GOING SOLO

Don Cameron *explains how lone worker solutions have the potential to save taxpayers as much as £60 million a year*

Lone working has become common practice in the UK, with an estimated 8 million lone workers performing tasks away from colleagues and close or direct supervision (BSIA). As the legal responsibility for protecting employees tightens year on year, so do the number of companies that are turning to BS848-accredited lone worker solutions to protect their staff.

Accredited solutions offer reliable protection for lone workers by ensuring the solution – be it an app or device – offers essential functionality to protect lone workers during an emergency situation. By monitoring the solutions via an accredited alarm receiving centre (ARC), alerts raised by a lone worker can be quickly verified and passed on to emergency response.

This demonstrates a clear benefit for organisations and their lone workers, who are able to receive timely and reliable assistance when they need it. However, accredited solutions also bring a surprising benefit – not just to the lone workers and their employers, but also to the tax payer and emergency responders.

The hazards and risks of lone working are often the same as that of any other employee. However, lone working carries with it an increased risk because any dangers faced, are encountered alone. According to LFS, there were an estimated 555,000 non-fatal injuries to workers according to self-reports in 2017/18. Lone workers are at higher risk of violence and aggression and are often regarded as easier targets. This could be down to the nature of their work such as working with vulnerable members of the public and behind closed doors; social, housing and outreach workers for example, or working with large amounts of money in occupations such as retail, hospitality and security.

ACCIDENT AND EMERGENCY

Lone workers are also open to common workplace hazards such as slips, trips and falls, moving objects and falls from height, which accounted for 49 percent of work place accidents reported by employers to RIDDOR in 2017/2018. Similarly, if a lone worker suffers from a medical emergency such as a heart attack or fainting, receiving immediate support and alerting emergency services can prove difficult without nearby colleagues, particularly if working remotely or out of sight and sound.

This is why it is important to ensure that lone workers are monitored; that their exact location is known at all times and if they fail to check in, or trigger a panic alert, this is responded to by someone who can reliably assess and respond to the situation quickly and – for the sake of allocating emergency

resources – appropriately. When such an alert is passed from an accredited lone worker solution through to an accredited ARC, alarms can be effectively verified so that any false notifications are swiftly filtered out before escalating to emergency responders.

FALSE ALARM

According to the BSIA, the lone worker industry only passes 0.1-0.2 percent of all generated alarms to the police each year. In 2013, 33,000 alarms were sent to accredited ARCs across the country. Of these, 1,200 were verified as potential emergency situations and passed to the police. Only 27 were found to be false alarms. According to the Metropolitan Police, the typical cost of responding to a false alarm is £150 each time, so it is no surprise that verifying alerts saves such a substantial amount of money each year.

In most circumstances, the first step a monitor at an ARC will take is phoning the lone worker to verify whether the triggered alarm is genuine. If a monitor at an ARC is unable to reach the lone worker via a phone call, some apps and devices will also allow the monitor to listen in on the situation covertly. If they

> **LONE WORKER SOLUTIONS ARE ABLE TO PROVIDE POLICE AN ARRAY OF CRUCIAL INFORMATION**

hear a confrontation for example, the alert can be immediately escalated to emergency services.

Saving emergency response budget each year is not the only benefit that comes with accredited lone worker solutions. Working with the police to ensure that alarms are genuine also means that responders will take the alarm seriously and allow for quicker response.

When an ARC has received accreditation, they are granted a Unique Reference number (URN). This means that when a police force receives a call from these numbers, the alarm is prioritised as a Level 1 Emergency and so will be treated as urgent.

Without a URN number, the police operators will need to verify the call, the emergency service required and to gather the location of the caller and incident before it can be escalated. According to the BSIA, the police respond, on average, two minutes quicker to an alert that's passed from a BS8484-compliant ARC than a direct call to 999. While this may not seem like much, a few minutes can sometimes mean the difference between a minor incident and a major one.

According to the BSIA, organisations using accredited lone worker solutions have reduced the number of police call outs to false alarms

Accredited lone worker solutions are able to provide the ARC and so the police, with an array of information that's crucial when responding to an alarm. Perhaps the most important is an accurate location of the lone worker. Accredited lone worker solutions must provide the GPS location of the phone or device used to raise an alarm. Once an alarm is live, the lone worker can continue to be tracked until the alarm is closed.

Solutions that allow the employee to leave notes, can also give additional information such as which apartment in a building they are visiting or the name of the client they were meeting with.

All of this information can also be used as evidence in court to prosecute any perpetrators responsible for harm to the lone worker, particularly in the case of a verbal or physical attack. The ARC will keep a recording of any audio and any other information

provided by the solution such as notes, are also stored for future use.

The British Standard BS8484, was developed in the mid-2000s by the National Police Chiefs Council, which is responsible for controlling police response to alarms and providers of lone worker solutions. The development of BS 8484 aimed to improve the quality of the different solutions available on the market, ensure they are fit for purpose and subsequently reduce the number of false alarms being sent to emergency response.

VERIFYING THE ALERT

The standards have gone through a number of revisions and improvements since being introduced, with the most recent in 2016. Lone worker solutions and ARCs go through thorough audits before

▶ receiving accreditation, and whenever any revision to the standards are made. In order to achieve BS 8484, the lone worker solution must offer a number of functions that communicate with the ARC in a way that allows them to verify the alert and send the police crucial information when responding.

Hafod Housing, which provides affordable housing care and support, employs a BS8484-accredited lone worker solution, StaySafe, with ARC monitoring from Securitas to protect its staff. StaySafe is a smartphone app and cloud-based Hub which monitors employees' safety status and GPS location. Employees are able to start a timed session and alert their employer through a number of features if they face any danger or fail to check in. Monitoring and responding to alerts within the Hub is outsourced 24/7 to a Securitas ARC.

MAKING A SAVING

Hafod Housing has found this set up has saved it time and internal resources as there is no need for manual monitoring in-house. If an alert is sent by an employee or they fail to check-in safely, a Securitas

monitor will be alerted via email, SMS and in the Hub. Securitas can then respond in line with agreed procedures, escalating to the correct member of staff at Hafod or the emergency services if needed.

By utilising its URN number, Hafod can rest assured that if a member of its staff needs assistance, any call made by Securtias to the emergency services will

ALERTS RAISED BY A LONE WORKER CAN BE QUICKLY VERIFIED AND PASSED ON TO EMERGENCY RESPONSE

be responded to urgently. "We are impressed by the versatility of the StaySafe app and broad range of features" comments Nerys Eldride, Project Officer at Hafod Housing. "Switching to StaySafe with Securitas monitoring has proven more reliable, more user-friendly and much more efficient for our lone workers and their managers and we are now confident that our staff have 24/7 protection should they need it" ●

Don Cameron, CEO for StaySafe, has over 25 years of experience in developing successful businesses in the IT, Telecoms and service industries. Don has worked for blue-chip organisations such as ICL, Fujitsu and Intergraph in both general management and sales and marketing roles.

Lone worker solutions have saved the police force £60 million in the last 12 months alone