



PPE & TECH: THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY IN PROTECTING LONE WORKERS



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FOREWORD



Naz Dossa,
CEO, Peoplesafe

From technology developments to changes in the workplace, lone worker protection has evolved considerably over recent years. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated technology adoption across every aspect of the sector: a McKinsey study concluded that ‘companies have accelerated the digitisation of their...internal operations by three to four years’.¹

The number of lone workers have risen over the last 12 months, from enforced remote working to more vulnerable lone workers now operating in isolation or out of earshot under social distancing measures far more frequently. As more firms announce plans to roll out flexible and hybrid working and cement temporary changes into permanent practices, it is clear that the working environment is changed forever.

This also has its downsides: teams are more disparate and new working practices have created new or heightened challenges, from managing increased risk and vulnerabilities to wellbeing concerns. So what does that mean for lone worker protection?

This report explores how firms have adapted to these changes and provides a useful view of how firms plan to continue their technological transition. Lone worker technology, integrated well into organisations’ systems and processes, can now provide firms with a smarter and more cost effective way to meet their duty of care and protect and communicate with at-risk employees.

We predict that technology will increasingly become part of an employee’s essential toolkit, marking a shift from PPE to PPET: Personal Protective Equipment and Technology to prevent, manage and respond to risks in the workplace.

¹McKinsey report, October 2020: How COVID-19 has pushed companies over the technology tipping point—and transformed business forever

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The changes to working practices brought about by COVID-19 have necessitated changes to health and safety practices at an unprecedented pace. While COVID-related PPE attracted the most press attention, the implications for employees have been far wider reaching.

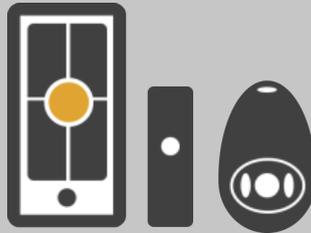
From a spike in lone workers to an increased need to address and support mental wellbeing, health and safety teams have had to respond to an ever-changing landscape and put in place frameworks

that enable swift review, decisive action and regular dialogue – frameworks that will place safety best practice at the heart of organisations into the future.

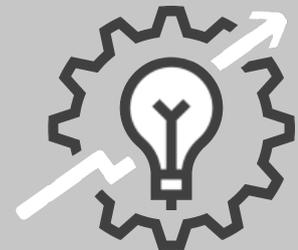
KEY FINDINGS



The definition of a lone worker has changed



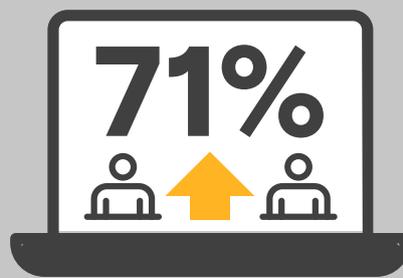
Lone worker tech is considered PPE by many firms



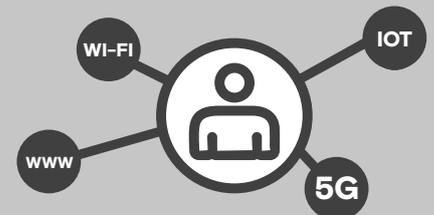
COVID-19 has accelerated tech adoption across many sectors



Tech is increasingly used to gather data to identify trends and anticipate risks



71% firms surveyed expect use of lone worker tech to increase



Connectivity and tech integration are key features of future safety management

PERSONAL PROTECTION EQUIPMENT & TECHNOLOGY

The COVID-19 pandemic has created an extraordinary period of change for organisations. Those responsible for health and safety have had to respond swiftly to unprecedented challenges, from creating COVID-safe procedures to managing the physical risks and mental wellbeing of a newly remote workforce.

Technology has played a major role in this, enabling firms to increase communication with teams but also provide vital support and protection for at-risk employees.

To help understand the impact of COVID-19 on the sector and identify broader attitudes and trends around lone worker protection and technology, Peoplesafe conducted research amongst health and safety professionals in early 2021.

Over 120 health and safety specialists from across the private and public sector took part in research on the topic, providing a useful insight into some of the challenges faced by organisations and how firms are responding to them.²

A roundtable with 11 senior health and safety professionals provided the opportunity for more in-depth discussions and examples of how technology is helping firms to adapt to the challenges presented over the last year.

More than three quarters of firms reported an increase in employee safety requirements over the last 12 months, with a quarter also stating an increase in lone workers on site or in the field in addition to those working remotely to comply with COVID-19 stay at home guidelines.

