Working Alone or in Isolation

1.0 Purpose:

To provide for measures to protect the health and safety of, and minimize risk to, any worker that works alone or at an isolated place of employment as defined in the Workers Compensation Act, Occupational Health and Safety Regulation, (Sections 4.20 – 4.23). Adherence to this policy will help to meet health and safety legal requirements and demonstrate due diligence in working alone or in isolation situations.

2.0 Scope:

This policy applies to all SFU campuses and to work for SFU at off-campus locations.

3.0 Definitions:

Office hours: the Simon Fraser University hours during which there are people available to help in the case of an incident. Office hours are 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at SFU Burnaby and SFU Surrey, and 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. at SFU Vancouver. Some departments have office hours that do not fall within this range. In such cases, the department must stipulate what they consider to be their office hours.

Supervisor: a person authorized by an employer to oversee or direct the work of workers and students, including teaching and research supervisors, department heads, deans, managers and any other persons in positions of authority.

Worker: any person engaged in an occupation in the service of an employer, including faculty, staff, graduate and undergraduate students, and volunteers.

Working alone or in isolation: according to The Occupational Health and Safety Regulation, means “to work in circumstances where assistance would not be readily available to the worker in case of an emergency or in case the worker is injured or in ill health.” In these circumstances extra precautions and requirements may be warranted. A variety of work environments and situations call for various interpretations of “working alone or in isolation.” For example, a worker who comes in alone after office hours to perform paperwork duties may not be considered to be “working alone.” A laboratory worker working alone may be considered to be “working in isolation,” while a worker coming in after office hours to do laboratory testing with hazardous substances may be considered as “working alone.” Depending on circumstances, situations, or environments, a site-specific Working Alone or in Isolation Policy may be required to limit individuals’ duties.

Worksite: any place where work is performed, including locations such as laboratories, offices, or field work.

Engineering controls: the physical arrangement, design or alteration of workstations, equipment, materials or other aspects of the physical work environment to manage risk.

Administrative control: the provision, use and scheduling of work activities and resources in the workplace, including planning, organizing, staffing and coordinating to manage risk.
4.0 Policy:

This policy requires the assessment of risk and the development of site-specific preventive and response procedures to protect the health and safety of, and minimize the risk to, any worker who works alone or in isolation, in circumstances where assistance may not be readily available in an emergency or should the worker be injured or fall ill.

For individuals required to work alone or in isolation the preventive and response procedures will address the identified risk(s), specify the types of activities that may be conducted, and any limitations on and/or prohibitions of specific activities, and procedures for securing assistance. Where possible, standard operating procedures (SOPs) can be developed to address similar activities within a department. Situations where an SOP may be appropriate include activities such as working alone in research laboratories or offices.

The site-specific policy with preventive and response procedures must be documented within the department, communicated to affected individuals, and monitored to ensure compliance and effectiveness.

5.0 Roles and Responsibilities:

5.1 Deans and Division Heads will:

a. direct supervisors in their areas to develop and implement a site-specific policy and appropriate preventive and response procedures for working alone or in isolation; and
b. monitor to ensure the policy and measures are communicated, enforced and effective.

5.2 Supervisors are required to review all workplaces under their jurisdiction and:

a. identify individuals required to work alone;
b. identify hazard(s) and assess risk(s);
c. take any necessary steps to eliminate the hazard(s);
d. eliminate the hazard(s) and minimize the risk(s) from the hazard(s) by using engineering controls, administrative controls or a combination of the two controls;
e. develop a site-specific Working Alone or in Isolation Policy and Procedure to address the risk(s);
f. communicate the site-specific Working Alone or in Isolation Policy and Procedure to all workers under their jurisdiction;
g. ensure understanding and compliance with the Policy and Procedure;
h. review the site-specific Policy and Procedure annually; and
i. maintain documentation of the site-specific Working Alone or in Isolation Policy and Procedure within each department.

5.3 Individuals required to work alone or in isolation will:

a. comply with the site-specific Working Alone or in Isolation Policy; and
b. advise the supervisor of arising concerns.

5.4 Environmental Health and Safety will provide guidance and act as a resource.

6.0 Authority:

6.1 This policy is administered under the authority of the President and all Vice Presidents.