What to check when working alone to stay safe from falls

Why falls matter more when you are on your own

Working solo changes the stakes for every trip, slip or fall. On a shared site someone sees you go down and can help within seconds. Alone, the same fall can turn into a serious incident simply because no one knows it happened. The risk is not just the injury from the fall itself but the time that passes before help arrives. That is why anyone who works alone needs a practical system for reducing both the chance of a fall and the impact if one does happen.

This article runs through the key points to check before and during solo work. Think of it as a mental checklist you can adapt to your own job site, whether you work in a warehouse, on a farm, in a remote office or on a construction site. The focus is on simple, repeatable actions that do not rely on anyone else being there.

Check the ground and your footing first

Most falls start with the surface you are standing on. Before you begin any task, scan the area for hazards that are easy to miss when you are focused on the job. Loose gravel, wet patches, uneven concrete, trailing cables, tools left on the floor, and changes in surface height are all common causes. Clear what you can and mark what you cannot move. If you are working outdoors, check the weather forecast. Rain, frost or dew can make a safe surface slippery in minutes.

Wear footwear that matches the ground. Smooth-soled shoes on a wet floor or loose boots on a ladder are accidents waiting to happen. If your job involves climbing, make sure your boot laces are tied and tucked in so they do not catch on anything. It sounds basic, but rushing through this check is how people end up on the ground.

Check your ladder or step platform

Ladders cause a large share of fall injuries among solo workers. Before you climb, check the ladder for cracked rungs, bent side rails or worn feet. Set it on firm, level ground and use the locking mechanism properly. Never stand on the top two rungs. If you are working at height for more than a few minutes, consider a step platform with handrails instead of a ladder. The extra stability reduces the chance of a fall and gives you a safer position if you feel dizzy or lose balance.



One practical rule is to keep three points of contact on the ladder at all times. That means two hands and one foot, or two feet and one hand, on the ladder. If you need to carry tools, use a tool belt or hoist them up after you are stable. Reaching sideways while on a ladder is a common cause of falls, so reposition the ladder instead of stretching.

Check your lone worker device and how it will alert others

When you work alone, your main safety net is the device that can call for help if you cannot. A wearable lone worker fall alarm is designed to detect a fall or a period of no motion and send

an alert automatically. This matters because after a serious fall you may be unconscious or unable to press a button. The device needs to be worn correctly, charged and set up before you start work.

Check that the device is positioned where it can detect movement properly. Most wearable units work best when worn on the belt, clipped to a pocket or attached to a harness. If it is loose in a bag or left in a vehicle, it cannot do its job. Test the fall detection feature according to the manufacturer's instructions so you understand what kind of motion triggers it. Some devices use an impact sensor combined with tilt detection, while others rely on a no-motion timer. Knowing the difference helps you avoid false alarms and ensures the system works when you need it.

Set the alert delay to a time that suits your work. If you are moving between tasks and stopping for a few minutes, a short delay may cause unwanted alerts. A longer delay means the device waits before sending a man down alarm, which gives you time to cancel it if you are fine. Find the balance that works for your typical work pattern and adjust it as needed.

Check how the alarm reaches someone who can help

Even the best detection is useless if the alert does not reach a person who can respond. A man down alarm needs a communication path, usually through a cellular network or satellite connection. Before you head into a work area, check that your device has a signal. If you work in a basement, a steel-framed building or a remote rural area, the signal may be weak or absent. Some devices store alerts and send them when the signal returns, but that delay could be critical in an emergency.

Know who receives the alert. Some systems call a monitoring centre, while others send a text or app notification to a designated contact. Make sure that contact is someone who will act quickly and knows your location. If your device uses GPS, check that the location function is enabled and accurate. A fall alarm that reports the wrong location can waste precious minutes.

Test the whole chain at the start of each shift. Trigger a test alert if the device allows it, and confirm that the message arrives and contains the correct information. This is not a one-time setup. Networks change, devices get bumped out of settings, and contacts change jobs. A weekly check keeps the system reliable.



Check for conditions that increase fall risk

Fatigue, dehydration, rushing and distraction all make falls more likely. Working alone means no one is there to remind you to take a break or to notice that you look unsteady. Build in regular pauses to rest, drink water and step back from the task. If you feel dizzy, light-headed or unusually tired, stop work and sit down. Pushing through those feelings is a direct path to a fall.

Illness and medication can also affect balance and reaction time. If you are unwell or taking something that makes you drowsy, adjust your work plan accordingly. For some jobs it may be safer to postpone the task than to work alone in a compromised state.

Check your plan for after a fall

Even with all the prevention in the world, falls can still happen. The difference between a minor incident and a serious one often comes down to what happens in the first few minutes after the fall. If you are conscious and able to move, your first action should be to cancel any false alarm if your device has already triggered. Then assess yourself for injuries before trying to stand. Moving too quickly after a fall can worsen a hidden injury.

If you are unable to get up, use any communication method you have. A lone worker device with two-way voice lets you speak to a responder and explain your situation. If you cannot speak, the device should still transmit your location and the fact that an alert has been triggered. Stay as still as possible to avoid aggravating an injury, and wait for help to arrive.

If your device does not have fall detection, consider adding a simple check-in system with a colleague or family member. A scheduled phone call or text at set times can act as a backup. If you miss a check-in, they know to call you and then alert emergency services if you do not answer. This is not as fast as an automatic alert, but it is better than having no system at all.

Check your device battery and maintenance

A dead battery turns your safety device into a useless piece of plastic. Charge the device fully before each shift and carry a backup power source if the workday is long. Some devices have a low-battery warning that you should never ignore. Treat it the same way you would treat a low-fuel warning on a vehicle. Stop and charge before you continue.



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Keep the device clean and free of debris. Dust, moisture and impact can affect sensor performance. Wipe it down after each use and store it in a dry place. If the device has been dropped hard or exposed to water beyond its rating, have it checked before relying on it again.

Check your own awareness and habits

No checklist works if you do not follow it. The best fall alarm in the world cannot prevent a fall caused by carelessness or overconfidence. Build these checks into your routine until they become automatic. Talk to your employer about any hazards you find and any equipment that needs replacing. And if something feels off about the work area or your own condition, trust that feeling and adjust your plan.

Working alone does not have to mean working unsafely. With a little preparation and the right equipment, you can significantly reduce the impact of a fall and get the help you need quickly. The key is to check before you start and stay aware throughout the job.