

Out of sight, out of mind? Managing distributed workers' occupational safety and health

Examples of hazards and risks encountered by different types of distributed workers



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The purpose of this document is to provide an overview of the hazards and risks faced by distributed workers – workers who spend part or all of their time away from a main office location. It is not an exhaustive list of all the hazards and risks faced, but is information gained during the research. It may serve as an *aide memoire* to assist managers and OSH practitioners in considering the hazards and risks for differing types of distributed (or remote) work.

Overall the study found that distributed workers:

- often move between different work environments, sometimes on a daily or even hourly basis
- many can face uncertain environments, often with changes to hazards and risks, requiring a dynamic approach to risk assessments
- many of the workers in the study are often lone workers, which can exacerbate the impact of some risks and the likelihood of new or emerging risks

The hazards and risks listed are relevant to particular types of distributed, or remote, workers. The list is not exhaustive, but it illustrates the range of work that can be considered as distributed. Further explanations of the types of work included in the table are given below.

- Public transport work: driving trains, buses and other forms of public transport, working on stations, depots and transport locations
- Engineering work: repair, maintenance, replacement of engineering services, utilities, plant or equipment
- Environmental engineering/consulting: work comprising, for example, surveying and environmental assessments
- Security and police work: comprising security operators, police officers and others working in security roles
- Goods transport work: driving vans or lorries, comprising driving and working at customer sites and depots
- Plant operations and maintenance work: operating and maintaining machinery
- Roadside construction work: comprising maintenance, repair or installation of services and utilities
- Domestic property work: for example, inspections, maintenance and meter reading
- Domestic care work: comprising care work, nursing, social services work
- Public spaces work: comprising repairs, maintenance and landscaping

- mobile work: work that involves frequent travel (from site to site or travelling for business) and home working.
- services consulting: work involves business travel and/or work being hosted by other organisations
- home work: work that is undertaken at the worker's home (for part or all of the work time)
- agricultural work: working with livestock and agricultural machinery and equipment
- lone work: spending part or all of work time alone

Many distributed workers in the research rated themselves as working in high-hazard environments, at least for some of their work time. For example, working at height, or at depth, working with chemicals, machinery and hazardous substances, that can potentially lead to multiple casualties and/or that are potentially life-threatening for the worker.

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Examples of hazards	Example risks of harm	Nature of harm	Examples of distributed work
Contact with members of the public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aggressive, unwanted and difficult behaviour - Exposure to people with blood-borne viruses (e.g. Hepatitis C and HIV) - Exposure to dangerous substances, such as through hypodermic needles carried by members of the public - Exposure to firearms, knives or other dangerous items 	Physical risks (assault, transmission of disease) Psychosocial risks (work-related stress and trauma)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public transportation work - Goods transport work (delivery drivers) - Roadside construction work - Engineering work - Domestic property work - Public spaces work - Domestic care work - Security and police work
Contact with aggressive or feral animals or insects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Biting, kicking, stampeding, butting 	Physical risks (disease, illness, cuts and bruises) Psychosocial risks (trauma)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Domestic property work - Public spaces work - Agricultural workers - Goods transport work (delivery drivers) - Environmental engineering/consulting
Environmental conditions (such as weather and daylight or darkness)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exposure to extremes of cold leading to hypothermia, or heat leading to dehydration - Exposure to sun leading to sunstroke or sunburn - Risks of falls or accidents due to slippery surfaces - Risks of falls or accidents due to low visibility 	Physical risks (disease, illness, accident)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engineering work - Environmental engineering/consulting - Roadside construction work - Plant operations and maintenance work - Roadside construction work - Mobile work - Agricultural work - Domestic property maintenance work - Public spaces work

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Driving (road)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Traffic accidents, frustrations of traffic; road rage incidents from third party drivers - Cab distractions (e.g. mobile phones, satellite navigation) - Unfamiliar delivery destination - Other road users and pedestrians - Going up and down steps on the side of the vehicle - Obstructions in the road such as from vandalism - Long journeys, hours and/or shifts without opportunity to eat and drink nutritionally or rest adequately - Vehicle failure such as fires (container vehicles) - Additional considerations for pregnancy (e.g. change in body shape affecting van seat position) - Boredom and reduced levels of alertness during long journeys* 	<p>Physical risks (accident, illness)</p> <p>Psychosocial risks (such as work-related stress)</p> <p>Ergonomic risks (musculo-skeletal strain)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public transportation work - Goods transportation work - Engineering work - Environmental engineering/consulting - Plant operations and maintenance work - Roadside construction work - Security and police work - Domestic property work - Mobile work - Services consulting
Driving (rail)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Obstructions in the rail, such as from vandalism - Public fatalities through falls onto the line / suicide incidents - Risks associated with dealing with the public (see above) 	<p>Physical risks (accident, illness)</p> <p>Psychosocial risks (such as work-related stress)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public transportation workers

