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# protecting LONE WORKERS

## Businesses need a plan for keeping workers safe when they're working by themselves

BY SEAN FOLEY

**C**annabis industry jobs are not without risk. Growing, processing, distributing and retailing cannabis products bring potentially serious workplace hazards, which can be biological, chemical or physical.

Because federal law still views cannabis as an illegal Schedule I drug under the Controlled Substances Act, banks have largely been unable to provide services to dispensaries, making the cannabis industry a “cash rich” business. Unfortunately, this fact is well known to thieves as well.

### THE WORKPLACE RISKS FOR LONE WORKERS

The cannabis industry currently employs lone workers in nearly every stage of its operations. This number will grow as its workforce expands.

Lone workers, employees who work on their own in their place of employment, have additional risks by nature of their isolation. In high-tech facilities, plants are grown in a tissue culture lab by lone technicians who are tasked with micropropagation. In facilities with high automation, lone workers perform oil extraction and seed processing. This involves a lone worker being by themselves on the facility floor as they oversee the process and ensure it is running smoothly. And, in smaller scale factories or small independent farms, crops are frequently tended and harvested by lone workers.

Due to the presence of large quantities of cash and product, lone work-

ers in the cannabis industry are also at increased risk of violence. Workplace violence can take many forms, including verbal threats, threatening behavior and physical assault, and can be committed by strangers, customers, co-workers or personal relations.

The most obvious opportunity for violence in the industry is at a grow facility or retail store. The high-stress environment and the threat of disgruntled former employees have the potential to elevate the associated risks. In addition, other routine activities, like moving large quantities of product between stores or transporting product in personal vehicles also create opportunities for a violent offender to attempt a robbery.

As they continue to expand, cannabis producers and retailers need to evaluate options to secure and monitor the safety of all employees, including lone workers.





### DEVELOPING A LONE WORKER SAFETY POLICY

To adequately protect lone workers, cannabis businesses should develop lone worker safety policies. Such a policy would clearly communicate the risks presented when an employee works alone, define everyone’s responsibilities and describe the actions required to minimize those risks.

There are three key factors that determine the risks associated with lone workers. The first is the environment. Businesses need to consider the area in which employees perform their jobs. This can include working in high-crime jurisdictions or handling dangerous chemicals.

Next, they have to identify the tasks that lone workers do that might put them in harm’s way. Transporting product between stores or closing a location late at night are just two examples of high-risk tasks.

And, finally, businesses have to consider the people with whom lone workers interact. Are they likely to be intoxicated or aggressive? And how might these conditions increase risk for a lone worker?

### OUTLINING RESPONSIBILITIES

Once the risks have been identified, it is important to list an employee’s responsibilities in each situation and describe all required actions. The policy should define the standard operating procedures and cover the training required to help employees develop the understanding and skills need-

ed to do their jobs safely.

SOPs for a lone worker in a cannabis retail setting could include the following:

- Wear a company-provided safety device;
- Make sure the lights are working;
- Make sure the cameras are properly focused and have the right line of sight; and
- Do not take the trash out after 5 p.m.

The associated training would ensure that employees understand their roles, the risks they face and how to manage difficult situations involving aggressive customers, being followed and dealing with known troublemakers. Training could also cover conflict resolution and anxiety management, including how to assess a potentially dangerous situation, how to recognize signs of aggression and how to communicate effectively to defuse conflict.

Most importantly, the policy should include both a synopsis of the security technologies in place to help lone workers as well as a detailed emergency communications plan that all employees must follow should they feel threatened or at risk.

### USING TECHNOLOGY TO PROTECT LONE WORKERS

Choosing the right portable security device is a critical part of any lone worker safety policy in the cannabis industry. The device should be small, lightweight and unobtrusive. It should require no installation or configuration by the end-user and should also be robust enough that employ-

ees will want to use it.

There is a new breed of smart, wearable and discreet personal protection devices that are designed to meet these criteria. They can be worn on a lanyard, belt, vest, jacket or pants and provide a cost-effective option for cannabis businesses that want to protect their lone workers.

These personal safety monitoring devices are always on, include a single-push panic button that silently dispatches security and can connect with a live monitoring service in seconds. They can also be directly integrated with interactive 24/7 command centers. This provides lone workers with access to experienced security professionals at the touch of a button. And because the devices are cellular based, there is no limit to how far an employee can be from their place of business. This is a real asset for use cases involving cash deposits or cash transfers. All of these features can boost morale and give lone workers confidence when doing their jobs because they know they don’t have to take unnecessary risks.

Wearable solutions have recently been launched that directly integrate with interactive 24/7 central command centers. These solutions offer single-push access to two-way voice communications, user profile data, near real-time images and geolocation data. This means that trained security professionals can immediately assess a situation, intervene and deploy the appropriate emergency response. With more camera eyes and ears on the ground, the opportunity to de-escalate a situation increases.

These personal protection solutions play a critical role in offering better safety to lone and mobile workers as well as customers. And as the industry continues to grow and expand its workforce, it is clear that personal protection devices and lone worker monitoring solutions should be

an essential part of any comprehensive business security strategy.



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