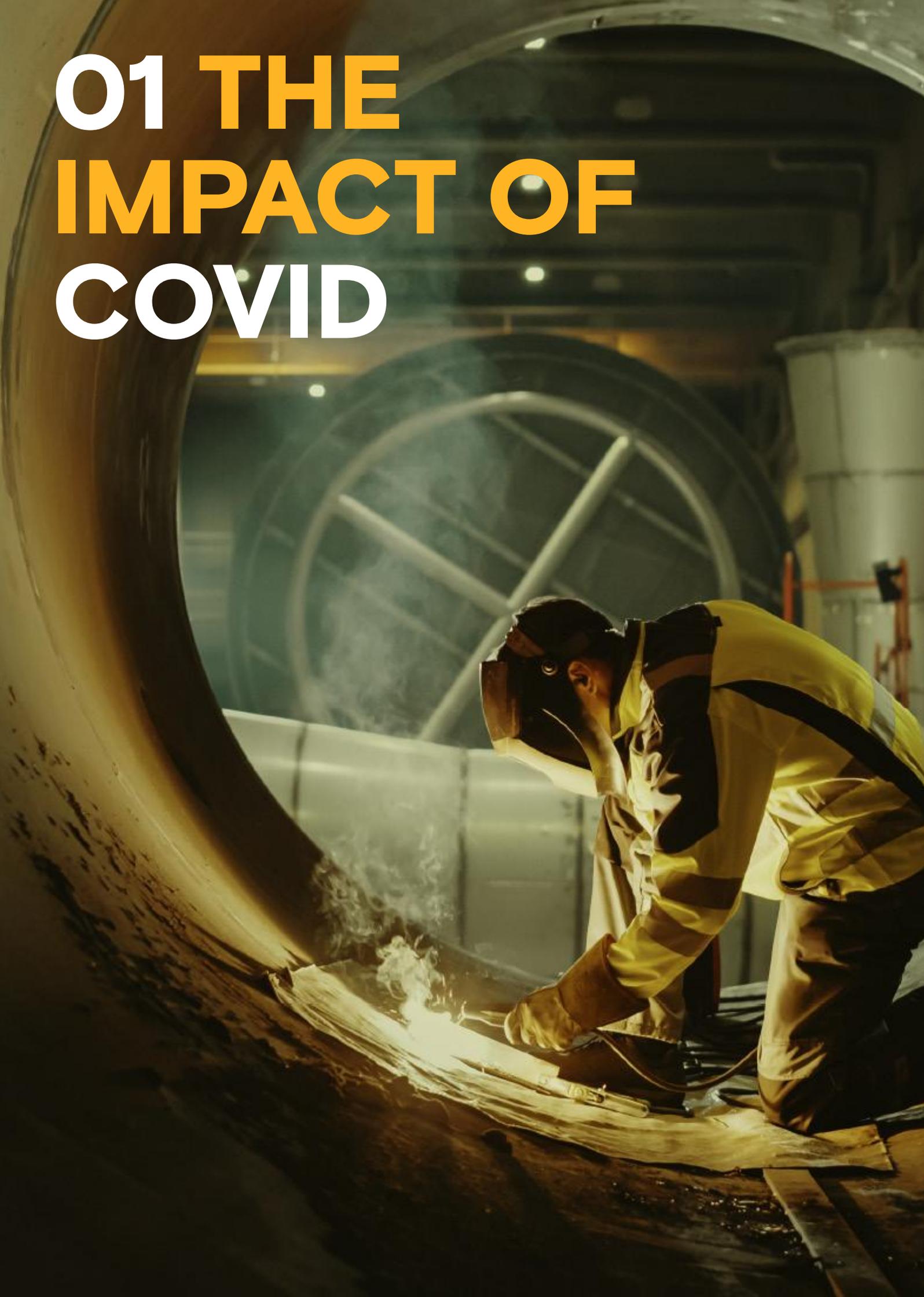
As firms engage more with this growing market, ensuring systems and solutions are fully embedded into an organisation is crucial to its adoption - yet the direction of travel towards a more technology-focused health and safety culture is clear.

² 122 respondents completed an online survey between late Jan and early March 2021. 71% were responsible for lone workers or directly managed lone worker teams. 39% held roles within health & safety, 23% sat in operations and 10% were director or board-level roles. 31% of the respondents were in the public sector (12% NHS, 18% council/LA), 17% in professional services, 12% housing, 7% construction, 5% manufacturing, 5% transport & logistics and 3% private social care.



The findings suggest an overwhelming shift towards the use of technology and smarter solutions to help protect lone working employees. Some firms are already classifying lone worker devices as PPE and the vast majority plan to increase their use of technology within the next few years.