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Heights, such as pylons, buildings and plant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Falls (e.g. due to equipment failure, inadequate equipment or incorrectly applied equipment) 	Physical risks (accident)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engineering work - Plant operations and maintenance work - Roadside construction work - Domestic property work
Overseas locations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Road accidents where driving in unfamiliar conditions - Overseas health risks (e.g. communicable diseases, extreme weather conditions) - Geographical risks such as earthquake, volcano, extreme weather - Dangerous political or social locations presenting risks of assault, robbery or abduction - Flying risks associated with adverse weather* 	Physical risks (accident, illness, disease, assault)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Environmental engineering/consulting - Mobile work - Services consulting
Electricity and dangerous substances such as gas and chemicals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exposure to gas leaks - Exposure to chemical spills - Exposure to dangerous chemical fumes - Risks associated with severing power cables (e.g. when digging) - Contact with live power cables - High-risk activities (e.g. dealing with gas leaks, power cables, chemical spills) 	Physical risks (accident, illness, disease)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engineering work - Roadside construction work - Security and police work - Domestic property work

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Working in public and domestic locations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exposure to chemicals and dangerous substances: asbestos, hypodermic needles - Discovering illegal activities (e.g. drug taking, marijuana farms) - Unsafe premises, including unsafe stairways, floors that collapse - Passive smoking - Allergic reaction (e.g. to plants, dust) - Working on slopes (e.g. strimming grass on banks) - Hitting services when digging in domestic gardens 	Physical risks (accident, illness) Psychosocial risks (such as work-related stress)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Security and police work - Domestic property work - Domestic care work
Loading and lifting weights, such as equipment, goods or people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Manual handling (e.g. of wheelchair ramps) 	Physical risks (accident) Ergonomic risks (musculo-skeletal strain)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public transport work - Goods transport work - Engineering work - Plant operations and maintenance work - Roadside construction work
Hazards associated with warehouse working	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Falls from height and slips (in the warehouse) 	Physical risks (accident) Ergonomic risks (musculo-skeletal strain)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Goods transportation workers
Working in confined spaces, such as holes, or in plant equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exposure to fumes or dangerous substances - Lack of clean air 	Physical risks (illness)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engineering work - Plant operations and maintenance work - Roadside construction work

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Handling cash (particularly late at night on return to the depot)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Theft, assault 	Physical risks (assault) Psychosocial risks (such as work-related stress)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public transportation work
Hazards associated with working at home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Poorly set up display screen equipment (e.g. laptop on the kitchen table) - Trip hazards in domestic setting 	Physical risks (accident) Ergonomic risks (musculo-skeletal strain)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Home work (including workers who spend part of their time working from home)
Hazards associated with machinery handling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Contact with machinery, trapping fingers, repetitive strain injury, etc. - Excessive noise from machinery* - Vibration from machinery* - Contact with sharp or blade machinery, risk of cuts or severing of limbs* - Contact with heavy machinery in excavation, risk of crushing, impact with debris etc.* - Accessing heavy machinery, falls and slips* 	Physical risks (accident, illness) Ergonomic risks (musculo-skeletal strain)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Goods transport work - Engineering work - Plant operations and maintenance work - Roadside construction work - Domestic property work - Public spaces work - Agricultural work
Hazards associated with high work demands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conflict between safety needs and customer service (e.g. needing to be on time) - Stressful sales environment – high demand, low control - Time pressure - Shift working, such as working during the nighttime* 	Psychosocial risks (such as work-related stress)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Goods transport work - Engineering work - Mobile work - Services consulting

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Hazards associated with lone working	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Isolation 	Psychosocial risks (such as work-related stress)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public transport work - Goods transport work - Engineering work - Environmental engineering/consulting - Plant operations and maintenance work - Security and police work - Domestic property work - Mobile work - Services consulting - Home work

* Risks identified from the literature review

Note: This list of hazards and risks is not exhaustive, it constitutes the examples found within the scope of the research. Further details on the research and other research outputs are available at www.iosh.co.uk/outofsite.