TRACKPLOT

KEEPING LONE WORKERS SAFE

Currently there is a real focus on lone worker safety. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) published updated guidelines in March 2020 to advise how to protect lone workers.

Lone working is typical in the forestry sector and is familiar to most, if not all, FCA members. Indeed, to recognise this fact, in December 2019 the Forestry Industry Safety Accord (FISA) launched their refreshed Guidance on Managing Health & Safety in Forestry.

THE LATEST FORESTRY HEALTH AND SAFETY STATISTICS

Forestry is one of the UK's most dangerous sectors to work in. The latest HSE data confirms that the worker fatal injury rate in agriculture, forestry and fishing remains much higher than any other sector (9.21 per 100,000) in 2018/2019, which is 18 times as high as the average rate across all industries.

HSE also report that there are an estimated 14,000 workers, around 4.1%, in the sector each year who sustain an injury at work. These statistics continue to highlight the imperative need to protect forestry workers, especially those who work remotely or alone.

WHY ARE LONE WORKERS PARTICULARLY SUSCEPTIBLE?

Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations, employers have a duty of care and must manage the risk to lone workers, considering the extent of potential harm lone workers are exposed to. Lone workers include employees, volunteers, contractors and self-employed people.

Lone workers may be exposed to significant risk simply because they work alone. Often lone workers behave differently to workers in teams and they are more likely to take higher risks. In fact, injuries for lone workers seem to be worse than for those in teams. To compound this there will always be greater risks for lone workers without direct supervision or anyone to help them if things go wrong. Considering this and the latest industry statistics it confirms the need to focus on lone worker safety should be of high priority.

It is worth understanding the consequences of non-compliance with health and safety regulations... HSE can impose fines, which typically have been up to £1 million pounds, and in some cases also custodial sentences for breaches to the law.

DE-RISKING A RISKY BUSINESS

Founded in 2009, after the preventable death of a farmer in the Scottish Borders, Trackplot's sole purpose has been to keep outdoor lone workers safe.

In response to this tragic accident Trackplot developed a complete lone worker solution specifically focused on the needs of lone workers in rural, remote or hazardous areas. Addressing the demand for better safety practices, the system is widely used across rural industries from forestry, estate and land management to local authorities.

A RECENT USE CASE

Last October, Trackplot experienced their first SOS alarm in the 10 years of the company. SOS is a vital function of Trackplot's remote lone worker monitoring system and is one of the primary reasons why customers choose the solution. The SOS escalation can be triggered in a life-threatening medical emergency.

The SOS alarm was raised by McGowan Ltd, a Trackplot customer specialising in environmental engineering, based in the Highlands of Scotland. The situation occurred as a group of McGowan employees, based in one of their remote locations, unfortunately discovered the body of a missing walker from the local area.

On raising the alarm, the SOS escalation procedure began. By 10.01 GEOS (Global Emergency Operating System) in Houston, USA received the SOS message by satellite into their secure call centre. The call centre established that the location of the SOS was in the UK and despatched an alert to ARCC (Aeronautical Rescue Coordination Centre) to start the emergency response. In tandem whilst this was happening the call centre also contacted the nominated Emergency Contacts at McGowan Ltd to verify if the SOS was real or a false alarm. On confirmation that this was a true SOS further details were gathered to brief the emergency services as fully as possible of the situation. Approximately 15 minutes after the SOS alarm was raised, a helicopter landed on-site supported by the police.

The McGowan site had very limited mobile phone reception, indeed one of the employees had

McGowan Ltd, based in the Highlands of Scotland, frequently work in remote, rural locations.

tried to send a text message to the main office to request help, but it was not delivered until after the emergency services arrived.

Despite living in an age when the mobile phone dominates, the incident demonstrated that the mobile network cannot be solely relied upon as a guaranteed method of communication in an emergency, especially in rural and remote locations.

The immediacy and rigour of the Trackplot system and the effectiveness of the SOS escalation procedures deployed confirmed to McGowan employees they can rely and trust in the system knowing that help is on its way.
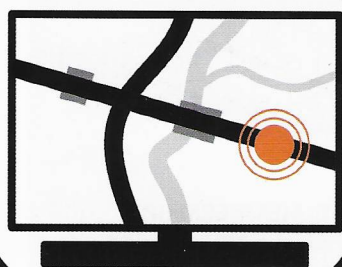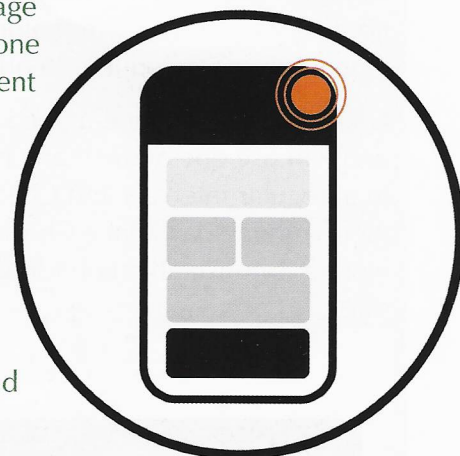
Although the incident had a sad ending, and nothing could be done this time to save a life it was reassuring to know the SOS escalation worked effectively ensuring a response as quickly as possible.

