

## LONE WORKER PROTECTION – WHY NOT USE A MOBILE PHONE?

As more and more employers start to recognise their legal obligations to protecting mobile and lone working employees many will look for ways of applying technology to the cause. It is inevitable therefore that many hundreds of thousands of lone working professionals will be asked to use a mobile phone, possibly one they already own, to raise an alert should they find themselves in trouble. In following this path, employers are failing to recognise two primary issues, in the process they are unwittingly creating new issues for themselves and their workers. The two primary issues not being addressed are:

1. Protecting lone working staff needs more than just a device. It needs a thorough look at lone working practices, on-going and dynamic risk assessment by both employer and employee and where appropriate the on-going training of those involved (workers and management).
2. A mobile phone is a communications tool, it is not necessarily an effective tool to use when faced with an aggressor or other form of danger. Arguably, by providing a worker with a mobile phone an employer increases the risks faced by the worker.

### What are the issues for the worker?

If risks are identified as potentially coming from those others who the worker interfaces with then consider the following:

- If a worker faces an aggressive approach (verbal or physical) will they be able to get to a mobile phone all of the time? Most people will carry a mobile in a bag or in a pocket. If an attack occurs, how easy is it for that worker to access their phone. What if their bag is in a different part of the room or if the attack occurs whilst walking across a car park?
- When faced with an aggressor how likely is it that a worker will be able to use a mobile phone without raising awareness of their actions? By default, using a phone is an overt action. The user may have to remove a keylock on the phone; they will certainly need to identify the correct keys to use to make a call. All of this assumes of course that the phone is switched on in the first place.

The simple fact is that a mobile is not a good tool to use in such circumstances. Furthermore, it can easily be seen that the workers are potentially increasing the risks to themselves if they try to use a mobile when faced with an aggressor. Add to that the risk of them being targeted for robbery and it is clear a better solution to the problem than simply handing out mobile phones is required.

### What are the issues for the employer?

All mobile phones and their bills need to be managed and accounted for. An employer has a legal responsibility to all of its employees whether they be full-time, part-time or volunteers. The issues therefore are:

- How do I manage the mobiles I give to all my workers and account for these?
- How do I ensure business v private calls are identified and managed accordingly?

The other, arguably larger issue facing those employers who provide mobile phones to their employees is how to manage the risks identified. If a phone can be proven as increasing the risks facing a lone worker, how does an employer account for this?