

A guide for employers

Work-related violence

October 2020





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1. Work-related violence – a guide for employers

Guidance in this handbook may help employers control the risk of work-related violence in the workplace. The information may also benefit employees and health and safety representatives (HSRs).

Definition of work-related violence

Work-related violence involves incidents in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work. This definition covers a broad range of actions and behaviours that can create a risk to the health and safety of employees. It includes behaviour sometimes described as acting out, challenging behaviour and behaviours of concern.

Examples of work-related violence

A range of sources can expose employees to work-related violence, including co-workers, clients, customers, patients, people in custody and members of the public.

Examples of work-related violence include:

- biting, spitting, scratching, hitting, kicking
- pushing, shoving, tripping, grabbing
- throwing objects
- verbal threats or abuse
- threatening someone with an object or weapon
- armed robbery
- sexual harassment and assault
- online harassment, threats or abuse
- assault with a weapon

Experiencing or being exposed to work-related violence can cause both physical harm and psychological harm from fear and distress.

Work-related violence is a work-related risk that employers must eliminate, so far as reasonably practicable. If it is not reasonably practicable to eliminate the risk, employers must reduce the risk so far as reasonably practicable.

This guidance will help employers understand their duties and provides advice about how to identify hazards and risks related to work-related violence, choose appropriate control measures and respond to incidents. The information may also be useful for employees and HSRs.

2. Occupational health and safety laws and work-related violence

The guidance in this chapter may help employers fulfil their duty to keep employees safe by eliminating and controlling workplace violence. This guidance can also help employers respond to work-related violence.

In this chapter

- Definition of work-related violence
- Complying with duties
- Psychological health and safety
- Work-related violence and other psychosocial hazards
- Employer duties
- Duties of self-employed persons
- Duties of those with workplace management or control
- Employee duties

Definition of work-related violence

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Complying with duties

Under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* (OHS Act) it is a legal requirement for employers to provide and maintain a safe and healthy working environment for their employees, so far as reasonably practicable. This includes the physical and psychological environments. This guidance provides information on how employers can implement measures to eliminate or reduce work-related violence, so far as reasonably practicable. It also provides information on how to respond to incidents, including what systems to put in place and how to investigate an incident. This information may help employers comply with their duties under the OHS Act. HSRs and employees may also find this information helpful.

Psychological health and safety

Managing psychological health and safety in the workplace is an essential part of an occupational health and safety (OHS) risk management system. Experiencing or being exposed to work-related violence can cause both physical and psychological harm. In addition, working in environments where there is a risk of violence or where violence is anticipated but does not actually occur can negatively affect psychological health. Psychological injury, fear or distress can impair an employee's ability to effectively function. It can also worsen an injury and delay recovery.

It is important for employers to consider how best to support employees returning to work after an incident of work-related violence.

2. Occupational health and safety laws and work-related violence

Work-related violence and other psychosocial hazards

Psychosocial hazards are anything in the management or design of work that increases the risk of work-related stress. The risk of work-related stress and other risks to health and safety can increase when work-related violence combines with other psychosocial hazards. For example, an incident of work-related violence might have a cumulative effect on employees who work alone, or those who feel unsupported by their managers might feel more vulnerable.

Common psychosocial hazards include:

- low job control – for example, little or no say over how work is performed
- high job demands – work or tasks are excessively challenging
- low job demands – idle employees or monotonous work
- poor support – inadequate emotional support from leaders, supervisors or co-workers
- poor organisational change management – poor communication and management of workplace changes
- poor organisational justice – inconsistent application of policies across employees
- low recognition and reward – lack of positive feedback or recognition and reward
- low role clarity – lack of understanding or guidance about work tasks and expectations or standards
- poor workplace relationships – interpersonal conflict, unreasonable or inappropriate behaviour or workplace culture
- poor environmental conditions – excessive noise or high temperatures, poor design and layout of workplace or work areas
- remote or isolated work – working in regional areas or alone

- violent or traumatic events – work-related violence, or criminal activity such as robbery or assault

More information about psychosocial hazards is available in WorkSafe's [Preventing and managing work-related stress](#) guidance.

Employer duties

Employers must, so far as reasonably practicable, provide and maintain a safe and healthy work environment for their employees, including independent contractors and the employees of independent contractors. Employers' duties include providing and maintaining systems of work that are, so far as reasonably practicable, safe and without risks to health.

In line with their responsibilities, employers must put in place controls to eliminate the risk of work-related violence, so far as reasonably practicable. If it is not reasonably practicable to eliminate the risk, employers must reduce the risk as far as reasonably practicable.

Employers must provide and maintain safe systems of work, and give employees the necessary information, instruction, training or supervision to do their job safely and without risks to health.

