Don’t Tempt Fate by Working Solo



What’s at Stake?

The freedom of working alone sounds like a dream job for many, but the downside is there’s nobody around to help you if something goes wrong. Social workers, home care nurses, custodians, security guards and late-night convenience store clerks all face hazards from working solo. People might not be able to hear your calls for help and come to your rescue when you work alone.

What’s the Danger?

Sharla Marie Collier, 20, had everything to live for. Recently engaged, saving to buy a house, and employed in her dream job – helping troubled youth. “She liked the whole job, being there and helping out,” said her father, Greg Collier. “She loved her job.

Sharla’s job was to socially rehabilitate youngsters in residential care. This included taking them on recreational outings, such as shopping, playing mini-golf or going to the movies

On Saturday November 16, 2002, something went horribly wrong. She was on her third visit with a youth from the center where she worked, and they went for an afternoon walk along a popular river trail. The teen patient clubbed her to death with a large tree branch during this walk.

How to Protect Yourself

If you work alone, you must protect yourself. How? By understanding the risks you face and knowing what work you can and cannot perform safely by yourself.

Tasks that are dangerous to do alone include working:

- In confined spaces.
- With potentially hazardous equipment such as chainsaws.
- At heights.
- With hazardous substances or materials under pressure.
- In temperature extremes.
- In areas where wild animals may appear and attack.

You shouldn’t perform these jobs until you’ve been adequately trained and know when to stop working or when to call a supervisor for help. Assess the hazards of the job.

Here are some important questions to ask yourself before you work alone:

- If you’re injured on the job and there’s no one around to help, do you have basic first aid knowledge?
- Do you carry a well-stocked first aid kit?
- Is your vehicle well-maintained to reduce the chances of a breakdown in a remote area?
- Do you pack blankets, food, and water in the event you’re unexpectedly stranded?
- If you work in the wilderness, are you prepared if you’re attacked by a wild animal?
- Do you report close calls to reduce the chances of more serious incidents occurring in the future?
- Do you maintain contact with your supervisor on a regular basis?

Final Word

Get to know and use the company’s check-in/ checkout procedures and maintain regular contact with a supervisor or co-worker when you’re alone in the field. You can enjoy the freedom of working alone if you understand and guard against the risks.