01 THE IMPACT OF COVID



COVID-19 AND THE EVOLUTION OF HEALTH AND SAFETY

The uptake of technology has been steadily increasing for the last few years - lone worker devices that enable alarms to be raised at the click of a button have been in the market for over a decade, and smarter devices or apps that integrate SOS alarms and other features such as environmental monitoring, geofencing and GPS tracking have been adopted by many firms.

The Health & Safety Executive (HSE) noted the growing importance of technology and the availability of systems and devices to support this area in its most recent update to lone worker guidance in March 2020, before the impact of COVID-19 pandemic was felt in the UK.³

However, the unprecedented events of the last 12 months have undoubtedly transformed the health and safety arena - and will do so for some time. This research provides a useful barometer of how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted organisations and how lone worker protection has been affected by the huge shift in working practices and patterns over the last year.



³HSE - Protecting lone workers How to manage the risks of working alone indg73.s



LONE WORKER RISKS

The HSE defines a lone worker as any individual 'works by themselves without close or direct supervision'.

Lone worker risks traditionally tend to fall in to one of three categories:

- **People risk:** work involves proximity to individuals who pose a potential risk
- **Environmental risk:** the workplace itself poses a risk to personal safety
- **Task-based risk:** arising from the nature of the task being undertaken, eg. operating machinery

The exceptional changes to working practices in response to the COVID-19 pandemic has added a new dimension on to this: remote and home workers are also classed as lone workers and the need to put in place good communications processes and consider mental wellbeing of those working in isolation has also risen to the fore.

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON LONE WORKING

77% of respondents noted an increase in employee safety requirements and lone working over the last 12-24 months, with almost a quarter (23%) reporting an increase in lone workers on site or out in the field, where risks are typically higher and those working alone are often more vulnerable, with no colleagues around to help them assess risks, prevent incidents from occurring or call for help in the event of an accident.

Social distancing and fewer personnel on site has also increased the risks in areas such as engineering and construction, where employees operating machinery or carrying out tasks have found themselves out of earshot from colleagues or working in isolation on the shop floor.

This increased risk can also be from interaction with unpredictable members of the public – something which has become a bigger issue during the pandemic as tensions have heightened during lockdowns and as COVID safety rules were enforced: for example, 61% of retail staff reported verbal abuse and 28% were physically assaulted by members of the public and Peoplesafe's own figures documented a 200% increase year-on-year in incidents in the hospitality sector in summer 2020. Those lone workers conducting household visits in industries such as telecoms and care roles also witnessed greater risks:

“Last summer we saw heightened tensions which led to an increase in aggressive behaviour between members of the public and people within our business. The training we implement is to remove yourself.....we can replace equipment, but we can't replace you.”

Duncan Robins, Virgin Media

“The potential for violence has increased which has been nationally reported and is possibly the result of an extended lockdown; you need to consider that staff may be going into situations where before you would never have experienced this. The emphasis is always for our staff to withdraw from those situations but lone worker devices and technology in terms of additional communications and alert systems will prove invaluable in terms of protecting staff.”

Jennifer Newbury, East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust

The risks facing employees was not restricted to working hours. Travelling to and from work is also a consideration for many firms – something the HSE specifically referenced in its updated guidance in March 2020, in which it suggests “implementing a robust system to ensure a lone worker has returned to their base or home once their work is completed.”

“We saw in the first lockdown that the streets were empty...our [nursing] staff had to get on empty trains at half nine at night feeling very vulnerable.”

Jayne King, Guy's & St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust



“The biggest challenge was moving away from our shared van model to single occupancy van usage... it meant a focus on individual security, van security, knowing where individuals are and being able to account for them. It created a lot of change in our risk management processes and bringing together our security function, our safety function and our operational function.”

Dr Shaun Davis, Royal Mail

⁴ Usdaw survey, August 2020. ⁵ HSE - Protecting lone workers How to manage the risks of working alone indg73.pdf (hse.gov.uk)

RESPONDING TO NEW RISKS

Organisations have responded to the challenges created by COVID-19 differently, depending on their sector; the tasks carried out by teams; the number of lone workers; as well as the proportion of workforce working remotely or on furlough.



However, 76% of firms have reviewed or refreshed risk assessments and 32% diverted health and safety spend to specific PPE or projects, such as creating COVID-safe workplaces, and 40% increased PPE provided to staff (not including face coverings).

