Lone worker emergencies: what to do when no one can see you

Why being out of sight changes the rules

When you work alone, every emergency starts the same way: there is no one there to notice. A slip in a remote corner of a warehouse, a sudden medical issue on a rural site, a fall from a ladder behind a building - these events become dangerous not just because of the injury but because of the delay in getting help. The moment something goes wrong, the clock starts ticking, and the only person who can trigger a response is you.

Working alone is common across many industries in New Zealand. Farmers, field service technicians, security guards, cleaners working after hours, and many others spend significant time out of sight of colleagues. The risk is not that accidents happen more often - it is that when they do, the consequences can be far worse simply because no one witnesses the event. Understanding what to do in those first critical minutes is essential for anyone who works solo.

The core problem: you are the only witness

In a normal workplace, a colleague hears a shout, sees someone fall, or notices that a person has not returned from a task. They can call for help, provide first aid, or direct emergency services to the exact spot. When you work alone, that safety net does not exist. The emergency might happen in a location where no one will pass by for hours. It might leave you unable to move, unable to speak, or unconscious.

This is where having a reliable way to call for help becomes critical. A lone worker alarm is designed specifically for this situation. It is not just a phone in your pocket - it is a dedicated device or app that can send an alert even when you cannot dial a number. The best ones combine multiple ways to signal for help, so that whatever happens, the alarm has a chance to work.

What should you actually do in an emergency?

The specific actions depend on the type of emergency, but the general principles are the same. The goal is to get help to your exact location as quickly as possible, even if you cannot speak or move.



If you can act: press the SOS button

The most straightforward action is to press the SOS button on your lone worker device. This should be your first move in any emergency where you have a moment to think. The SOS button sends an immediate alert to a monitoring centre or to your pre-set emergency contacts. It typically includes your GPS location, so responders know exactly where you are. Do not wait to see if you can handle the situation yourself. Press the button first, then assess.

If you cannot move: rely on automatic alerts

Some emergencies leave you unable to press a button. A fall, a medical event like a seizure or a stroke, or a sudden impact can render you unconscious or immobilised. In these cases, the device's automatic features become your lifeline. Fall detection and man-down alerts use sensors to detect a sudden impact or a lack of movement. If the device senses that you have fallen and not moved for a set period, it sends an alert automatically. This is why wearing the device correctly matters - if it is not positioned properly, these sensors may not work as intended.

If you can speak: use two-way voice

Many lone worker alarms include two-way voice communication. If you are conscious and able to talk, speaking directly to a responder can speed up the help you receive. You can describe what happened, confirm your exact location, and receive instructions. The responder can also hear background noises that might help them understand the situation. Even if you can only

whisper or breathe heavily, the voice channel gives valuable information to the person on the other end.

If you are in a remote area: plan for delayed response

Working in a remote location adds another layer of complexity. Help may take 30 minutes or more to arrive, and in some cases, it might be hours. In these situations, your alarm should send an SMS alert to a designated contact who knows the area and can coordinate with local emergency services. Your response plan should include what to do while waiting - finding shelter, applying first aid, and conserving energy. The GPS location sent by the device is crucial here, as it guides responders to the exact spot rather than a general area.

The role of a response plan

Having a device is only half the solution. The other half is knowing who gets the alert and what they do with it. A well-designed response plan specifies who is contacted first, how they verify the emergency, and what steps they take to get help to you. Without a plan, an alert is just a notification that might sit unread until someone happens to check it.

Your employer or manager should work with you to set up this plan. It should list your emergency contacts, their phone numbers, and what each person is responsible for. It should also include a pre-alert feature - a way to notify your contacts that you have started a high-risk task, so they know to expect a check-in call. If you do not check in on time, the pre-alert escalates into a full emergency response. This is especially useful for tasks like working at height, entering a confined space, or driving a long distance in poor conditions.

How a lone worker alarm fits into the picture

A lone worker alarm is the tool that makes all of this possible. It is the bridge between you, alone and out of sight, and the people who can help you. The device itself is usually small enough to wear on a belt, a lanyard, or a wristband. It contains a GPS module, a cellular transmitter, and sensors for motion and impact. When you press the SOS button, or when the device detects a fall or a period of inactivity, it sends a signal that includes your location and a notification that something is wrong.



For New Zealand workers, finding a reliable alarm that works across the country's varied terrain is important. The site loneworkeralarms.co.nz provides wearable alarms that include SOS, GPS, fall detection, man-down alerts, and two-way voice. These features cover the main scenarios a lone worker might face, from a sudden fall to a medical event that leaves you unable to speak. The absence of mandatory monitoring fees means you can choose a plan that fits your work pattern without being locked into ongoing costs.

Practical checks before each shift

No device is useful if it is not working when you need it. Before you start work, take a few seconds to check your lone worker alarm. Make sure the battery is charged. Confirm that the

device has a signal - if you are in a building with thick walls or a metal roof, test the signal in the area where you will be working. Check that the SOS button is not blocked by clothing or a case. If your device uses an app on your phone, ensure the app is running and has permission to access your location and send notifications.

It is also worth testing the alert system periodically. Press the test button (if your device has one) or do a scheduled check-in with your monitoring centre or emergency contact. This confirms that the system works end to end, from your device to the person who receives the alert. A failed test is better than a failed emergency.

What about false alarms?

False alarms are a common concern. Workers worry that they will set off an alert accidentally, causing unnecessary panic or wasting resources. Modern lone worker alarms handle this in two ways. First, many devices have a pre-alert stage - a short countdown after the alarm is triggered during which you can cancel it. This gives you time to confirm that it was a false trigger. Second, the automatic features like fall detection are calibrated to distinguish between a real fall and a sudden movement like bending over or dropping the device. You can usually adjust the sensitivity to match your work environment.

If a false alarm does go through, it is not a failure. It is a sign that the system is working. The responder can quickly confirm it was a mistake, and you can go back to work. The alternative - a real emergency that goes unnoticed - is far worse.

Training and familiarity matter

An alarm is only effective if you know how to use it under stress. Take the time to learn the device's features before you need them. Practice pressing the SOS button with your eyes closed. Know where the two-way voice button is. Understand how the fall detection works and what movements might trigger it. If you work in a team, talk to your colleagues about how the alarm system works for each person. Knowing that someone else has your back, even from a distance, changes how you approach the work.



Many employers provide training on lone worker safety. If yours does not, ask for it. The training should cover not just how to use the device but also how to respond to different types of emergencies, how to communicate with responders, and what information you should have ready when help arrives.

The bottom line

Working alone means taking responsibility for your own safety in a way that office workers do not have to. The risks are real, but they are manageable with the right preparation. A lone worker alarm gives you a way to call for help when no one can see you. Combined with a solid

response plan, regular checks, and a clear understanding of what to do in each type of emergency, it turns a dangerous situation into one where help is on the way.

If you are currently working alone without a reliable alarm, consider what would happen if you fell and could not get up. The time to solve that problem is now, not after an incident. A device from loneworkeralarms.co.nz can provide the safety net you need, but only if you wear it, charge it, and know how to use it. That is the real answer to the question of what a lone worker should do when an emergency happens out of sight: be ready before it happens, and have the right tool to call for help when it does.