



## HAZARDS

# Working Alone at Night in Aged Care

**Workers in the aged care sector are often required to work alone at night and this may increase the likelihood of some workplace hazards or risks occurring. If an incident does occur the consequences may be more severe because immediate support is not available.**

Whilst aged care facilities operate 24 hours a day, staffing requirements at night are generally much lower. It may be a quieter time, with most residents sleeping and few, if any visitors, but the same hazards are present as during the day. Aged care workers on night shift are at risk of injury through manual handling practices, slips and trips or improper use of hazardous chemicals. They may experience bullying or become the victim of occupational violence. The big difference is that a worker who is alone at night may be unable to access immediate assistance from colleagues or other people if an incident occurs.

Factors which may affect the level of risk a worker faces may include:

- ◆ The length of time spent working alone.
- ◆ The location and nature of the work.
- ◆ The competencies and characteristics of the worker.
- ◆ The access a worker has to tools for contacting colleagues, management or outside providers i.e. walkie talkies, mobile phones, duress alarms, etc.
- ◆ The processes and procedures in place should an incident occur.

### When might this hazard occur?

An emergency situation may arise where a resident suddenly becomes unwell or has a serious fall. In order to treat the resident quickly and prevent further injury, a worker chooses to lift or move the resident without the assistance of a co-worker or a mechanical lifting aid and as such, sustains a serious injury themselves.

Working at night may increase the risk of occupational violence. An intruder may attempt to gain access to an aged care facility to obtain cash, drugs or other valuables at night, physically attacking and injuring a worker.

Under work health and safety legislation, aged care facilities have a duty to provide a safe and healthy workplace. In order to meet these obligations and their duty of care to residents, an aged care facility must have robust policies in place in relation to working alone at night. The facility must also provide adequate training and respond to and investigate incidents.



## What do you need to do?

- ◆ Consult with workers, work health and safety representatives and supervisors to identify the risks associated with working alone at night in your workplace.
- ◆ Ask yourself these questions:
  - What might happen?
  - When might it happen?
  - Why might it happen?
  - What could cause this to happen?  
(there may be multiple causes)
- ◆ Consider what you are currently doing to manage the risk (also known as controls).
- ◆ Ensure policies and procedures are in place for working alone at night.
- ◆ Ensure procedures for emergencies such as fire, hazardous chemical spills and evacuations are appropriate for workers who work alone.
- ◆ Provide all workers with appropriate information, instruction and training to identify the risk factors associated with working alone at night and the role they have to play in reducing the risk.
- ◆ Identify workers who may be at greater risk.
- ◆ Ensure there is a means of communication available which will enable the worker to call for help in the event of an emergency (mobile phone, duress alarm etc).
- ◆ Regularly review the controls in place and develop and implement any new controls necessary.

## Practical Help

- ◆ **Safe Work Australia**

If you would like further information about Working Alone at Night in Aged Care please contact the *risksupport* Helpdesk on:

**1300 660 827**  
**helpdesk@risksupport.org.au**

**[www.risksupport.org.au](http://www.risksupport.org.au)**

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