Technology has been paramount during the pandemic to enable a remote working model: as a McKinsey study confirms, 'digital adoption has taken a quantum leap at both the organisational and industry levels'. Beyond the shift to digital operations and video meetings, it has also enabled communication with a largely remote workforce. Its use in protecting those at-risk employees has also been significant: 8% of survey respondents increased or introduced lone worker technology, in addition to the 47% who already have lone working solutions in place. 25% of firms also increased spend in this area this year, and a third also expect to increase the use of technology within the next 12 months.

The wellbeing of lone workers has become a prominent concern during the pandemic. Whilst the potential impact of working alone or in isolation on mental

wellbeing and stress has been known for a long time, the increase in remote workers in such exceptional circumstances has caused many firms to embed better communication processes and reinforce wellbeing amongst the workforce.

"One of the lone worker areas that has become really important to us is that with a number of staff working from home - and they're now classed as lone workers if they live alone - is checking to make sure that their mental health is in the right place."

David Campbell, Eurovia

"For us it was about making sure [new safety] information was disseminated and we did it by various means. We did it by emails, by desktops, by newsletters and just by personal briefings... The ability to be able to talk to people and make sure they understood what they needed to do to protect themselves was also an opportunity to check in with people and just say "Are you ok?", and that was a daily occurrence."

Jayne King, Guy's & St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust

THE 'NEW WAYS OF WORKING'

Whilst it may be too soon to tell when and how organisations and employees will return to traditional working arrangements, studies consistently suggest that the COVID-19 pandemic has permanently changed the way we work.

"I think COVID has been an accelerant for the introduction of technology... The NHS has been pushed into a technology tunnel because now actually some people can work from home, all the technology is there for us. That will only help us going forward and I think what we will start to see with things like lone worker devices is that people will say "yes, put it on the mobile phone, because I know I have to keep a mobile phone with me". So, we've really accelerated our use of technology and devices and it's become really business as usual."

Jayne King, Guy's & St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust



A study by messaging platform Slack concluded that 72% of UK knowledge workers want a hybrid mix of remote and office work.⁶ Organisations where remote working was previously not thought possible have also adapted and enabled employees to work from home.

This could mean a permanent increase in the number of lone workers, from those working remotely in isolation to those who previously worked in teams or on sites with others in attendance now spending some, or all, of their working time alone.

"There have been lots of changes that have impacted us enormously and we'll have to see how things progress, but I think the workplace setting has changed for good."

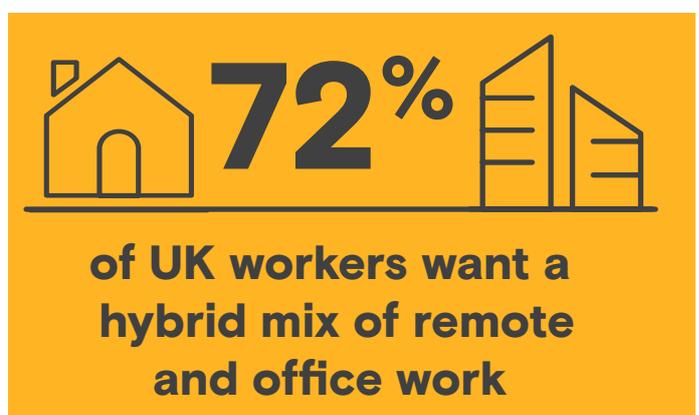
Rebecca Wignall, Provident

The pandemic has already increased lone and remote working as well as accelerating the roll-out and reliance upon technology. Organisations are likely to review new processes and efficiencies brought about by the enforced changes to working practices to create permanent changes.

Similarly, it is also unlikely that social distancing measures and the need to create COVID-safe workplaces will change any time in the near future.

"Any control measures that we put in place short term are actually going to be longer term measures that need to form part of the safety culture for the foreseeable future."

Aimee Povall, Yorkshire Water



⁶ Moving beyond remote: Workplace transformation in the wake of COVID-19 | Slack

02 THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY



TECHNOLOGY

Health and safety technology was already undergoing a transformation before COVID-19, from so-called 'smart PPE' to smarter devices and software that enable organisations or employees to identify hazards, provide greater protection, collect data and/or better respond to incidents that occur.

Organisations are already using a broad combination of methods to protect lone workers and the research indicates technology is a major growth area in the sector.

More than two thirds of firms already use traditional PPE (such as high vis vests, safety glasses and appropriate footwear), but adoption of smarter technology is also quite high.

Nearly half of organisations surveyed (47%) equip their lone workers with some form of personal safety device and 30% use personal safety devices with additional features such as fall detection.

Around a fifth (24%) use smartphone/tablet apps with SOS alarms and 30% use smart communication devices or location devices to help them to monitor the location and safety of remote workers.