Employers must also consult with their employees and any HSRs about health and safety issues that may directly affect employees. Consultation about work-related violence must occur when:

- identifying or assessing hazards or risks in the workplace
- making decisions about measures to prevent and manage work-related violence risks
- making decisions about procedures, including procedures for consultation and monitoring and for resolving health and safety issues
- making decisions about information and training on work-related violence
- proposing changes to the work environment, equipment or systems of work that may affect the health and safety of employees

2. Occupational health and safety laws and work-related violence

Employers must also provide information, instruction, training or supervision to their employees so they can perform their work in a manner that is safe and without risks to health.

The WorkSafe website has more guidance about [consultation with HSRs](#) and about [employee representation](#).

Duties of those with workplace management or control

A person who has the management or control of a workplace must ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, that the workplace and the means of entering and leaving it are safe and without risks to health. In line with their responsibilities, those with workplace management or control must put in place controls to eliminate the risk of work-related violence, so far as reasonably practicable. If it is not reasonably practicable to eliminate the risk, they must reduce the risk as far as reasonably practicable.

Employee duties

Employees must take reasonable care of their own health and safety in the workplace and the health and safety of others who their actions and omissions may affect. Employees must also cooperate with their employer's reasonable directions to comply with the OHS Act or regulations. Regarding work-related violence, employees' responsibility might mean reporting violent incidents or following reasonable employer directives about how to do work to avoid or reduce the risk of exposure to violence.

3. How leadership and culture can help control the risk of work-related violence

The guidance in this chapter explains the role of leadership and culture in controlling the risks of work-related violence. This chapter may help employers and others with leadership roles in the workplace.

In this chapter

- Definition of work-related violence
- The role of leadership and culture

Definition of work-related violence

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The role of leadership and culture

Leadership and culture play an important role in work-related psychological health and safety. It is important to spend time actively creating a work environment which effectively manages work-related violence and where employees are able to report work-related violence.

Culture

Workplace culture refers to the shared practices, behaviours, norms and values of people within an organisation or workplace. Culture creates the 'unwritten rules' that guide the behaviour of employees, including how they interact with each other, how they interpret and respond to events or change and the things they prioritise. Research shows that a positive workplace culture which prioritises safety plays an important role in the prevention and management of work-related illness and injury. Positive workplace culture also creates an environment that effectively addresses work-related violence and other hazards that increase the risk of work-related stress, also known as psychosocial hazards.

Employers can encourage a 'safety' culture through alignment of leadership behaviours and employer policies and practices. Examples include visible leadership and communication about the importance of health and safety, recognition for initiatives that reduce the risk to health and safety and timely interventions for health and safety risks. Sometimes encouraging a 'safety' culture requires changes or new practices.

3. How leadership and culture can help control the risk of work-related violence

Positive culture

A workplace culture that prioritises the prevention of work-related violence and physical and psychological injury:

- has leaders who are vocal and proactive in promoting employee safety
- has policies and procedures in place to prevent and manage work-related violence and expects and promotes compliance with these policies and procedures
- consistently recognises and rewards employees for prioritising safety
- seeks out and implements new and improved ways of preventing work-related violence
- gives employees genuine opportunities to speak up about issues and have input into decision-making
- is clear about everyone's roles, responsibilities and the desired outcomes they are working towards in preventing work-related violence
- has teams and groups across the organisation that can work well together to solve problems relating to work-related violence
- provides employees with the skills and knowledge necessary to do their work safely
- provides employees with the support and resources they need to do their work safely
- encourages open discussion and reporting of work-related incidents involving violence and aggression
- encourages employees to report and discuss emotional distress arising from exposure to work-related violence and provides appropriate support
- takes proactive steps to prevent and manage negative emotional responses arising from exposure to work-related violence

Leadership

Leaders at all levels, from the most senior leaders to frontline managers, play an essential role in creating a 'safety' culture that prioritises the prevention of work-related violence. Active and visible commitment to prevention and management of work-related violence from the top down is critical for driving positive change and ensuring continuous management of risks.

Leaders' responsibilities

In particular, leaders should take responsibility for:

- setting and enforcing health and safety objectives and accountabilities
- ensuring effective safe systems of work to identify and control risks
- developing and promoting policy and key initiatives to support safety
- allocating resources to the prevention and management of work-related violence
- consulting with and creating opportunities for employees to speak up about risks and their ideas for managing those risks
- supporting different groups within and outside the organisation to understand their role in risk management and to work together to minimise risks
- modelling compliance with policies and other desired behaviour
- providing the support, information, feedback and resources for employees to do their job and manage work demands, including additional support during difficult events such as organisational change
- providing support and assistance for employees who are struggling to cope with the potential for or risk of work-related violence

4. Managing the risk of work-related violence

The guidance in this chapter can help employers manage the risk of work-related violence. This chapter includes information about consultation, identifying hazards and risks and controlling risks.

In this chapter

- Definition of work-related violence
- How to manage the risks of work-related violence
- The importance of consultation
- Identifying hazards and assessing risks
- Questions to ask
- Controlling risks
- Reviewing risk control measures
- Successfully implementing risk controls
- Reviewing roles
- Violence prevention policy

Definition of work-related violence

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How to manage the risks of work-related violence

Managing the risks of work-related violence is a planned, systematic process. It involves a series of steps:

Step 1

Identifying hazards to find out what could cause harm to employees.

