



A guide to lone worker services
for the retail and hospitality sector

What is a lone worker?

More than six million people in the UK work either in isolation or without the safety net provided by direct supervision, often in places or circumstances that put them at potential risk. A wide variety of organisations and industry sectors employ people whose jobs require them to work or operate alone, either regularly or occasionally.

Almost by definition, lone working can be both intimidating and at times dangerous, so the protection of lone workers involves a twofold approach; not only to provide safeguards but also to offer reassurance to the people involved.

In the retail sector, lone workers often include shop workers, warehouse personnel, mobile (door-to-door) retailers, and petrol station forecourt personnel. However, the retail sector is wide-ranging and employees in many other job roles can also benefit from lone worker protection.

In the hospitality sector, lone workers often include front-of-house hotel staff, pub and nightclub employees and motorway services personnel, all of whom are often required to work late at night. In equal measure, the hospitality sector is also wide-ranging and employees in many other job roles can also benefit from lone worker protection.

Lone workers in the retail and hospitality sector

According to the British Retail Consortium crime survey 2023, there were over 850 incidents of violence towards retail staff every day in 2023. Common incidents include verbal, physical assault and being threatened with weapons.



Job roles within the UK's retail and hospitality sector are very diverse, resulting in varying levels of risk for employees. But generally, those facing the highest levels of violence, abuse and aggression include customer-facing staff, such as cashiers, waitstaff, and security personnel. Additionally, employees working in areas such as hotels, restaurants, and entertainment venues in the UK face unique challenges including alcohol-fuelled behaviour.

It is not just violence and abuse that is an issue. According to the British Retail Consortium crime survey, retailers lost £1.76 billion in 2021/22 to crime which is still having a huge impact on their bottom line. This could be through in-store theft or attacks on lorries and delivery drivers transporting high-value goods.

All these risks are amplified for those who are working alone, without a colleague in the vicinity, to provide necessary support if an incident occurs.

To address these risks, many organisations in the sector implement safety technology, policies, procedures and employee training programs. These measures help to ensure employees are equipped to handle verbal disputes, disruptive behaviour, shoplifting and other potential threats effectively to minimise the impact on the business and colleague wellbeing.

Job roles within the hospitality sector are extremely varied and wide-ranging, meaning that the nature of risk faced by employees can differ greatly.

According to members of the Lone Worker Section of the BSIA, the group facing the highest levels of risk within this sector are hotel employees. Also at risk are those working within pubs and bars, where there is a significant demand for lone worker protection.

According to a survey of the BSIA's Lone Worker Section, the biggest risk facing lone workers in the hospitality sector is physical violence or assault, while verbal threats are equally likely.

Craig Swallow, Chief Executive Officer of BSIA member company, **Vismo**, went on to explain: "More and more retailers are recognising the risks and the impact of those risks on lone working or travelling employees. Single working in retail stores is now extremely common as retailers struggle with staff recruitment and also seek to reduce the operational costs of being open for longer retail hours. Deploying a credible device or phone app based solution can not only protect staff better, thus improving their productivity and reducing the risk-cost of insurance and reputational brand damage but it can also help with recruitment and retention as employers are perceived as being more caring and protective of their teams".



Why is a lone worker policy necessary?

As in any other UK industry that employs lone workers, retail and hospitality companies have a legal duty of care to their employees, which can result in heavy fines and even imprisonment for directors and managers found negligent. However, can employers really argue in court that they have taken adequate protection measures for their staff, when the technologies they use only safeguard the company's buildings, stock or property?



Taking care of employees is a key driver of purchasing decisions in the retail and hospitality sector, according to members of the BSIA's Lone Worker Section, with demand from insurers providing employee liability insurance also causing these companies to sit up and take notice of the issue of lone worker protection. Increased awareness of employers' responsibilities under health and safety and corporate manslaughter legislation is also generating increased interest in lone worker protection from retail and hospitality companies.

It is for this reason that 100% of the BSIA's Lone Worker Section is expecting demand from the retail and hospitality sector to either stay steady or increase in the next twelve months.

How do lone worker protection solutions work?

To address the important issues raised by the risk to employee safety, the security industry has worked with the police and end-users to develop a combination of practice, technology, and standards capable of providing an effective – and cost-effective – solution to the risks. The development of technology and practice in the field has focused on encouraging and enabling lone workers to assess the risks they might be facing and provide them with the means both to summon aid in an emergency and collect information that can be used in evidence, if necessary.