Ross Smith, Director at McGowan Ltd, explained, "McGowan Ltd work frequently in remote, rural locations and to safeguard our employees we use Trackplot. On the 10th Oct 2019 the SOS button was activated by an employee on a remote peatland restoration site near Roy Bridge (Highland). Within 15 minutes an emergency services helicopter was on-site and recovered the body of a deceased walker. Through this experience our staff and management are reassured that, if needed, the Trackplot system alerts the emergency services who can respond extremely quickly and exactly where required."

How the Trackplot system works

The Trackplot system combines satellite and GPS technology, mapping software incorporating Ordnance Survey mapping, mobile app software and customer support processes.

Drawing on over 50 years' experience in GPS technology, mapping and software development, Trackplot designed the Trackplot Portal, a unique online interactive platform. At the heart of the
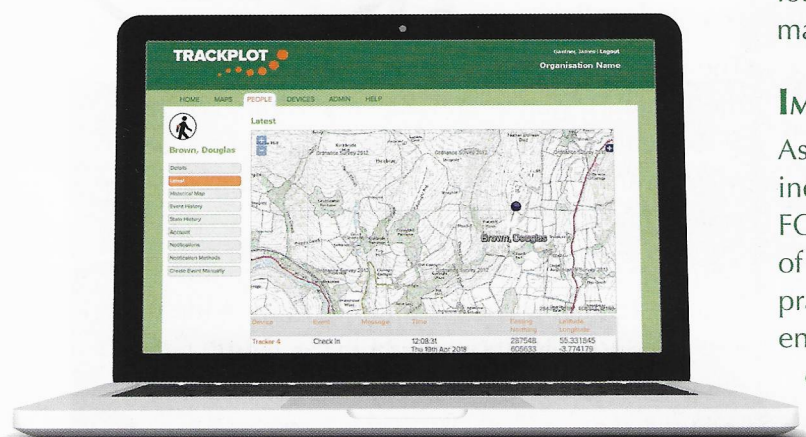
system, the Trackplot Portal monitors each lone worker, who can use different methods to keep in touch. In addition, the carefully thought through workflow provides flexible monitoring and notification periods, with automatic alerts if the lone worker is overdue or requires assistance.

Lone workers have pre-agreed 'Check- in' times and will use one of the many methods to Check-in at regular intervals and Check-out at the end of their working day. Once Checked-in, each lone worker is constantly monitored to ensure they are safe.

The Trackplot Portal keeps authorised managers informed by notifications via email, text messaging and phone. If a lone worker is running late and overdue, they can advise they are OK. If a lone worker misses an agreed Check-in time then this is escalated, following an agreed procedure. Typically, the worker's emergency contacts are notified to ensure the lone worker is found as soon as possible.

Working in forestry it is common to experience temperamental or non-existent mobile phone reception. To overcome this, and remove any reliance on mobile networks, the Trackplot system is integrated with the Global Positioning System (GPS), a satellite-based navigation system. Using the latest GPS Devices and, combined with accurate Ordnance Survey mapping in the Trackplot Portal, this enables each lone worker's location to be found.

GPS works across the whole of the UK and beyond including all remote areas. The functions on the GPS Device allow lone workers to 'Check-in',

'Check-out', Track, Request Assistance and Request an SOS response in an emergency situation.

The system is easy to use when out in the field. If there is reliable mobile phone reception, then the Trackplot Mobile app can be deployed. This flexibility allows for the GPS Device to be used when lone working in a remote area with no mobile phone coverage and, for convenience, the user can switch to the Mobile app when there is a mobile signal.

As a genuine and complete lone worker monitoring system Trackplot can be used to schedule and monitor progress of tasks across lone worker teams, bringing cost, operational and management efficiencies.

IMPROVE SAFETY ACROSS THE MEMBERSHIP

As the only body representing businesses and individuals involved in forestry contracting, the FCA continues to raise awareness of all aspects of safety with it's membership, and find practical, pragmatic approaches to improve safety. Trackplot endorse this goal and, as an FCA member, are committed to working with fellow members to help them keep safe.

To find out more about how Trackplot can keep your lone workers safe, please email: sales@trackplot.com or call 0131 513 9751

RESOURCE REFERENCES:

WWW.HSE.GOV.UK/LONE-WORKING/INDEX.HTM?UTM_SOURCE=HSE.GOV.UK&UTM_MEDIUM=REFFERAL&UTM_CAMPAIGN=LONE-WORKING&UTM_CONTENT=HOME-PAGE-BANNER

WWW.UKFISA.COM/SAFETY-INFORMATION/SAFETY-LIBRARY/HEALTH-AND-WELFARE.HTML