Step 2

Assessing risks to understand the nature of the harm the hazards could cause and the likelihood and seriousness of the harm.

Step 3

Controlling risks by determining the most effective risk control measures for any given circumstance, using the hierarchy of control and current industry best practice. The hierarchy of control is a step-by-step approach to eliminating or reducing risks in the workplace, so far as reasonably practicable. It ranks risk controls from the highest level of protection and reliability through to the lowest and least reliable protection. You can find out more about [the hierarchy of control](#) on WorkSafe's website.

Step 4

Monitoring and reviewing hazards and control measures to ensure prevention measures are working as planned and, when necessary, improved.

4. Managing the risk of work-related violence

The importance of consultation

Employers must consult with employees and any HSRs about health and safety matters that directly affect or are likely to directly affect employees.

Drawing on the experience, knowledge and ideas of employees is more likely to result in the identification of hazards and the selection of effective risk control measures.

The points at which consultation must occur include when:

- the organisation is identifying and assessing work-related violence hazards and risks in the workplace
- making decisions about measures to control risks of work-related violence
- making decisions about the adequacy of the facilities for the welfare of employees
- making decisions about procedures for resolving health or safety issues, consulting with employees, monitoring the health of employees or providing information and training to employees
- proposing changes that may affect the health and safety of employees such as changes to the conduct of the work performed at the workplace

Consultation should also occur:

- when there are reports or indications of work-related violence affecting the health and safety of employees
- after an incident, 'near miss' or injury

What does consultation involve?

Consultation should involve:

- sharing information with employees and HSRs about anything that could affect workplace health and safety. Information must be timely and in a form understood by employees, including in other languages where appropriate
- giving employees a reasonable opportunity to express their views. Encourage employees to play a part in the problem-solving process
- taking those views into account. Employees should help to shape decisions, not hear about them after decisions are made

The WorkSafe website has more [guidance about consultation](#).

Identifying hazards and assessing risks

Work-related violence hazards may arise from a combination of the:

- work environment
- work tasks and how they are carried out
- way work is designed and managed
- engagements between employees and clients or members of the public
- engagements between employees

Typical hazards

Typical hazards that give rise to work-related violence include:

- face-to-face interactions between members of the public and employees
- handling cash, drugs or valuables
- working alone, working in isolation and working in the community, for example, home visits, outreach work, driving passenger transport vehicles and working at night

4. Managing the risk of work-related violence

- providing services or treatment to people with potentially unpredictable behaviour, such as those who are distressed, angry, intoxicated, incarcerated, confused, afraid or ill
- enforcement activities, for example, community law enforcement work and security work

Under-reported

When identifying and assessing the risk of work-related violence it is important to recognise that work-related violence is under-reported, particularly in occupations where incidents occur on a regular basis.

Factors that can deter employees from reporting work-related violence include:

- reporting is time-consuming and complicated
- once an event is over, employees just want to forget about it
- beliefs that violence is just 'part of the job' so nothing can be done about it
- workplace culture of 'just getting on with it' or discouragement of reporting
- lack of understanding or definition of what is and isn't reportable
- thinking or knowing that nothing will happen if a report is made
- employees believe they will be blamed for the incident
- incidents are so common that only serious ones are reported

Employers should take steps to address these factors and actively encourage employees to report all incidents without fear of reprisal, discrimination or disadvantage to their role or career.

Consult employees

When hazards are identified, employers must consult with affected employees, those likely to be affected and any HSRs about how to control risks associated with the hazards. This includes risks associated with work-related violence. To help identify if work-related violence is a hazard:

- review hazard and incident reports
- consult with employees and HSRs
- walk through and inspect the workplace
- gather information from customers, clients and organisations representing employees

Questions to ask

To determine the likelihood that work-related violence will harm someone, ask the following questions:

- What is the likelihood or the hazard or risk concerned eventuating?
- Has it happened before, either in this workplace or somewhere else? If it has happened, how often does it happen?
- What are the consequences? Will it cause minor or serious injury or death?

While assessing risks based on frequency and severity, it is important employers understand the environment their employees work in and prioritise control measures to prevent work-related violence. It is also important not to discount risks that are less likely to occur or only cause minor harm. All identified risks must be acknowledged, monitored and managed to ensure a safe workplace.

Use WorkSafe's Work-related violence risk control measures selection tool in [Appendix A](#) to identify work-related violence hazards and risk factors in the workplace.

4. Managing the risk of work-related violence

Controlling risks

There are many ways to control the risk of work-related violence, and some measures are more effective than others. Use the hierarchy of control to select risk control measures on the basis of what is most reliable and provides employees with the highest level of protection. First consider whether it is possible to eliminate the risk, so far as reasonably practicable. If elimination is not reasonably practicable, reduce the risk so far as reasonably practicable. Typically, effective control of work-related violence involves multiple risk controls.