This has led to the creation of lone worker devices equipped with mobile phone technology that connect employees quickly and discreetly with an emergency response system that has direct links to the police.



A number of products are commercially available from BSIA member companies, ranging from applications on Smartphones to dedicated GPS/GSM Lone Worker devices.

Lone worker products are connected to an Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC), which receives and manages the alarm call and can quickly request emergency services or other responses if required. Sending a pre-activation message allows users to inform the ARC when they are entering an area with a potential risk – e.g. before walking across a dark car park. If the user then experiences a problem or encounters a situation that seems likely to escalate into something more serious then the lone worker device can be activated to summon help.

Activating the lone worker device automatically triggers a voice call to the ARC where operators monitor the audio channel in real-time, enabling them to assess the situation and alert the police if the user needs help or protection. No further action is required by the user as the device effectively functions as an open microphone. This procedure allows the police to optimise their response to genuine emergencies by providing a 'moving picture' of the incident, including an increase or decrease in risk as it happens. The very knowledge that this is taking place is, of course, a major boost to the user's confidence. The ARC captures an audio recording of the incident for future action such as police investigation of legal proceedings.



Lone worker services in practice – case studies

The Works is a prominent high-street retailer with over 525 stores across the UK and Ireland selling arts and crafts supplies, stationery, toys, games and books. A staple of the British high-street, it is seen as the go-to place for reading, learning, creativity and play.



The Challenge

Britain's retail sector is facing a widespread problem as abuse towards staff continues to rise. In 2022 alone, the **ACS Crime Report** estimated that there had been over 800,000 incidents of verbal abuse and 25,216 violent incidents towards staff. Too often, employees do not feel safe, and this is leading to a recruitment and retention crisis. Risk has become part of the job description for retail staff. Workers in this sector think about their safety more than any other industry, with 27% thinking about it at least once a week. Despite not being viewed as a dangerous profession, violence and abuse against retail workers is nothing new.

When **David Pardoe** joined the company as Head of Profit Protection in December 2021, he quickly found that a number of retail stores were reporting events of crime risk and general disorder on a weekly and occasionally daily basis. In Dave's view, the events experienced by store colleagues required mitigation outside the security measures that were currently in place. The question of colleague safety and crime risk quickly rose to the top of his agenda. "Acts of aggression and violence towards retail workers have become so prevalent across the sector now, that many employers run the risk of the problem racing out of their control", says David Pardoe. "The retail landscape has changed beyond all recognition, and we have experienced that first-hand in our own stores."

The Solution

The Works set out on a search for a solution that teams would feel comfortable using, ultimately opting for the MySOS device. The **MySOS** is a discreet, easy-to-use personal safety device which allows users to activate an alarm at the press of a button. Within seconds, users are connected to **Peoplesafe's** dedicated **Alarm Receiving Centre** where trained Alarm Controllers are on hand 24/7. Alarm Controllers will handle the situation, ensuring the right course of action is taken – including summoning the police directly to the user's location bypassing the 999 system, should the need arise. All alarms raised to the Peoplesafe ARC are recorded and can be admissible as evidence in prosecutions. The device can be worn on a lanyard, keyring or belt holster, to best suit the needs of the employee. The portable nature of the device also means that colleagues who feel unsafe commuting can carry the device with them outside of working hours.



The Works now allocate a MySOS personal safety device to any site where employee safety may be compromised. "We issue the devices to all sites we deem to be at risk", continues David. "This may commonly be store colleagues but could also be someone we feel is at risk of being unsafe on their way in and out of work. The relationship we have with our staff is not a 9-5 thing. One of our staff has been at risk of harassment from a customer who has targeted them outside of work and we will look to provide them with a device or app to provide that level of protection."

The Results

Implementing the Peoplesafe service has not only improved employee safety but has provided peace of mind that help is available 24/7, should it be needed. "We are deeply concerned by the fact that crime risk contributes to the reason some of our valued colleagues chose to leave The Works. As a fiercely people-focused business we have realised that it is incumbent on us to protect our staff, where required, 24/7 and that means both inside and outside of official working hours and particularly when colleagues are expected to open or close one of our retail stores.

By providing this service to our people, we aim to live and breathe the people-centric values that have always formed the foundation for our business. We believe it's fundamental that every colleague in our team feels safe and supported."

