How to set up SOS contacts for a lone worker

When you work alone, having a way to signal for help is critical. Many lone worker alarms now combine SOS buttons with GPS tracking so that when you press the alert, your location and a distress message reach the people who need to act. But the device alone is not enough. The system is only as reliable as the contact setup behind it. This article walks through how to configure SOS contacts for a lone worker, covering who to choose, what information to share, and how to test everything works before you depend on it.

Start with the right device

A lone worker alarm with GPS is the foundation. The device needs to send your location accurately and allow you to trigger an SOS without fumbling. Some units also detect falls or periods of no movement and send alerts automatically. The **Mercari Lone Worker Alarm NZ SOS worker device** is one example that combines these features. Choose a device that fits how you work, whether you are indoors, on a construction site, or travelling between sites. The setup steps that follow assume you already have a working alarm with GPS and SOS capability.

Step 1: Decide who receives the alerts

The first decision is who will get the SOS message. You need people who will see the alert quickly and who can act. For most lone workers, the list includes a supervisor, a colleague who is nearby or on call, and sometimes a family member. If your workplace has a dedicated safety team or a monitoring service, add them too. The key is to choose people who are reliable and reachable at the times you work. If you work night shifts, your daytime contacts may not wake up for an alert. Adjust the list for your actual schedule.

What to watch out for

- Do not rely on just one contact. A single person might be unreachable when the alert goes out.
- Make sure each contact knows they are on the list and has agreed to respond. Surprising someone with an alert can cause confusion.
- If you work in remote areas, consider adding a contact who is familiar with the terrain or who can coordinate search and rescue.

Step 2: Collect accurate contact details

Once you have your list, gather the details the alarm system needs. For most devices, this means a phone number for SMS alerts or a push notification via an app. Some systems also

support email. Double-check every digit. A typo in a phone number means the alert goes nowhere. Write down the contact information in a way that is easy to update, because people change numbers or leave jobs. Review the list at least once a quarter.



What to watch out for

- Use numbers that accept SMS. Some landlines do not receive text messages.
- If your system allows it, add a secondary contact method for each person, such as an email address, in case the primary method fails.
- Store the list securely but make sure the person who administers the device can access it to make changes quickly.

Step 3: Configure the SOS message

The alert that goes to your contacts should include more than just a distress signal. It needs your name, your location (ideally a GPS coordinate or a link to a map), and the time of the alert. Some systems let you add a custom message, such as the nature of the emergency or a note about your medical conditions. Keep the message brief but complete. If the system sends a pre-defined template, review it to ensure it contains all the essentials.

For example, a good SOS message might read: "Lone worker alarm triggered by [name] at [location]. Please respond immediately. Location accuracy: [accuracy radius]." Avoid adding unnecessary information that could slow down the response. Test the message by sending a test alert to yourself or to a trusted contact to confirm it reads clearly on their phone.

Step 4: Set up fallback and escalation

No matter how well you plan, a primary contact might miss the alert. Good systems let you set up an escalation path. If the first contact does not acknowledge the alert within a few minutes, the system sends the SOS to the next person on the list. This is sometimes called a chain of contacts. Configure the timing carefully. Too short a delay and you risk annoying contacts with false alarms. Too long a delay and help may not arrive in time. A common setting is a two-minute wait before escalation, but adjust based on your work environment and the response time you expect.

What to watch out for

- Make sure each contact in the chain knows they are part of it and understands the order.
- If you work in a team that rotates, update the chain whenever the roster changes.
- Some devices allow you to set different escalation rules for different types of alerts. For example, a fall detection alert might escalate faster than a manual SOS because the worker may be unconscious.

Step 5: Test the system before relying on it

Testing is the step that most people skip, and it is the one that reveals problems. Schedule a test at least once a month. Press the SOS button (or trigger the fall detection if your device allows a test mode) and ask your contacts to confirm they received the alert. Check that the location shown is accurate. If the device uses GPS, walk to a spot where the signal might be weak, such as inside a metal building or underground, and test again. Note any delays or failures and adjust the setup accordingly.



During the test, also verify that the escalation chain works. If the first contact does not respond, does the alert move to the second contact within the expected time? Do not assume it works until you have seen it happen. Keep a log of test results and share them with your contacts so everyone knows the system is functioning.

Step 6: Train your contacts on what to do

Your contacts need to know more than just how to receive the alert. They need a plan for what to do when it arrives. For a workplace supervisor, that might mean calling the worker first, then

contacting emergency services if there is no answer. For a family member, it might mean coordinating with the employer or with local emergency numbers. Provide each contact with a simple checklist: acknowledge the alert, try to reach the worker, check the location, and call for help if needed. Review this checklist together every few months, especially if the contacts or the work environment change.

Step 7: Keep the setup current

Lone worker arrangements are not a set-and-forget task. People change jobs, phone numbers expire, and work locations shift. Set a recurring reminder to review your SOS contacts and their details. Every three months is a reasonable interval. When you update the list, send a confirmation to each contact so they know they are still active. If you switch to a new device, such as the Mercari Lone Worker Alarm NZ SOS worker device, run through the full setup and test process again, even if the previous device was similar.

What to do if something goes wrong

Even with careful setup, issues can arise. A contact might miss an alert because their phone was off. The GPS location might be inaccurate in a dense urban area or inside a building. The device battery might run low and fail to send the SOS. The solution is to build redundancy. Use multiple contacts, test regularly, and keep the device charged. If you notice a pattern of failures, investigate the root cause. For example, if the GPS signal is consistently poor in a particular location, consider a device that also supports Wi-Fi or cellular triangulation. Talk to your employer or safety officer about upgrading if the current system is not reliable.



Setting up SOS contacts for a lone worker takes an hour of focused effort and a small ongoing commitment to maintenance. The payoff is peace of mind and a faster response when seconds matter. By choosing the right people, configuring the message and escalation carefully, and testing everything beforehand, you create a safety net that works even when you cannot speak or reach a phone.

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