The most effective control measures eliminate the hazard and associated risk. For example, eliminate cash handling in a public car park by introducing an electronic payment system.

If it is not reasonably practicable to eliminate the hazard, minimise the risk by implementing a range of control measures.

Use a number of control measures

If necessary, use a number of control measures together to reduce the risk of work-related violence in instances where a single control is likely to be ineffective. For example, a bank could use engineering controls, such as anti-jump barriers, CCTV and security measures, together with administrative controls, such as cash-handling procedures. You may need to implement some control measures across the whole organisation, and others only in specific work areas. Make control measures part of the systems of work.

Use WorkSafe's risk control measures selection tool to assist in selecting measures to control hazards and risk factors. Risk control measures may include:

Physical work environment and security risk control measures

The physical environment can affect the likelihood of violent incidents occurring and the ease with which people can respond to those incidents. The following control measures are the most reliable and are likely to provide the highest protection for

employees. Multiple measures that may provide the most effective control include:

- where possible, separating employees from the public, for example:
 - by outsourcing delivery of products to customers to suitably resourced providers
 - by contacting clients via phone rather than in person, where possible
 - with protective barriers or screens, secure employee areas and facilities, safe rooms etc.
- installing safety glass in high-risk areas, for example, laminated, toughened glass or perspex, including in picture frames and mirrors
- designing ambient conditions to lower arousal and reduce stress
- where possible, eliminating the need for employees to work alone, at night or in close proximity to the public or clients
- appropriately controlling access to the premises and vulnerable areas
- ensuring no public access to the premises when people work alone or at night
- ensuring communication, duress and alarm systems are in place, regularly maintained and tested and that all employees are trained regularly in the system's operation
- ensuring employees can see who is coming into the premises and can restrict access when necessary
- installing sufficient internal and external lighting or mirrors to provide increased visibility indoors and onto the street
- ensuring other features provide visibility, such as transparent panelling for doors and windows
- ensuring cash, valuables and drugs are stored securely
- developing and implementing cash-handling procedures, for example, electronic funds transfer only, locked drop safes, carry small amounts of cash, vary banking times, display 'limited cash held' signs

4. Managing the risk of work-related violence

- where possible, limiting the amount of cash, valuables and drugs on the premises
- ensuring there is no access to dangerous implements or objects that could be thrown or used to injure someone
- ensuring employees have a safe place to retreat to and to escort others to and are trained in the procedure to do this safely
- arranging furniture and partitions so movement is not restricted and there is good visibility of all service areas
- restricting access to furniture and items that could be used as weapons, for example, by bolting down furniture
- ensuring the size and layout of rooms facilitate safe practices, for example, rooms large enough to enable more employees to attend to patients or clients at once, where appropriate
- installing appropriate signs to direct clients and visitors
- providing security measures, for example, CCTV, anti-jump screens, timer safes
- ensuring the building is secure, maintained and fit for purpose
- policy statements to communicate an employer's position on work-related violence, discourage violence and set expectations about incident management. You'll find suggested content for a violence prevention policy on this page
- responsible service of alcohol policy and practices
- procedures for opening and closing the business
- monitoring employees when working in the community or away from the workplace, for example, a supervisor checks in regularly throughout the shift
- a system to map and record areas of concern for safe access and exit
- ensuring regular handover of information occurs, for example, with employees, other agencies, carers and service providers
- processes to assess client compatibility and suitability
- evaluation of work practices to determine whether they contribute to violence
- identifying behaviours and their triggers and implementing strategies to address those triggers and behaviours
- having an identification system in place, for example, employees and authorised visitors are clearly identified
- understanding client condition/disability/triggers/care and behaviour management plans
- reviewing behaviour and treatment programs after incidents or changes in behaviour
- a process in place to note, report and monitor client violence
- where a client is known to have a history of violence, a management plan is in place that has been developed in consultation with appropriately qualified people
- policy on the ongoing treatment of clients known to be violent or abusive, such as treatment contracts

Work system risk control measures

Work systems and procedures are administrative controls and should be part of the overall work-related violence prevention strategy. Work systems and procedures are insufficient on their own to reduce the risk of violence and should be used with physical work environment and security control measures.

Work system examples

Examples of work systems include:

- procedures for working in isolation and in uncontrolled environments. A risk assessment should be carried out to determine the minimum number of employees that should be rostered to shifts at high risk places or during high risk times

4. Managing the risk of work-related violence

Training, instruction and information

Use training, instruction and information to support the overall approach to work-related violence prevention but do not use them as the main or only ways to control the risk of work-related violence.

Provide training, instruction and information in:

- violence prevention measures, for example, as part of the induction training package before employees start work
- workplace policy and procedures, including emergency response
- de-escalating violence, for example, identifying signs of violence, verbal and non-verbal communication strategies, encouraging reasoning, listening carefully, acknowledging concerns
- situational risk assessment, for example, when visiting homes or working off-site
- positive behaviour strategies and managing behaviours of concern
- communication, interpersonal skills and negotiation

Studies suggest that self-defence or breakaway training is not effective for preventing work-related violence. These approaches may reduce the risk if contact cannot be eliminated.

