

# FOREST MACHINE MAGAZINE

CUTTINGS FROM THE FOREST FLOOR DELIVERED DIRECT TO YOUR DOOR



## COMMITTED TO KEEPING LONE WORKERS SAFE

TRACKPLOT



I started working in forestry in the 1970's with the Forestry Commission; we worked in large squads and our vans were equipped with two way radios which gave us contact with our forest office. This was a good system as we all looked out for each other and urgent help was available at the other end of the radio. As mechanised harvesting increased and the private sector took over most of the timber being harvested, there was a big change in the way that the forests were worked. The big felling squads were replaced by harvesters and forwarders and the job changed from being a social occupation with good banter at break time, to a solitary way of life with very little human contact.

As mobile phones became more affordable and reception improved we had a method of communicating and keeping in contact again although many forestry areas were still void of phone reception. I have looked at alternative systems for safeguarding lone workers in recent years and there have been many pros and cons with different types, one of the negative factors has been cost. It is impossible to put a price on a human life but many forestry contractors work on tight margins and don't have the necessary finances to fund an expensive communications system. I myself used to run with two or three phones on different networks so I could check in every two hours. This was both expensive and not infallible as there was always somewhere where there was no phone signal on any network. I have been very lucky over the years as there have been instances in my forestry career where "I have dodged a bullet". I have been lucky that there was someone nearby who saw what happened and were able to summon help or I have been able to get myself help. I know of many other workers who, sadly, have not been as fortunate as me and were taken far too soon.

I met Andrew Miller from Trackplot at the Confor Woodland Show in September and after chatting to him I realised that Trackplot had come up with a good system that was not solely dependent on mobile networks, and was both efficient and affordable for all forestry contractors/workers. I was extremely impressed with this system and met up with Andrew and one of the Trackplot directors, Emma Thomas, for further information on this simple and innovative system.

2019 is a significant milestone for Trackplot who are celebrating a decade spent protecting lone workers. The first iteration of the interactive online Portal was developed in 2008 as a project for a blue chip client. Educated as a land surveyor and with 15 years experience working in the oil & gas industry Gert Riemersma, the founder, knew his product could help lone workers. In 2009 Trackplot Ltd was born after the preventable death of a farmer in the Scottish Borders brought home the need for a lone worker monitoring system specifically for people working remotely in rural and isolated areas. A year later in 2010 the Royal Highland Show awarded Trackplot the Silver Medal for their innovative Trackplot Portal.

This lifesaving solution has been designed for people who work outdoors. It allows people who work alone to keep in touch wherever they are. The system has wide ranging uses across rural industries from the forestry sector, estate and land management, to local authority land and infrastructure inspection and maintenance.

### HOW IT WORKS

It is a complete lone worker monitoring solution, combining satellite, GPS and mobile phone technology, mapping software and customer support processes. The system offers a range of different communication methods and does not need mobile phone reception to work. This is especially important for people who work in areas beyond any mobile network reach.

The Trackplot Portal is the control and command centre at the heart of the system. In the Portal you monitor the location, activity and safety of your workforce in real time throughout the day; set up processes and escalation procedures; and reporting. Trackplot has applied over 50 years experience in GPS technology, mapping and software development to design this unique online interactive platform.

First and foremost the interactive system has to be easy to use. Integral to Trackplot is a system of notifications, a check-in and check-out facility and alerts. The Trackplot Portal has an automatic escalation procedure which, in the event that the lone worker is incapacitated, allows the alarm still to be raised. Users can check-in and check-out using



Andrew Miller - Business Development Manager

either a GPS device, landline, text message, computer, laptop or tablet using the Trackplot Portal or mobile app.

Over the ten years that Trackplot has spent protecting lone workers they are fortunate that there has never been an SOS emergency triggered by a customer. If a customer was in any danger the system allows them to send an SOS message which is escalated to the emergency services. Plenty of "Assistance required" incidents have been experienced by customers and these range from falling from an ATV (All Terrain Vehicle); machinery and logging incidents resulting in injuries to flat tyres and broken down vehicles in isolated sites. In each case the ability to request assistance brought the issue immediately to the attention of management and triggered the escalation procedures to kick-in.