The research also explored the use of 'smart PPE' (equipment which 'combines the traditional means of protection with enhanced materials or electronic components, and it may collect data on the user, the work environment or its own use'⁷). Uptake of this was low within those organisations who participated in the research, with less than 1% using garments with sensors, light emitters or smart lockout/stop devices built in.

"In our work situation we'd be quite up for sewing [devices] into the PPE so that when they're in the vehicle it's on them, when they're out of the vehicle it's also taken with them."

David Campbell, Eurovia

"I'd like to see PPE better integrated into current working solutions - smaller, lighter, so it's not such a physical effort to actually pick up a device and carry it with you. Staff have to be bare below the elbows in our sector, so we can't wear things like wrist watches or rings, when people are wearing lanyards they're getting in the way of therapies. That's what I'd really like to see develop."

Jennifer Newbury, East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust

However, smarter and more connected devices are already being used by organisations and their benefits are being realised by more professionals within the industry - a trend that is set to continue.



⁷European Agency for Safety and Health at Work: Smart personal protective equipment: intelligent protection for the future

FUTURE USE OF TECHNOLOGY

From so-called 'smart PPE' to smarter devices, organisations are already using equipment to offer greater support to lone workers, and also using data gathered from connected devices to develop more informed activity based on smarter reporting and data management; and the general ability to customise technology to fit an individual business' needs.

Technology is clearly a growth area within the sector: 48% of respondents expect to increase their use of PPE in the future and 51% of respondents believe their use of Smart PPE will increase. Notably, they expect this to happen soon: 22% within 12 months and 21% within the next 1-3 years.

Lone worker technology was the biggest category on the rise: 71% of firms expect their use of lone worker technology to increase – one third (33%) within the next 12 months, 25% within 3 years and 13% within 5 years.

This could be rolling out technology to more employees as lone working grows, or re-assessing current provisions against new innovations and solutions in the market. For example, replacing simple GPS tracking with a solution integrating software such as what3words that enables firms to more accurately pinpoint employee locations to within 3m² which can help emergency services locate those in need of support more swiftly. Those working in hazardous environments could benefit from geofencing alerts reminding them to check or put on specific PPE when entering or leaving specific areas on site.

Video technology is also being used to ensure employees get the right level of assistance in the event of an incident, as well as helping to gather evidence for use in legal proceedings. That could be linking CCTV or dashcams to alarm software or fall detection technology, enabling those responding to incidents to immediately ascertain the issue and provide appropriate assistance, from de-escalation support to alerting emergency services swiftly.

Connected devices will also be a big growth area, combining multiple solutions into one app or device to create bespoke solutions and maximise protection without adding to the equipment lone workers are expected to carry.

“You can actually lower the amount you spend by finding the right supplier – finding out exactly what you want and what you need. We’ve moved from no control and no BS 8484 to a solution that we know has got the 8484 standard and BS EN 50518, one where we get regular updates on training and support.”

Michael Pytel, Cornwall Care

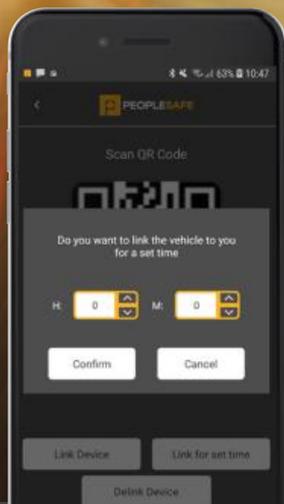
Technology could also be used to keep employees safe beyond the normal working day – for example, ensuring devices or apps are used to help counter the risk of employees travelling home at unsociable hours or in inclement weather conditions. This is an increasingly pertinent topic as health and safety ‘in the workplace’ has become redefined in the COVID-19 pandemic. Companies are now reviewing their responsibilities to employees and how this has changed under the new way of working both during and post-pandemic. Providing employees with peace of mind and a means of raising an alarm in the event of an emergency is one way to ensure this.

“For me, it’s building into that mechanism the final check that somebody has got home safely. We can use [their device] to check that people have got home safely, that they are safe and well. That would close the loop on that individual for that shift.”

David Campell, Eurovia

“One of the big considerations we’ve seen is around adoption and consumption. How do you get your staff to carry the device at all times and understand the importance of it. I always point out to customers that we don’t turn the service off – you don’t stop work and the service stops, it’s 24/7. Actually, your employer is providing that extended service [during your commute], and it’s getting that mindset changed.”

Naz Dossa, Peoplesafe



CONNECTED TECHNOLOGY

The SureCam and Peoplesafe partnership is a great example of connected software coming together to improve employee safety.