Reviewing risk control measures

Reviews help employers check that risk control measures are working and may also identify possible improvements to their effectiveness through changes to the physical environment, new work procedures and additional training.

A review of risk control measures can include an examination of the physical environment, work functions and tasks.

A review of risk control measures should occur:

- at a regular time, for example, annually
- when employee or HSR feedback indicates risk control measures are ineffective or not as effective as they should be
- when an HSR or health and safety committee requests a review
- when there have been significant changes in the work environment or work tasks
- after an incident or near miss

4. Managing the risk of work-related violence

Successfully implementing risk controls

Implementing effective risk controls and ensuring they work as intended is not always straightforward. Although an employer's proposed actions or changes may be appropriate and even necessary, they may require others to change how they do their work, how they work with others and may challenge some fundamental assumptions about what is the 'right' way to work. For example, some people may find it difficult to support risk controls that protect employees if they are concerned about how the controls affect the public.

It is important to consider how to bring about necessary change. If the change is large or disruptive enough, employers should engage all their stakeholders and make a plan for change. Consider the following areas when planning your approach:

Organisational commitment

Senior management commitment is critical to the success of any significant organisational plan. Senior leaders should be visible and active in promoting changes they support. Gaining employee commitment through frequent and open communication is also necessary to successfully change employee attitudes and behaviour. You may want to consider:

- developing a stakeholder map so you understand all your stakeholders and their needs. For example, employees in clinical roles may have different needs from those in administrative roles
- conducting an impact analysis to see which groups will be impacted and what the impact will be. Use this information to plan how you help these groups manage change

Participation, communication and consultation

The OHS Act requires employers to consult with employees and their HSRs when identifying and controlling risks to health and safety. When managing the risk of occupational violence, input from employees to help identify and address risk factors is crucial. You should already be consulting with employees throughout the risk management process and must continue to do so for implementation. Make sure you consult with all relevant or impacted groups, not just the obvious ones. Consulting with employees may help you to:

- understand their experiences, needs, ideas and concerns
- encourage them to accept and comply with the risk control measures to be put in place

You may also want to consider establishing working groups to support change implementation, steering committees to provide guidance and senior leader involvement.

Clear communication at all points before, during and after the change is essential to ensure everyone understands their obligations and rights and knows what they need to do.

Further information on consultation is available in WorkSafe's [Consultation: A guide for Victorian workplaces](#).

4. Managing the risk of work-related violence

Effective change management

Employers must decide what risk control measures they will use in the workplace to control change management risks that might lead to work-related violence.

Planning change management and its communication across a workforce can help control risks and helps employers meet their obligation to ensure they provide a working environment that is safe and without risks to health, so far as is reasonably practicable.

Control measures should target the work environment and focus on job design and working conditions. Risk control measures should address communication before and during a change process, ensuring effective consultation and participation take place and ensuring job roles are revised should any changes occur. Feedback is critical.

Violence prevention policy

What to include

Employers have an obligation under the OHS Act to consult with employees and any HSRs when making decisions about measures to control risks to health or safety. This obligation includes when making decisions about controls such as a violence prevention policy.

A violence prevention policy should be on display in a prominent place in the workplace and should include:

- **Purpose statement**

Outline the purpose of the policy. For example: This workplace policy was developed with the intent of providing a safe and healthy workplace where employees are not subjected to work-related violence. The employer is committed to supporting employees who are exposed to, or have witnessed, work-related violence.

- **Objectives**

Outline the policy's objectives. For example: Violence is not acceptable and will not be

tolerated at this workplace. Appropriate action will be taken if aggression or violence occurs. Reporting incidents is very important and is encouraged. Incidents will be investigated to identify all causes and work out how to prevent it from happening again.

- **Responsibilities**

Outline the roles and responsibilities of relevant people, for example, senior managers, employees, emergency response coordinator, security.

- **Risk management**

Provide details about how the policy manages risks.

- **References and related documents**

Reference all relevant documents and sources used in the development of the violence prevention policy.

- **Endorsement**

Provide details about who has endorsed the policy. For example: The policy is endorsed by the board, chief executive officer and OHS committee.

- **Approval and review date**

The date this policy was approved and the date it will be reviewed, for example, 12 months after approval.

5. Responding to work-related violence

This guidance may help employers respond to workplace violence. It includes information about incident management, how to respond during and after incidents of work-related violence and how to prevent further incidents.

In this chapter

- Definition of work-related violence
- Have systems in place
- Managing incidents
- Require and encourage reporting
- During an incident
- Immediately after an incident
- Incident investigation
- Investigation outcome

Definition of work-related violence

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Have systems in place

Responses to work-related violence will vary depending on the nature and severity of the incident. Systems should be in place that document what to do at the time of, and immediately after, an incident.

Managing incidents

A response system should address immediate safety issues, medical treatment, internal reporting and notifications required by external agencies such as police, fire, ambulance and WorkSafe Victoria.

