G4.21 Procedures for checking the well-being of workers 🟡NEW

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Regulatory excerpt
Section 4.21 of the *OHS Regulation ("Regulation")* states:

(1) The employer must develop and implement a written procedure for checking the well-being of a worker assigned to work alone or in isolation.

(2) The procedure for checking a worker's well-being must include the time interval between checks and the procedure to follow in case the worker cannot be contacted, including provisions for emergency rescue.

(3) A person must be designated to establish contact with the worker at predetermined intervals and the results must be recorded by the person.

(4) In addition to checks at regular intervals, a check at the end of the work shift must be done.

(5) The procedure for checking a worker's well-being, including time intervals between the checks, must be developed in consultation with the joint committee or worker health and safety representative, as applicable.

(6) Time intervals for checking a worker's well-being must be developed in consultation with the worker assigned to work alone or in isolation.

Purpose of the guideline
The purpose of this guideline is to

- Provide information on the application of the requirements for checking the well-being of workers
- Elaborate on time intervals to use when checking
- Provide information on acceptable methods for checking, including
- technologies with particular application in populated areas, and
- means of checking that may be of particular use in remote locations

Application
As of February 1, 2008, the requirement to develop and implement a written procedure for checking the well-being of workers under 4.21 *applies to all workplaces where workers are working alone or in isolation.*

Previously, section 4.21 applied to *workers who were working alone under conditions which present the risk of disabling injury if the worker might not be able to secure assistance in the event of injury or other misfortune.* As of February 1, 2008, the requirement to be working under certain conditions has been removed, and section 4.21 now applies to all workplaces where workers are working alone or in isolation.

Time intervals
Time intervals should be developed after considering the risks to which the worker is exposed. They must be developed in consultation with the worker assigned to work alone or in isolation, and with the joint committee or worker health and safety representative as applicable. This may be done as part of the hazard identification process required under section 4.20.2 of the *Regulation*. High risk activities require shorter time intervals between checks.

Methods for checking well-being
In selecting procedures to check a worker's well-being, employers should give preference to procedures which allow for the visual confirmation of the worker's well-being. An alternative is two-way voice contact between workers at the site. Where this is not practicable, employers may use other

approaches. For example, an employer could require workers to make phone calls at regularly scheduled intervals to workers at another location.

Employers may also decide to use one of a number of available technologies to check the well-being of workers. An acceptable system is one that allows the worker to send an OK signal at predetermined intervals and which activates procedures to contact the worker or initiate emergency response if the worker does not send a signal at a predetermined interval or if a signal for assistance is received. If a technology is used the employer is still required to develop written procedures and ensure there is the appropriate documentation of check-ins.

Information is provided below on technologies and systems that may have particular application in populated areas. In addition, there is discussion of various types of check systems that may be particularly applicable to work in remote locations.

Use of worker check in technologies - in populated areas
Technologies that may be of assistance, particularly in populated areas include, but are not limited to

- **Call-in systems:** These systems are available from security service providers and only require access to a phone. Workers call into the system at scheduled intervals during their shift and enter a code to confirm their safety. In the event that a worker fails to phone in by his or her scheduled interval, the service provider follows a predetermined protocol to make contact with the worker. If the worker cannot be contacted, emergency assistance will be sent.

- **Externally monitored panic alarm devices:** A number of security service providers offer panic alarm devices for use in their service area, which workers can carry with them, eliminating the need for access to a phone. As is the case with the call-in systems, panic alarm devices can be programmed to require a worker to confirm his or her safety at scheduled intervals.

  Some devices also offer a "person down" feature, which will notify the security provider when a worker does not move for a given period of time, as well as a panic button, which will automatically alarm the security provider of an emergency. In the event that the person down or panic alarm feature is activated, or a worker fails to confirm his or her safety at a scheduled interval, the service provider will attempt to contact the worker before emergency assistance is sent. These devices are designed to be carried on the worker at all times, and can be worn around the worker's neck or on his or her belt. It is the employer's responsibility to ensure that workers consistently wear the device when working alone or in isolation.

- **Internally monitored panic alarm devices:** Panic alarm devices can also be purchased with a monitoring station that is operated by the employer, rather than a security service provider, for use in their workplace. The employer's monitoring station can be linked to a number of different panic alarm devices, and will emit an audible signal in the event that a worker fails to confirm his or her safety or the person down or panic button features are activated. In such cases, the employer is expected to follow their written procedures to ensure the worker is contacted or assistance is provided.

  As with the other systems, the procedures for an internally monitored device must include the intervals at which a worker is expected to confirm his or her well-being. At a minimum, the monitoring station must be checked at these intervals by the worker assigned to check the well-being of the workers who are working alone or in isolation, and the results of the checks recorded. To ensure that assistance is provided quickly in the event that a panic alarm or person down feature is activated by a worker, the station should be monitored more regularly. This can be accomplished by having the worker(s) responsible for checking the station remain within the vicinity of the station, as is practicable, so that they can be alerted in the event that an audible signal is emitted.

Checking worker well-being in remote locations
Examples of work activities in remote areas include range riding, timber cruising, surveying, fire watch, beetle probes, mineral exploration, seismic blasting, and guide work. Working alone in such areas can present particular risks given that the work is typically done outdoors, and often in difficult terrain or otherwise relatively inaccessible areas.

Such areas also present particular challenges to providing a means of checking worker well-being. Land-based telephone lines and security services are typically unavailable, and cell phone coverage may be limited or non existent.

However, there are a number of types of systems that may be of use in such locations. Examples include

- Wireless satellite hand-held alerting and tracking devices: These are proving to be a promising type of system at a relatively modest cost. Several systems are available, and provide capabilities such as alerts, simple messaging, and very importantly GPS coordinates of the worker. Systems are available that can provide coverage in most outdoor situations. Such systems should be tested for reliability in the areas they are intended to be used.
- Satellite phones: These can also be effective in remote areas, and offer the advantage of permitting extended two way voice communication. They should be evaluated for reliability in the areas they are intended to be used.
- Radio transmitters: In some circumstances, for example where there is a relatively permanent base site with power generation capability, it may be feasible to use a radio transmitter that provides surface-to-surface radio contact. In some areas there are repeater systems that can be accessed for a wider area of communication.
- Crew contact: Where a crew is working in a remote location but the work involves working alone, it may be possible to arrange work so that the crew will meet periodically during the work day, or have another means of alerting one another. If a worker doesn't arrive on time at the pre-determined point, or otherwise signal his or her well-being then a search procedure can be initiated by the other worker(s). The successful use of this approach involves the following five elements:
- A pre-determined meeting place or other means of contact
- A pre-determined time for contact
- Information provided by the workers beforehand on their expected routes and areas of activity
- A procedure for the crew to follow in the event a worker does not make contact
- A plan in place to find a missing worker

In addition, depending on any limits to the kind of assistance that the coworkers on the crew can provide, it may be necessary to have an effective means of communication between the crew and the home base for the operation.