The two parties have come together to develop an industry-first lone worker service that better protects drivers in and out of the vehicle via a video-enabled solution that allows footage to be viewed directly from the cameras fitted on the vehicle in the event of an alarm being raised via Peoplesafe's app.

This provides added insight into what has occurred, as well as additional evidence should any matter progress to court.

Driver ID functionality will also be introduced, so the lone worker app can be used to scan an in-vehicle QR code and confirm exactly who is driving.

This will enable SureCam's video telematics platform to report by driver, which will be particularly useful for companies that operate a pool of vehicles that are not designated to a specific employee.

In particular, fleets will gain complete visibility of who is operating a vehicle when a collision, near miss or harsh driving event occurs.



⁸ Peoplesafe's lone worker technology is accredited to all five parts of BS 8484 and its purpose-built Alarm Receiving Centre (ARC) is certified to BS EN 50518, superseding the previous BS 5979 standard. It was also the first to receive 'Secured By Design' accreditation.



DATA-DRIVEN DECISIONS

Smarter technology is also enabling organisations to collect data to inform strategies and roll out better processes to protect employees. Crucially, this can also help prevent incidents and put better protection in place, rather than simply using devices in response to events that have already occurred.

“What we’re doing with our technology is via PDAs and we can use that data to map our risks better. We can look at where we’ve got particular addresses or particular areas [that are risky] and we can put risk mitigations and strategies around that. The next iteration for us is a geographical heatmap so we can look at the areas where you might want to use a different type of vehicle or different ways of working, different squads, different measures.”

Dr Shaun Davis, Royal Mail

“Because we are dealing with members of the public and they are unpredictable, we have to make sure the processes surrounding the technology are there, so how can we educate the workforce, what procedures can we put in place before sending someone out to an area to spot if we’ve got any trends with violence or threats, any patterns, any incidents occurring that have made our teams feel uncomfortable. They report it so that we can track that data to see where those incidents are happening”

Aimee Povall, Yorkshire Water

03

**INFLUENCING
CULTURE**



EMBEDDING TECHNOLOGY INTO COMPANY CULTURE

Technology can only truly be effective if it is widely adopted, well understood and fully embedded into a company's wider systems and processes. Achieving this means a concerted effort to evolve company culture, increase education and training and ensure support from lone workers through to senior management.

A fifth of those health and safety specialists surveyed for this report felt culture changes in the organisation impacted budget availability by changing the priority of PPE and technology within an organisation, and 18% of firms who increased lone worker and PPE requirements

over the last 24 months deemed cultural changes and education programmes promoting the adoption of PPE and technology positively impacted their business.



“We have a very strong health and safety culture and good communication is key to achieving and maintaining this: listening to understand, not just simply to respond. Prevention of incidents is always the focus but not all issues are foreseeable and you may not have all the information you need so working with the staff involved is important. This really assists in getting to grips with where and how issues could arise. Members of our Board have gone out to visit community locations to speak to staff, and senior managers often work with their teams including district nurses and response teams to understand problems. Ultimately, this really assisted in information gathering and the Board in getting to grips with what those risks were.”

Jennifer Newbury, East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust

INCLUDING TECH IN PPE

More than three quarters (78%) of those surveyed felt that lone worker technology could be better embedded into an organisation by re-classifying it as PPE within their organisation. A quarter (26%) felt it would be viewed as more important or even a requirement by senior management and almost a third (30%) felt there would be better adoption by workers.

Senior management support was also listed as one of the biggest barriers to securing budgets for lone worker technology by a tenth of the survey respondents, making it interesting that 13% felt it would be easier to procure technology through their PPE budget. 8% also thought it would link with wider systems for reporting benefits.

Some firms already classify lone worker devices as PPE and cite this as vital to ensuring it is used by workers. Roundtable participants explained how this technology is already deemed an essential part of the kit, to be carried by lone workers to help keep them safe.

“If you’re a community worker going into an aggressive environment it’s got to be something that’s easy to use, and [lone worker devices] fit that bill for me. I believe wholeheartedly that it’s PPE.”

Michael Pytel, Cornwall Care

“What we decided to do a couple of years ago, pre-COVID - was to make the lone worker devices PPE. Our staff will pick up their bag with all their equipment and everything else that they need to see their patients, their patient list and their Peoplesafe device - it’s part of the everyday equipment.”

Jayne King, Guy’s & St Thomas NHS Foundation Trust

“The tech is a vital tool and, I believe, a form of PPE. In the same way that we use the five points of PPE format and our gas monitors are a part of that, the lone worker devices should be included too, so six points of PPE.”

