

Do OHS “Working Alone” Protections Cover Telecommuters? – Ask The Expert



In BC, OHS working alone safety measures apply to employees who work from home.

QUESTION

Do the safety measures OHS laws require you to take to protect workers who work alone or in isolation apply to telecommuters who work from home if there are other adults in the house? We're from BC?

ANSWER

It depends on who those other adults are.

EXPLANATION

Section 4.20.1 of the BC *OHS Regulation* defines “working alone or in isolation” as “working in circumstances where assistance would not be readily available to the worker (a) in case of an emergency, or (b) in case the worker is injured or in ill health.” WorkSafeBC guidelines list factors to consider in determining if assistance would be “readily available to the worker” for purposes of interpreting the requirement:

- **Presence of others:** Are other people in the vicinity?
- **Awareness:** Will other persons capable of providing assistance be aware of the worker's need?
- **Willingness:** Is it reasonable to expect those other persons will provide assistance?
- **Timeliness:** Will assistance be provided within a reasonable period of time?

We know that there are other persons in the home. The fact that they're adults suggests but doesn't necessarily prove that they're capable of helping the worker. So, you need to get more information about those other people to determine if they could provide “readily available” assistance to the worker in accordance with the WorkSafeBC criteria. If they don't, for example because they're disabled or elderly, you'd have to treat the telecommuter as a worker working alone or in isolation.