David Pardoe, Head of Profit Protection

Roadchef Ltd: Lone Worker Case Study

Roadchef chose SoloProtect's safety solution due to the discreet appearance of the lone worker devices and, of course, because of the focus on employee protection.



Roadchef operates 24/7 at 30 motorway and trunk road service area locations across the UK. The business employs over 3,200 people and caters for over 50 million customer visits per year.

Roadchef were in the market for a personal safety solution that would help them to improve employee safety and fulfil their duty of care commitments. SoloProtect devices were chosen due to their discreet appearance and, of course, because of the focus on employee protection.

Roadchef's Director of Commercial and Loss Prevention understands the importance of lone worker safety and the significance of protecting Roadchef's workforce:

"There are a number of dangers involved in either working alone or in vulnerable places in any business. Lone workers are at greater risk, due to not having the same avenues of support and therefore it's of great importance to us that they're fully trained and have extra protection, something they get through their SoloProtect ID devices."

SoloProtect Devices

SoloProtect devices are specifically designed so that they're easy to wear and discreet to use, and are equipped with mobile GSM and geolocation technology. In the event a worker requires assistance, the device opens a call with SoloProtect's Monitoring Centre at the push of a button where specially trained operators will listen in to the incident and send the appropriate assistance e.g. alerting the emergency services or contacting a manager.

The safety solution offers protection to employees facing social risks such as violence, abuse or aggression, and environmental risks such as slips, trips, falls or health issues. The Director of Commercial and Loss Prevention was particularly impressed with the service levels and focus on alarm verification that comes with every SoloProtect solution:

"Here at Roadchef, we take the safety of our workforce very, very seriously. SoloProtect has undoubtedly helped our employees feel safer, they know if they raise an alarm SoloProtect are working their hardest to quickly verify the seriousness of the alarm and escalate it accordingly. This gives our employees the confidence and peace of mind to carry out their tasks when they're working alone."

The SoloProtect solution is accredited to BS 8484 (the British Standard for Lone Worker Device Services) which means we can dial straight into the regional police force, saving valuable time in an emergency. The solution includes the chosen SoloProtect device(s), 24/7 monitoring, and device training, plus access to SoloProtect Insights – our online platform for the end-to-end management of the solution and wider visibility of mobile teams.

Roadchef is understandably proud of the way it supports and develops its employees and, as a result, they have been re-awarded an 'Investors in People Gold' accreditation. Less than 100 companies in the UK hospitality industry have achieved this accolade and it is evidence that the business takes its duty of care very seriously.



BS8484: why is it important?

The development of **British Standard BS 8484**, a Code of Practice for the provision of Lone Worker Device Services, has been a key element of the security industry's work to create such solutions. BS 8484 is employed and adhered to by all credible suppliers in the industry and forms the basis for police response to lone worker systems.

Responsible employers will consider the health and safety of their lone workers as a top priority, and the use of BS 8484 compliant lone worker devices/applications can help by connecting such employees with an emergency response system that has directlinks to the police. BS 8484 is the basis on which police respond to lone worker systems, so it's important for employers to choose a supplier who works to these standards. An appropriate police response cannot be guaranteed by a supplier who isn't audited and compliant with BS 8484.



Choosing a system: what to look for

When sourcing lone worker solutions, the BSIA Lone Worker Section suggests that you look for systems that offer:

- Device or smartphone applications certified to BS 8484.
- A supplier who can prove they are audited and compliant against BS 8484 through audits.
- Monitoring by an Alarm Receiving Centre certified to BS 5979 (Cat II) / BS 9518 or BS EN 50518 (Cat I). Solutions that fit the lone working application and risk profile of your workforce.

Smartphone software applications are also available as an alternative to using a dedicated device. While these are not always ideal for high risk lone workers, they are a viable option for some clients who do not want to carry additional hardware. Apps offered by members of the BSIA's Lone Worker Industry Group are compliant against BS 8484 through audit.

Choosing your supplier from the BSIA's Lone Worker Industry Group ensures you peace of mind and quality of service.

Find out more

For more information on the work of the BSIA's Lone Worker members and to find a supplier in your area, visit the **BSIA website**.



About the BSIA

The British Security Industry Association (BSIA) is the trade association representing over 70% of the UK's private security industry. Its membership includes companies specialising in all sectors of security. For security buyers, BSIA membership is an assurance of quality, with all member companies required to adhere to strict quality standards.

This guidance has been produced by the Lone Worker Section of the BSIA.