Owning lone worker alarms or paying for mandatory monitoring subscriptions

Two ways to fund lone worker safety

Employers in New Zealand often weigh the same practical question when staff work alone: is it better to own the safety devices, or enter a mandatory monitoring subscription that bundles devices, alerts and support? Both approaches can protect workers, but they suit different teams, budgets and risk profiles.

A two way voice alarm can be part of either arrangement. Its value sits in the ability to raise an alert and speak without needing a phone call, which matters when a worker is stressed, injured or unable to reach a handset. The wider question is not just equipment access. It is who holds the device, who maintains it, who receives alerts, and how quickly the system is checked when something changes.

What device ownership looks like

Device ownership means the employer buys or otherwise holds the alarms and manages them as workplace equipment. The devices may be issued to named staff, allocated by shift, or kept at a depot for teams that need them occasionally. Ownership gives the employer direct control over allocation, storage, charging routines and internal policy.

This approach tends to suit organisations with stable teams, predictable shifts and staff who are comfortable following internal procedures. If the same people use the same devices each week, they are more likely to know how to activate an SOS alert, understand the limits of location reporting and carry the unit in the right place. Familiarity reduces hesitation.

Ownership also works when an employer already has a capable internal response structure. For example, a site might have supervisors on site, a controlled after-hours contact process, or a small team where every alert recipient knows the response plan. In that setting, the device is one part of a broader workplace policy rather than a standalone safety measure.



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The trade-off is that ownership shifts more duties in-house. Devices need charging, checks and a clear process when a unit is lost, damaged or left in a vehicle. Battery life becomes a daily operational concern rather than a product specification. If staff rotate quickly or casual workers move between sites, keeping track of each unit can become tedious. A device in a drawer is no protection at all, so storage habits matter as much as purchase decisions.

Ownership can also create a false sense of security. A worker may carry an alarm with two way voice capability but not know whether the alert reaches anyone after hours. Before choosing this path, an employer should be clear about who monitors alerts, what happens when that person is unavailable and how escalation works. The device is only as useful as the response around it.

What a mandatory monitoring subscription changes

A mandatory monitoring subscription usually means staff are required to use a connected safety service as part of their role. The subscription may cover the alarm, connectivity, alert handling and ongoing access to a monitoring function. Instead of treating the device as a loose piece of equipment, the employer builds it into the working day.

This approach can suit teams with scattered sites, changing rosters or lone work outside normal office hours. If workers move between locations, a managed service can reduce the

burden of tracking devices and keeping the alert path active. It can also support clearer expectations: staff know that carrying the alarm is part of the job, not an optional extra.

Mandatory use has a cultural side. Some workers may resist being monitored, especially if they feel the system is there to watch performance rather than respond to risk. That concern is easier to handle when the purpose is explained plainly and the rules apply fairly. The focus should stay on safety outcomes, such as SOS alerts, man down alerts, fall detection alerts and two way voice communication when a worker needs help.

A subscription can also fit workplaces where alert response needs to continue beyond the presence of a supervisor. If a worker is alone in the evening, the value of an alert recipient depends on the service being active and reachable. The employer still needs to define who receives information, what details are shared and how workers are told about the limits of the system.

The trade-off is dependence on an ongoing service. The employer must keep the subscription current, make sure devices are returned when staff leave, and avoid gaps between roster changes and device assignment. If connectivity is weak in some work areas, the promised safety layer may be uneven. Location features such as GPS, WiFi positioning or GSM triangulation can behave differently depending on the environment, so expectations need to be realistic.



Where two way voice changes the decision

Basic alarms and two way voice alarms solve different problems. A basic SOS alert can tell someone that help is needed. Two way voice allows a response person to hear context, ask short questions and gather details while the worker stays still or moves to a safer place if able. That can matter when an alert is accidental, when a worker is shaken but mobile, or when emergency services need a clearer picture.

For high risk work, voice communication can be worth prioritising over owning a larger number of simpler devices. For low risk roles where lone work is brief and controlled, a simpler arrangement may be enough. The decision should start with the hazards and the likely response, not with the device feature list.

Employers should also think about how a worker activates the alarm. A device kept in a pocket, on a lanyard or clipped to a belt may be reachable in some incidents and not in others. That is why device testing and scenario practice should cover realistic positions, not just a desk demonstration. Short tests can reveal whether staff know the difference between raising an alert and speaking to a responder.

Questions to settle before choosing

The cleanest decision usually comes from a few operational answers. These questions apply whether the employer owns the devices or uses a mandatory subscription:

- Who is the alert recipient during every shift, including weekends and public holidays?
- Can the worker speak clearly through the alarm when they are stressed or injured?
- What happens if the device is flat, lost or left behind?
- How will location information be used, and what are its limits in the work setting?

Answers here often decide the matter. If the workplace has strong internal cover and stable device holders, ownership may feel straightforward. If shifts are scattered and alert handling must follow the worker, a subscription may reduce friction. If no one has a clear response duty, neither option will fix that gap on its own.

It helps to separate safety equipment from discipline tools. Wearable devices for safer shifts should be introduced as a way to call for help and enable communication, not as a way to track every movement. When workers understand that, they are more likely to carry the device and use it early. When they suspect the device exists mainly to monitor behaviour, they may avoid it or leave it switched off.

Matching the option to the workplace

Ownership tends to fit smaller, steady teams where alarms can be issued, charged and checked with minimal fuss. It also suits employers that want direct control of equipment and have a reliable internal response chain. The main risk is administrative drift: devices become untracked, battery life is ignored, or staff assume the alarm is active when nobody is listening.



A mandatory monitoring subscription tends to fit teams with variable rosters, dispersed work or lone shifts outside normal hours. It can make safety equipment part of the employment routine and keep alert handling consistent. The main risk is treating the subscription as a complete solution while ignoring local conditions, worker concerns or the need to check the system regularly.

Many employers will find that the better choice sits with the model that keeps the device close to the worker and the response close to the risk. Wearable devices for safer shifts work best when the technology, the workplace policy and the human response are planned together. A two way voice alarm is then a practical tool, not a token item in a drawer.

Before committing, compare the options against the real pattern of lone work: where staff go, when they are alone, what can go wrong and who can respond. That keeps the decision grounded in safety rather than paperwork. It also makes it easier to review later, because the employer can ask whether alerts were reachable, whether voice contact worked and whether staff understood what to do.