Gert Riemersma, CEO said *"Keeping people safe is at the heart of our business. We have worked with many different companies and lone workers over the ten years and we have brought enthusiasm and experience to every project. Trackplot is fully committed to keeping lone workers safe and as a result of customer feedback we make continual improvements to our system to ensure it is fit for purpose."*

#### HOW IS THE SYSTEM DEPLOYED IN A FOREST?

In practice the deployment depends on your location and specific environment. In areas with absolutely

no mobile phone reception all lone workers would carry a GPS device to check-in and check-out at agreed intervals to confirm they are safe. In areas with reliable phone coverage it makes sense to use the Trackplot App to check-in and check-out which is quicker and more immediate. In the majority of cases it is a combination of these approaches that works best – often check-ins are performed using the GPS device whilst on-site, which are typically outside of phone reception, and at the end of the day the App is used whilst commuting or from home to check-out. Users appreciate this flexibility to choose the best way to keep in touch.

You need to consider risks first, what risks your lone workers may be exposed to and decide what level of risks you as an employer are comfortable with. Undertaking risk assessments for each type of lone worker you have and the environments they work in will inform what your lone worker policies should be and the best way to set the lone worker system up.

Risk scenarios to consider could include environmental hazards such as difficult terrain, unpredictable or extreme weather. Operating hazardous machinery is an obvious risk. As is understanding any medical conditions of lone workers and the potential consequences. Night time risks can be quite different to those faced during daylight hours. This will impact on the appropriate reporting, response and back-up mechanisms you may need. Considering "What if?" scenarios is important too, don't assume situations and hazards will remain the same. For example, a remote site with good mobile phone reception could very quickly become a hostile environment for a lone worker if a storm takes out electricity and mobile



Emma Thomas a director at Trackplot

phone masts leaving the lone worker with no way to get in touch.

#### WHY DO YOU NEED IT?

Because lone workers are susceptible. People who work alone are exposed to significant risk – simply because they work alone. Often lone workers behave differently to workers in teams. In fact, injuries for lone workers seem to be worse than for those who work in teams as they tend to take more or riskier risks.

In addition, there are legal implications. Employers have responsibility for the health, safety and welfare at work of all their employees, including self-employed people and contractors who may be affected by the work activities they need to undertake. Every employer needs to comply with their legal duties towards any lone workers they have under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974; the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 and the Corporate Manslaughter and Corporate Homicide Act 2007 (in the worst case scenarios).

Emma Thomas, Director, said *"Understanding our customers and their challenges drives us forward. We are currently working towards gaining BS8484 standards to demonstrate our pledge to quality and our rigorous approach to health and safety."*

*"We have a fantastic dedicated team who strive to deliver truly outstanding customer service every day. We are proud of this because lives depend on it. We are looking forward to working with more safety-conscious clients over the next ten years, to challenge us and continue to evolve our product and service."*

[www.trackplot.com](http://www.trackplot.com)

# TRACKPLOT



- Trackplot is the preferred lone worker solution designed for people who work outdoors. It allows people who work alone to keep in touch wherever they are. This is especially important for people who work in rural and isolated areas.
- Trackplot's GPS devices use the Globalstar satellite network to transmit the status of the user on a regular basis. They work across the globe, from oceans to the poles. The devices are battery powered and can last for many months (depending on usage).
- As long as you have a good view of the sky, Trackplot's GPS devices will be able to transmit a position report from anywhere.
- The GPS device can be used in tracking mode allowing a user to be frequently monitored at intervals of 10-15 minutes. The tracking leaves a "snail trail" ensuring they can be located quickly in the event of an incident.



GPS device and armband



To find out more call Andrew Miller, Trackplot Business Development Manager, on **0131 513 9571** or email **[andrew@trackplot.com](mailto:andrew@trackplot.com)**