Employers must consult with employees and any HSRs when developing incident management policies and procedures.

Policies and procedures for work-related violence should include:

- emergency and evacuation plans
- reporting procedures and incident investigation
- guidelines on when to call the police
- guidelines on when to call ambulance services
- sanctions and actions against perpetrators, for example, referral for clinical review
- testing and maintenance of communication and duress equipment
- regular emergency drills
- employee supervision and monitoring
- assessing the need for immediate emotional support as well as a plan for ongoing support

Workplace information and training should support incident-response policies and procedures to ensure employees are familiar with them. To ensure an appropriate response, trained and experienced employees should be rostered for high-risk shifts or in high-risk areas.

5. Responding to work-related violence

Require and encourage reporting

Encourage reporting by:

- developing and implementing policies and procedures requiring reporting of all incidents
- acting on reports as soon as possible
- having a consistent and effective response to reports
- line supervisors acting appropriately when a report is made
- regularly providing information to HSRs, employees and the health and safety committee on incidents and actions taken after incidents and including them in the investigation of incidents, near misses and review of controls

During an incident

Employees can take a range of actions during an incident. Where appropriate, actions include:

- setting off duress alarms
- calling the police
- implementing internal emergency response processes
- seeking support from other employees
- asking the aggressor to leave, using calm verbal and nonverbal communication
- retreating to a safe location

Refer physical assault, robbery, sexual assault and threats to harm someone to the police.

A workplace incident investigation should still occur when a matter has been referred to police.

A workplace investigation will assess whether risk control measures are effective and whether the response procedures worked.

Immediately after an incident

Where appropriate, take the following actions immediately after an incident to minimise injury to employees:

- ensure everyone is safe
- provide first aid or medical attention or refer to an employee assistance program where necessary
- notify WorkSafe Victoria if required
- in the event of a notifiable incident, ensure the incident site is preserved in line with the requirements of section 39 of the OHS Act

Incident investigation

Investigating incidents will help prevent similar incidents happening again and will help with responses to future incidents. Investigators should be impartial and have appropriate knowledge and experience in OHS issues.

The type of investigation depends on the type of incident. Physical assault, robbery, sexual assault and threats to harm someone should be referred to police for criminal investigation before being investigated internally for OHS implications.

The main reason for an investigation is to prevent future incidents. The investigation should lead to improved prevention measures and response processes.

Look for causes, not blame. Systems fail for many reasons and the people involved are usually not the cause of the incident.

5. Responding to work-related violence

Investigation principles

Collect information

Find out what happened, where it happened, for example, the physical location and environment, and any other relevant details. Do this by conducting interviews and reviewing written reports, client histories, training records, police reports, workplace plans and before-and-after photographs.

Look for causes

Find out possible explanations for the incident, how it happened and whether response systems worked or failed. Consider all aspects of the incident, including the environment, equipment, people and responses, systems of work, workplaces, training, information etc.

Review risk control measures

Ask whether the risk control measures worked as intended and consider, if necessary, how they could provide better protection to employees, clients and visitors. Identify and implement new control measures where necessary.

Investigation outcomes

Document and communicate the results of an investigation to all relevant parties, such as senior management, HSRs, the health and safety committee and affected employees. The investigation report should outline what happened, what has been done, what will be done and when.

Related information

Consultation: A guide for Victorian workplaces

www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/resources/consultation-guide-victorian-workplaces

Consultation: Safety Basics

www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/consultation-safety-basics

Consultation with health and safety representatives

www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/consultation-health-and-safety-representatives

Employee representation: A comprehensive guide to part 7 of the OHS Act 2004

www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/resources/employee-representation-comprehensive-guide-part-7-ohs-act-2004

Preventing and managing work-related stress: A guidebook for employers

www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/resources/preventing-and-managing-work-related-stress-guidebook-employers

The hierarchy of control

www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/hierarchy-control

Appendix A – Work-related violence risk control measures selection tool

Work-related violence risk control measures selection tool



Introduction

This tool can assist employers to control the risks of work-related violence in different workplace scenarios. The tool is for situations when elimination of the risk is not reasonably practicable or successful, and further measures are required to control or reduce the risk to an acceptable level.

Once control measures have been identified, it is important for an employer to ensure the measures have been implemented as planned, and are regularly reviewed to assess that they are working effectively. An employer should continue to monitor the workplace and activities to identify if any work-related violence is occurring, even if there are control measures in place, to reduce work-related violence so far as is reasonably practicable.

Section 35 of the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 requires employers to consult with their employees when identifying and controlling risks to health and safety in the workplace. This tool should be used as a consultation tool to help employers and employees work together to identify risks factors and controls to reduce the risk of violence occurring in the workplace.