Aimee Povall, Yorkshire Water

“In our business PPE is usually high vis, boots and helmets, but when you break PPE down to Personal Protective Equipment, that’s exactly what [a lone working device] is.”

David Campbell, Eurovia

Stretched budgets and a tough economic climate can make it harder to secure funds to invest in technology or measures to boost protection, or roll measures out to more team members. The research indicates that senior management support is critical and building a strong business case will be paramount.

“Undertake a cost benefit analysis by researching actual and potential incidents, examining whether your risk mitigation is working for the whole process. Not everything is foreseeable and we found that technology assisted us in providing staff with a further protective measure which was a significant and proportionate approach. You cannot replace people.”

Jennifer Newbury, East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust

“[COVID-19] has been a good opportunity to show the value that we as a profession and function can bring... armed with the information we’ve got now, and the essential role of the function, why would we not use it as a case for further investment?”

Dr Shaun Davis, Royal Mail.

“78% felt re-classifying lone worker technology as PPE would better embed it in their organisation”

LONE WORKER REGULATIONS

The HSE's updated guidance in March 2020 reflects some of the broader challenges facing lone workers, from stress and mental wellbeing to the risk of violence as well as the general risk and vulnerabilities facing those working alone.

Whilst 78% rated the HSE's guidance good (57%) or excellent (21%), a fifth (20%) would like to see specific regulations published by HSE to better support lone workers. Additionally, 23%

of respondents would like to see lone worker technology included within PPE definitions*, perhaps reflecting the impact this would have on adoption within their organisations.



“There will always be greater risks for lone workers with no direct supervision or anyone to help them if things go wrong. It is important to keep in touch with lone workers, including those working from home, and ensure regular contact to make sure they are healthy and safe. Technology advances mean there is a wide range of systems and devices available to employers to help monitor lone workers but any monitoring system needs to be embedded into an organisation so it is well understood by workers. This includes having clear procedures, regular contact and testing of both equipment and procedures to make sure emergency situations can be handled well.”

Barbara Hockey, Head of Vulnerable Worker's Team, HSE

ADOPTION AND ENGAGEMENT

A top-down approach is crucial to ensuring adequate focus is given to rolling out technology and boosting awareness and education around it, but ensuring its adoption and engagement also means ensuring lone workers themselves understand its purpose and function.

“There are three barriers to not engaging with technology. The first is where it’s not embedded within a bigger system; where lone workers see it as a tick box exercise by the business. The second reason unfortunately is where there’s a lack of trust in the device or service – they’re not sure about the response they’ll get or don’t think it’s going to be as reliable as they’ve been told. The third thing is a lack of understanding by the lone worker on the purpose of it and how it works in terms of the impact to their risks.”

Nicole Vazquez, Worthwhile Training

Lone workers need to understand what the technology is, how it works, when it should be deployed, and what role it has in supporting their health and safety whilst carrying out their work.

“There’s still a massive human factor. We’ve had serious incidents, for example, this year we’ve had a gritter overturn in treacherous conditions and the driver’s left his Peoplesafe device back in the depot. So that human reliance is still a significant weak point for making this technology work.”

David Campbell, Eurovia

Overcoming the ‘human factor’ and ensuring technology is taken out with lone workers and used requires training and communication to engender trust in the system and ensure an understanding of its purpose. This also includes the need for broader education on personal safety, to understand what risks and incidents the technology is being used to mitigate and why they are being equipped with solutions to respond to these risks.

COVID-19 has undoubtedly made training employees more difficult, but virtual sessions to support the roll-out of software and devices have been delivered successfully.

Initiatives such as ‘train the trainer’ programmes and appointing personal safety champions can also help to boost engagement and encourage adoption amongst

lone workers.

“It’s making people understand that this device – although it doesn’t look like a piece of PPE – is actually a life-saving device.”

Michael Pytel, Cornwall Care

Employee buy-in can also be boosted by wider stakeholder engagement, helping to educate lone workers in the importance of technology and why a specific device or software has been selected to help protect them in their role.

“We need to talk about the role of trade unions in working with us on this collaboratively, be that introducing new methods or working with them on identifying investment priorities. Throughout the pandemic we’ve worked closely with unions, shoulder to shoulder.”

Dr Shaun Davis, Royal Mail

Monitoring adoption levels is also a useful way to check engagement and identify teams or locations where solutions could be refined or where greater training is needed.

“We’ve got access to a lone worker portal where we can find out who’s using it and who’s not using it, why they’re not using it and we can have a chat with them, so we can pinpoint where the holes are in our system almost immediately. This is vastly different from our previous provider – not all service providers are the same.”

