

**Background**

A new law, RCW 49.60.515, was passed to protect isolated workers in certain workplaces from sexual harassment and assault. One provision of the law requires affected employers to “provide a panic button to each employee” covered by RCW 49.60.515 (1) (d).

**Employers and Employees**

**Q. Who is required to provide panic buttons?**

**A.** RCW 49.60.515 (1) (d) requires hotel, motel, and retail employers with at least one employee to provide panic buttons.

Property service contractors (i.e., commercial janitorial services) with at least one employee are also subject to this requirement.

**Q. Which employees are covered?**

**A.** The panic button provision covers workers employed as janitors, some security guards\*, hotel and motel housekeepers, and room service attendants who:

- Spend a majority of their working hours alone  
Or
- Don't spend a majority of their working hours alone, but their primary work responsibility involves working without another coworker present.

\*Licensed contracted security guards are exempt from the panic button provision.

**Q. Are temporary employees covered?**

**A.** Yes.

**Q. Would a team of two housekeepers working in hotel rooms next to or across the hallway from each other require personal panic buttons?**

**A.** Yes. These employees are considered “alone” and the RCW requires a panic button for each employee covered.

**Panic Buttons**

**Q. What is a panic button?**

**A.** A panic button is an “emergency contact device” designed to be carried by the user and to summon immediate on-scene assistance from a security guard, coworker, or other employer-designated personnel.

**Q. What types of panic buttons are acceptable?**

- A.** The following effectiveness criteria can help you select an acceptable panic button device (and system) for your workplace:
- The panic button is designed to be carried by the user (e.g., lanyards, clip-ons, etc.)
  - The device should be simple to activate (e.g., a single action like a push, pull, or tap provides a sustained signal) without delays caused by entering passwords or waiting for the system to turn on.
  - When activated, the signal is effective for the circumstances (e.g., designated personnel will be able to detect it regardless of their location and distinguish it from other audible or visual alarms and noise from vacuum cleaners and other sources.)
  - The device is designed to summon immediate assistance and allows responders to accurately identify the user's location.
  - The device reliably works in all locations on all shifts and the activation of one device won't obscure the activation of others.
  - The device should minimize inadvertent activation and resist possible disabling by attackers.



**Q. *What about signaling devices like horns, strobes, or buzzers?***

**A.** These typically do not meet the effectiveness criteria (e.g., if they require the user to hold down a button to sustain a signal then they wouldn't be considered "simple to activate".)

**Q. *Can we use communication devices like radios, cellphones, or pagers?***

**A.** Many off-the-shelf or consumer-grade devices may not meet the effectiveness criteria for simple activation and reliability. For example, verify all operational mechanisms of wireless systems (e.g., Bluetooth, cellular data, wireless internet, etc.) are in place and functional.

**Q. *What else helps ensure effectiveness?***

**A.** Maintenance is important to ensure panic buttons (and systems) continue to work. Periodic system checks can help you identify and correct problems.

Training is also important; include:

- Instruction on both use and response.
- Information on device limitations.
- How to maintain and replace devices.

**Q. *Who pays for panic buttons, batteries, maintenance, etc.?***

**A.** Employers are responsible to provide and pay for panic buttons; this would include batteries and other consumables, and all service and maintenance related to devices and systems.

## Effective Dates

**Q. *When does the panic button requirement go into effect?***

**A.** January 1, 2020 for larger hotels and motels (i.e., with 60 or more rooms). January 1, 2021 for all other employers covered by the law.