Appendix A – Work-related violence risk control measures selection tool

Work-related violence risk control measures selection tool

General – to be applied in conjunction with controls listed below

| Lower risk | Risk scale | Higher risk | Risk control measures |
|---|--|-------------|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • systems to support work practices (policies, procedures) • appropriate supervision • structured training program in place • open communication | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of appropriate communication processes • poorly trained staff • business located in an area with higher crime statistics • higher frequency of incidents • lack of security measures • lack of experience • lack of support systems | | <p>If risks are identified, the following are examples of risk control measures that should be applied:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • educating employees about violence prevention measures before starting work (this could be in a company induction) • training employees in workplace policy and procedures, including emergency response • ensuring employees receive communication skills training • ensuring employees receive regular support and supervision • ensuring operational procedures and back-up are in place for when employees are alone or isolated • training employees in situational risk assessment such as for visiting homes or working off-site • ensuring regular handover and information exchange occurs (with employees, other agencies, carers and service providers) • implementing a workplace policy that states appropriate action will be taken to protect employees and others from violence • implementing operational procedures for opening and closing the business • ensuring the skill level, training and experience of employees is appropriate for duties allocated to them • training employees in de-escalating aggressive behaviour, including signs of aggression, verbal and non-verbal communication strategies, encouraging reasoning, listening carefully, acknowledging concerns |

Appendix A – Work-related violence risk control measures selection tool

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| Environmental/workplace design | | Risk control measures |
|--|---|--|
| Lower risk | Risk scale | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> adequate lighting installed safety barriers/screens available in high risk areas procedures in place for safe access/egress building planning considers use | <p style="text-align: right;">Higher risk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> limited number of exits lack of adequate visibility low visibility of alarms and security devices | <p>If risks are identified, the following are examples of risk control measures that should be applied:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> building is secure, maintained and fit for purpose service areas have good visibility for employees internal and external lighting assists visibility communication and alarm systems are in place (regularly maintained and tested, monitored) access to the premises and vulnerable areas is appropriately controlled employees can see who is coming into the premises and can restrict access when necessary safety glass is installed (e.g. laminated, toughened, Perspex, including picture frames etc.) safe room/place is provided for employees and others to retreat to furniture and partitions are arranged so movement is not restricted and there is good visibility of all service areas security measures are used (e.g. CCTV/anti-jump screens, drop/timer safes) access to dangerous implements and/or objects that could be thrown or used to injure employees is prevented clear signage allows the public/clients to easily find their way where possible, employees are separated from the public (e.g. with protective barriers/screens/ suitable fences for grounds) |

Appendix A – Work-related violence risk control measures selection tool

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Handling cash, drugs and/or valuables

| Risk scale | | Risk control measures |
|---|---|--|
| Lower risk | Higher risk | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> procedures developed and implemented security measures in place and correctly implemented adequate storage facilities for cash, valuables and drugs rostering takes into account business activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> few employees are on site working alone business located in an area with higher crime statistics easy access to escape routes for offenders higher frequency of incidents lack of security measures | <p>If risks are identified, the following are examples of risk control measures that should be applied:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> no public access to the premises when people work alone or at night installation of adequate and secure storage for cash, valuables and drugs where possible, limited amounts of cash, valuables and drugs held on the premises identification system is in place so employees and authorised visitors are clearly identified cash handling procedures are in place (e.g. requiring or encouraging electronic funds transactions, using locked drop safes, carrying small amounts of cash, varying the time banking is done, installing signage stating limited cash held) drug-handling and storage procedures are in place and facilities are available |

Appendix A – Work-related violence risk control measures selection tool

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Working alone or in an isolated or remote area; working off-site; working in the community

(Note: remote and isolated work refers to situations where employees may be exposed to risks because the nature and location of their work means they are unable to call for assistance in an emergency)

| Lower risk | Risk scale | Higher risk | Risk control measures |
|--|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> open communication security measures in place and correctly implemented rostering takes into account business activities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> lack of information for employees limited visibility from others lack of security measures in place working in a location with higher crime statistics lack of supervision and support working in a private home | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> lack of information for employees limited visibility from others lack of security measures in place working in a location with higher crime statistics lack of supervision and support working in a private home | <p>If risks are identified, the following are examples of risk control measures that should be applied:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> no public access to the premises when people work alone or at night employees are monitored when working in the community or away from the workplace (e.g. supervisor checks in regularly throughout the shift) employees are rotated into alternate duties to reduce exposure understanding client condition/disability/triggers/care and behaviour management plans employees are able to seek urgent assistance or raise an alarm if required (e.g. duress alarm, mobile phone, security guard) |

Appendix A – Work-related violence risk control measures selection tool

Work-related violence risk control measures selection tool

| Working in unpredictable environments | | Risk control measures |
|---|--|--|
| Lower factors | Higher risk | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> adequate rostering for employees appropriate supervision and monitoring systems in place | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> working in a location with higher crime statistics lack of security measures lack of supervision lack of monitoring systems working with offenders higher frequency of incidents lack of information for employees | <p>If risks are identified, the following are examples of risk control measures that should be applied:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> where possible employees working in unpredictable environments should not work alone employees are monitored when working in unpredictable environments (e.g. supervisor checks in regularly during the shift) employees are able to seek urgent assistance or raise an alarm if required (e.g. duress alarm, mobile phone, security guard) alert local law enforcement/security to employee presence in the area, if practical |