Michael Pytel, Cornwall Care

Selecting the right software or devices that meets the needs of a specific role or team is also crucial. This can mean finding the most appropriate solution to mitigate the risks of a specific role or workplace, but also means finding ways to ensure the technology is used. This can mean integrating software into kit or devices that are already being used.

“The future, I think, is going to be implementing technology better. Our teams have a lot of tech that we give them, such as socket testers and so on, so we think about the impact of giving them another thing they have to charge. Leaving devices in the depot or having them run out of battery is a hurdle we’re going to have to get over – having an app, being able to press a couple of buttons and that kicks in a response, or integrating with gas detectors, which are a mainstay of what our guys are using as their BAU, [are all considerations]. How can we make use of the equipment they already have, so we’re reducing the element of ‘here’s another thing we’ve got to worry about’.”

Duncan Robins, Virgin Media



During 2020, Peoplesafe started to work with new customer, The Calico Group, supporting their lone and at-risk workers with lone worker solutions. As part of the onboarding process, Peoplesafe’s customer support team spent a couple of weeks delivering virtual training sessions to make sure everyone was confident in using their devices.

These 30-minute training sessions were staggered throughout the day to ensure that workers on all shifts could attend, and team members were asked to bring their device with them to the session so that they could test all of the practical functionality of the device there and then. This approach worked really well, and delivering the training virtually provided additional flexibility around varied shift patterns.

“Our lone workers are very happy with their new devices, and we have been incredibly impressed with Peoplesafe’s service too. We have a dedicated Account Manager, who is always friendly, helpful and quick to respond, and they ensured that the whole set-up process went very smoothly, despite the complexity of our organisation. Peoplesafe’s dedicated Alarm Receiving Centre has also been brilliant on the few occasions our employees have needed support.

“More of our teams are now ordering devices as they can see the peace of mind that both the devices and Peoplesafe’s service give to their colleagues, who are supporting some of the most vulnerable groups in society.”

Liz Dewell, Group Health and Safety Manager at The Calico Group,

PART OF THE TOOLKIT

When fully embedded in a system, technology is increasingly becoming an essential part of how businesses manage the risk of working alone, but it needs to be part of a broader approach that includes training, risk assessments and wider support for lone workers.

As technology matures further, businesses will be able to rely on smarter solutions, greater connectivity and explore how IoT can help them to gather more data and insight to inform plans. How organisations implement this into their business will be crucial to its success.

“It’s not so much about giving somebody a piece of kit to help recognise hazards and prevent risks. For me it’s about better collection of data and gaining a greater insight into health and safety – any trends and themes that can then be used to impact the safety culture and influencing future decisions. That’s how I see PPE and Smart PPE changing things for the future.”

Rebecca Wignall, Provident

“Technology definitely has a place, there’s no doubt about it, if it’s innovative and eliminating hazards, but if it’s just sat there with no framework behind it then it’s just ticking a box. It’s about getting that joined up thinking, putting it in place for the right reason and not just having an influx of people carrying devices. It’s how that increase is managed that’s the important factor.”

Aimee Povall, Yorkshire Water

“Integration into other services to improve adoption will be key. IoT has a role to play too – this is almost “people IoT” and that’s where we see lone worker technology moving into the future.”

Naz Dossa, Peoplesafe



CONCLUSION

The research findings make it clear that technology is making an ever-increasing impact on the way organisations manage the risks of lone working and adapt to the unprecedented shift of what health and safety ‘in the workplace’ means.

Smarter, connected devices are creating more effective ways to achieve this, from integrated solutions offering multiple functions within one device or app to greater data collection and management enabling firms to create informed processes and plans to mitigate risk and reduce incidents.

It is clear that PPE is becoming a far broader category than the traditional definition suggests. Personal Protective Equipment and Technology is helping to prevent, manage and respond to risks faced by at-risk workers. The research also highlighted that broadening the definition of PPE to include lone worker devices could free up funds for a range of organisations to invest in lone worker safety, could drive up adoption and senior management buy-in, and, crucially, would also place a

duty on the employee to use the service in accordance with their training and for the purpose(s) it was provided.

It may be too soon to tell whether the reaction to COVID-19 will sustain once we begin to return to ‘normal’, but the acceleration of technology and continuing innovation in this field show no signs of slowing. Finding the right balance of software and equipment to mitigate the risks faced by individual employees, teams and workforces and embedding solutions into the workplace through effective training and engagement will be crucial to manage the growing numbers of lone workers and create the right mixture of personal protective equipment and technology for each organisation.





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