

# US Tragedy Illustrates One Danger of Working Alone



Workers are especially vulnerable to some safety hazards when they're working alone. For example, workers such as afterhours cleaning staff, repairmen or late night retail employees are more at risk of being subjected to workplace violence.

But the dangers of working alone don't stop there. If workers get injured or become ill while they're by themselves, they may not be able to call for assistance or safely get medical attention.

A carpenter from South Carolina unfortunately found himself in exactly that position.

Octavio Godinez, 27, was working as a trim carpenter with his father-in-law. As he was shaping a shim for a door, it seems that his hand slipped and he cut himself. Because his father-in-law had gone for supplies, Godinez was all alone.

He wrapped the wound, got into his truck and headed toward a nearby hospital. He called his father-in-law, told him what had happened and agreed to meet up at the hospital.

But Godinez's truck went off the road and hit a tree. Because there were no skid marks or other indications that he'd tried to brake, it's likely that he passed out from loss of blood—he'd severed an artery—or was even dead before the crash.

The subsequent autopsy showed Godinez died from a ruptured heart and blood loss. According to the coroner, he wasn't wearing a seat belt and the impact likely caused the damage to his heart.

There are several lessons you can take away from this tragedy.

First, Canadian employers have a duty to ensure the safety of workers who work alone. In fact, the OHS regulations in several jurisdictions contain special working alone requirements.

To fulfill that duty, there are several key steps you should take, including:

- Assess the hazards faced by all workers who work by themselves and

implement measures to address those hazards (see, Model Working Alone Risk Assessment Form)

- Set up a communications system so those workers can call for help if needed and you can contact them periodically to check on their safety
- Establish safe work practices for when workers are by themselves.

Here's more information, tools and resources to help you protect workers working alone:

- Model Working Alone Policy
- How to Protect Mobile Workers Who Work Off-Site, Part 1 and Part 2
- Checklist for workers at risk of violence because they're isolated.

Second, make sure that all workers know that if they get injured or sick on the job, whether they're alone or not, they should *not* try to drive themselves to the hospital or elsewhere. If they should pass out while behind the wheel, they endanger not only themselves but also everyone else on the road.

Last, remind workers to always wear their seatbelts when driving on the job. Go to [SafetyPoster.com](http://SafetyPoster.com) to buy posters for your workplace on using seatbelts.