Appendix A – Work-related violence risk control measures selection tool

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Working at night or outside business hours

| Lower risk | Risk scale | Higher risk | Risk control measures |
|---|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> secure access to premises appropriate supervision and monitoring systems in place adequate visibility | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> easy access to escape routes for offenders lack of supervision lack of monitoring systems armed offenders higher frequency of incidents lack of security measures lack of alarms blind corners or entrapment spots limited visibility | <p>If risks are identified, the following are examples of risk control measures that should be applied:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> no public access to the premises when people work at night cash-handling procedures are in place (e.g. requiring or encouraging electronic funds transactions, using locked drop safes, carrying small amounts of cash, varying the times that banking is done, installing signage stating limited cash held) responsible serving of alcohol policy and practices are used where relevant back-up is in place for employees working alone or in isolation (e.g. another employee on site, contactable by phone, supervisor checks in during shift) use of mirrors and lighting to ensure all areas have adequate visibility | <p>Risk control measures</p> <p>If risks are identified, the following are examples of risk control measures that should be applied:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> no public access to the premises when people work at night cash-handling procedures are in place (e.g. requiring or encouraging electronic funds transactions, using locked drop safes, carrying small amounts of cash, varying the times that banking is done, installing signage stating limited cash held) responsible serving of alcohol policy and practices are used where relevant back-up is in place for employees working alone or in isolation (e.g. another employee on site, contactable by phone, supervisor checks in during shift) use of mirrors and lighting to ensure all areas have adequate visibility |

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Providing care/services to people who may have unpredictable or aggressive behaviour, are distressed, ill or incarcerated

| Risk scale | | Risk control measures |
|---|---|--|
| Lower risk | Higher risk | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> employees appropriately trained premises and facilities suitable for services provided adequate rostering information available for clients appropriate supervision and monitoring systems in place | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> person/client being intoxicated or affected by drugs unwelcome or coercive treatment higher frequency of incidents long waiting periods overcrowding communication difficulties certain behavioural and/or psychiatric conditions untreated pain lack of information no client capability assessment | <p>If risks are identified, the following are examples of risk control measures that should be applied:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> process in place for client compatibility and suitability assessment client intake assessments include screening for aggression structured and planned activities for clients employees are trained in positive behaviour strategies and managing behaviours of concern behaviours and what triggers them are identified and strategies to avoid/address behaviours and triggers are implemented behaviour and treatment programs are reviewed after incidents and/or changes in behaviour where client is known to have history of aggression, a management plan is in place that has been developed in consultation with suitably qualified people policy on the ongoing treatment of clients known to be aggressive or abusive (may include treatment contracts) ratio of employees to clients is adequate for the level of care needed, taking into account the range of activities undertaken, such as peak periods, transfers, meal times, night work, sleep-overs, emergency responses, acute care/crisis, respite where possible, employees are permanent or regular employees who are known to the clients and workplace physical separation (e.g. barriers or use of video conferencing) |

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Service methods cause frustration, resentment or misunderstanding

| Lower risk | Risk scale | Higher risk | Risk control measures |
|--|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> employees appropriately trained premises and facilities suitable for services provided adequate rostering information available for clients regular review of work practices | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> person/client being intoxicated or affected by drugs unwelcome or coercive treatment higher frequency of incidents long waiting periods anxiety overcrowding communication difficulties certain behavioural and/or psychiatric conditions no client capability assessment prolonged and untreated pain | <p>If risks are identified, the following are examples of risk control measures that should be applied:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> waiting rooms and reception areas are pleasant signage directs and assists clients and visitors to find their way work practices are evaluated to minimise the contribution to aggression employees are rotated into alternate duties to reduce exposure ratio of employees to clients is adequate for the level of care needed and takes into account the range of activities undertaken, such as peak periods, transfers, meal times, night work, sleep-overs, emergency responses, acute care/crisis, respite where possible, employees are permanent or regular employees who are known to the clients and workplace procedures and back-up are in place for employees working alone or in isolation employees are trained in positive behaviour strategies and managing behaviours of concern physical separation, for example barriers or counters | <p>Risk control measures</p> |

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| Enforcement activities | | Risk control measures |
|---|--|--|
| Lower risk | Risk scale | Higher risk |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • appropriate supervision and monitoring systems in place • adequate rostering | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of supervision • lack of monitoring systems • working in unpredictable environments | <p>If risks are identified, the following are examples of risk control measures that should be applied:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • operational procedures for working in isolation and uncontrolled environments • employees are rotated into alternate duties to reduce exposure • employees are monitored when working in the community or away from the workplace (e.g. supervisor checks in regularly throughout the shift) • system to map and record areas/places of concern • working alone is avoided where possible; risk management plans, including procedures and back-up, are developed if solitary or isolated working is necessary |



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