas trees is looking its best, the festive period can be a tough one for many workers.

Take retail as a prime example.

During the daytime/early evening consumer peak, you'd probably struggle to find a place quite as busy and bustling with people as a High Street supermarket than at Christmas time.

But there is another reality to working in retail over Christmas.

In order to meet the huge customer demand over the festive period, opening hours are extended. For a worker, this doesn't necessarily mean longer working hours, but instead a change in working patterns that can often mean working until after store closing at midnight.

Stores themselves can be a threatening place when the doors are open until late at night. They transform from being a hub of activity, bustling with busy shoppers, to huge empty spaces that can leave members of the skeleton staff crews feeling vulnerable for many reasons - whether that be from the threat of potentially abusive customers or the hazards involved with sorting stock in the warehouse with less colleagues.

On top of this, at some stores, it is agreed that the closest parking spaces are saved for shoppers meaning staff face a walk to their cars when the shutters come down at the end of the night.

In the summer, when the doors close at a reasonable hour and a full shift finishes at the same time, workers generally have company to walk back to the car and feel safe in daylight. But with staggered shifts over Christmas and it being pitch black when the doors close, that short walk to the car can be a daunting one. For a number of retail workers - whether they be on the shop floor, security, office or warehouse - Christmas time at work brings with it a feeling of vulnerability.

Then there's health workers. For health workers in NHS departments already under huge pressure to treat patients in the face of tight budgets, winter can prove to be an incredibly stressful period of excessively long working hours and sometimes impossible demands.

Winter contingency plans are executed in hospitals to cope with the soaring numbers of patients, often leading to the opening up of extra beds to cope, whilst for community nurses visiting patients' homes, winter heralds increasing working hours in bitterly cold temperatures on dark winter nights.

It is not just the increase in potentially life-threatening illnesses that put increasing pressure on health workers but also the surge in accidents, trips and falls associated with the cold weather, including icy roads and pavements, as well as alcohol consumption.

For paramedics and frontline health workers, this not only means an increase in workload - but it also can lead to a spike in attacks by intoxicated patients.

Latest figures reveal that violence against NHS staff has rocketed over the past five years - with almost 200 assaults on doctors, nurses and other NHS staff in England every day. In 2015-16, there were 70,555 assaults on NHS workers - up 4% on the previous year - which will be of no comfort to the medical staff approaching the winter period when attacks traditionally rise.

Then there's the police officers dealing with the spike in crime rates associated with Christmas, ranging from burglaries and robberies to alcohol-fuelled assaults and attacks, or the firefighters dealing with increasing numbers of accidents and incidents that the season brings such as blazes caused by overheating sockets or the average 20% increase in road accidents during the winter months. Or the cleaner single-handedly taking on duties for an office block due to annual leave and rising absence rates. Or the nail technician tasked with closing the salon alone on a dark evening after the rest of the staff have left.

It's ironic that the busiest time of year for many business can actually be the loneliest and most exhausting for the people working in them.





*Solutions
for all
lone workers
all year
round*

*Merry Christmas
to you & all of your lone workers
from all of us at*

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