Which features matter most in a lone worker safety device?

The features that matter most are the ones that help a worker call for help, be located, and be understood during an incident. For a wearable lone worker alarm, the core set is an easy SOS action, reliable positioning, two way voice, automatic alerts for a worker who stops moving or falls, enough battery life for the shift, and a clear process for who receives the alert and responds.

Extra functions can be useful, but they should not get in the way of those basics. A device with many settings is not much help if the wearer hesitates when something goes wrong. The best choice is usually the one that fits the work environment, the worker's routine, and the workplace policy that sits behind it.

Start with the SOS action

An SOS function is the feature most people think of first, and for good reason. In an emergency, the worker needs a simple way to raise an alert without searching through menus or trying to remember a sequence. A dedicated button, a clearly marked control, or a motion based action can all work, provided it is easy to use under stress.

The physical design matters here. A button that sits flush against clothing may be hard to press with cold hands or while wearing gloves. A device that can be clipped to a pocket, worn at the wrist, or carried in a visible spot may suit different roles. If the wearer has to unzip a bag, remove a tool belt, or reach behind a harness, the SOS function becomes less useful.

It is also worth asking what happens after the alert is triggered. Some systems open a voice channel, some send location data, and some do both. A strong setup does not just say someone needs help. It gives the alert recipient enough detail to act.

Location needs to make sense for the setting

GPS is valuable when a worker is outdoors or moving between sites. It can narrow down where the person is and help a responder avoid guessing. In towns, dense buildings, car parks, and industrial areas, location accuracy can be less precise, so a single coordinate should not be treated as the whole story.

That is why positioning support such as WiFi positioning or GSM triangulation can matter. These methods may provide a useful fallback when satellite signals are weak. No positioning method works perfectly everywhere, and indoor or underground areas can be difficult. The practical question is whether the system gives enough location context for a responder to start, and whether it shows when location is uncertain.

Location reporting also needs a sensible rhythm. Constant updates can drain battery life, while rare updates may leave a responder with old information. Different jobs need different balances. A worker driving between remote appointments may need regular location during travel. A worker based in one building may need accurate indoor context more often than a moving trace.

Two way voice changes the quality of the response

Two way voice is often more important than people expect. An alert without voice can leave the responder wondering whether the worker is injured, threatened, confused, or simply pressed the wrong control. A voice channel can confirm what happened and whether immediate assistance is needed.

It also helps the worker. Hearing a known response process, or being able to explain that an area is unsafe to enter, can guide the next steps. In some incidents, the safest outcome may be to contact emergency services, in others it may be to move away, wait, or meet someone at an entrance. Voice makes those decisions less blind.

Good voice communication depends on more than a speaker and microphone. Wind, machinery, traffic, and PPE can all affect clarity. A wearable device should be worn where speech can be picked up and heard without being buried under clothing. If a role regularly involves noisy environments, that should be part of the assessment.

Automatic alerts cover the moments a worker cannot act

Man down and fall detection alerts address a hard situation: the worker may be unable to press SOS. A fall, sudden impact, or long period of no movement can trigger a check in or alert. This can be critical for people working alone, especially where nobody else is nearby to notice.

These features need careful setup. False alarms can happen if a device is set down on a desk, placed in a vehicle, or worn during activity that resembles a fall. That does not make the feature useless, but it does mean the workplace policy should explain how alerts are handled and how a false alarm is cancelled.

The aim is not to create the most sensitive device possible. The aim is to create a reliable safety net that workers trust. If people turn off automatic alerts because they are inconvenient, the protection disappears. Clear wearing instructions and consistent device testing help keep the system useful.

For New Zealand workplaces, the practical fit also matters. A page discussing lone work alarms for local conditions can be found at loneworkeralarms.co.nz, where the focus is on SOS, GPS, two way voice, man down and fall detection alerts. Those functions line up with the questions most teams need to ask before choosing equipment.

Battery life is a safety feature, not a convenience

A device that runs flat before the end of a shift cannot raise an alert. Battery life should be judged against the longest realistic work period, including delays, travel, and overtime. If a

worker can finish late or be called to another task, a device with only a narrow margin may create risk.

Charging habits matter too. A simple charging routine, a visible place to return the device, and a check before departure are more dependable than relying on memory. Where multiple workers share equipment, responsibility for charging and inspection should be clear.

It is sensible to look for low battery warnings and to include them in daily checks. A device may still appear fine while having too little power left to support voice communication or repeated location updates. Battery indicators are only helpful if someone acts on them.

The alert chain matters as much as the device

An alarm is only as useful as the response behind it. Before comparing models, define who receives an alert during work hours, after hours, and when that person is unavailable. The alert recipient needs a clear role, access to the right information, and a way to escalate if the worker does not respond.

This is where workplace policy does much of the heavy lifting. It should cover when the device is carried, how SOS alerts are treated, what happens after a man down or fall alert, and what workers should do if they cannot speak. It should also explain that emergency services are contacted when the situation calls for it, rather than leaving responders to improvise.

A simple written process can prevent confusion. It also helps new workers understand that the device is not a substitute for planning. Lone work still needs risk assessment, communication check ins, and clear boundaries for tasks where assistance would be slow to arrive.

Wearability decides whether the device is used

A safety device that is left in a drawer protects nobody. Comfort, weight, clip strength, strap design, and resistance to daily wear all affect whether workers keep it on. The best placement depends on the job. A lanyard may work in an office or community setting, while a clipped device may suit someone moving through yards, sites, or vehicles.

Clothing and PPE should be considered. High visibility gear, jackets, harnesses, and uniforms can hide a device or make controls difficult to reach. If the alarm is worn over clothing, it may catch on equipment. If worn under clothing, voice clarity and button access may suffer.

Workers should be able to explain, in plain terms, how to carry the device and trigger an alert. If that explanation becomes complicated, the design is probably not a good match for the role.

How to weigh the options

A practical comparison can be made with a few focused questions:

- Can the worker activate SOS quickly in the conditions they actually face?
- Does location information remain useful where the work takes place?
- Can voice communication be heard and understood in typical noise levels?
- Do automatic alerts fit the task without constant false alarms?
- Will the battery last through the full shift and any reasonable delay?

Each answer should be checked against the work itself. A lone worker in a quiet office may place less weight on fall detection than someone visiting remote properties. A worker in a noisy plant may care more about voice clarity and button access than map precision. Different risks point to different priorities.

Regular device testing keeps those priorities honest. Testing does not need to be dramatic. It can involve confirming that controls work, that alerts reach the intended person, that location appears as expected, and that the worker knows how to cancel a false alarm. The point is to find gaps before an incident does.

A sensible final check

When choosing a wearable lone worker alarm, treat SOS, location, voice, automatic alerts, battery life, and response process as one connected system. Each feature should support the next. A fast SOS button is less useful without a prepared alert recipient. Accurate GPS is less useful without voice confirmation. Fall detection is less useful if workers do not know how it behaves during normal activity.

The right device is the one people will wear, can operate under pressure, and trust enough to keep ready. Start with the incident you are trying to manage, then choose the functions that answer it clearly. Anything beyond that should earn its place by making the response safer, faster, or easier to understand.