



Violence at Work Guidance



In a society, which is becoming more violent the Company is concerned about staff that may find themselves in violent or potentially violent situations. Heads of Departments will use the guidance attached to assess the risk to their staff and take appropriate action to control that risk. In addition, however, it is important to state that Company monies, equipment and property can be replaced but human life cannot. Members of staff should not put themselves in a potentially threatening situation on any account. The Company will, where it is sought by the victim, provide or arrange for the provision of counselling for those who have been involved in a violent attack. The Company will do all it can to support any criminal or civil prosecution by a member of staff against an alleged aggressor.

All incidents of violence shall be reported to, and investigated by, the Head of Department. Additionally, incidents involving serious threat or physical violence shall be reported using the Company Incident/Near Miss accident report form. Any member of the Company who themselves are found to be the subject of allegations of violent behaviour will be investigated under the disciplinary procedure and, if proven, action will be taken up to and including dismissal.

Those who consider themselves to be in a situation where physical violence might occur should immediately contact the Security staff, especially if it is thought that a weapon might be involved.

Introduction

Violence at work is defined by the Health and Safety Executive as:

'any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work.'

Verbal abuse and threats are the most common types of incident. Physical attacks are comparatively rare. Personal harassment, which can include unwanted, unwelcome or uninvited acts of aggressive behaviour (from other members of staff) would be dealt with by the Head of Department and/or the Personnel Manager. The procedures to be followed in these circumstances are not repeated here.

The purpose of this guidance document is to assist managers in:

- identifying circumstances where the potential for violence exists
- assessing the control measures necessary to reduce risk to an acceptable level.

The Company has a legal responsibility to identify all work activities for which foreseeable risks of violence arise from the nature of the work, and to ensure that such risks are adequately controlled. In all walks of life there is a small possibility that *unforeseeable* random acts of violence, unrelated to work activities, may occur. It is not reasonably practicable to devise control strategies for such random acts of violence, and these should therefore not be taken into account when deciding if a potential for violence exists in the workplace.

The Company Safety Policy requires health and safety to be proactively managed by carrying out assessments of activities and adopting safe working practices to control risks. The same principles apply when considering those who might be at risk of violence because of their work. The process of conducting this risk assessment is no different to that followed when assessing more conventional activities. The important point is to carry out the assessment systematically in the following way:

- **Identify the hazardous situations and who might be harmed**



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- **Assess the risks associated with the work and decide on the safe working arrangements to control these risks**
- **Record the findings of the assessment**
- **Implement the safe working arrangements**
- **Monitor and review the safe working arrangements.**

The rest of the guidance provides further detail on each of these steps.

Identify the hazardous situations and who might be harmed

A systematic and thorough review of activities should be carried out within departments to identify those tasks, which could be the focus of, or result in, violent acts against members of staff, visitors or contractors. There are a number of activities where an increased risk of violence is clearly foreseeable. These are identified in the following table, with examples of the staff groups that might be affected. Departments involved in any of these activities will need to assess the risk of violence.

The list in the table is not exhaustive and other activities may also involve an increased risk of violence.

Activity	Examples of those at risk
Representing authority, providing a front line service	Security staff, staff dealing with customer complaints, ride operators, bar staff, first aid personnel
Cash handling	Cashiers, canteen/bar/shop staff, games and arcade staff, staff emptying vending machines/phone boxes etc.
Working with animals	Zoo personnel
Lone work, work in remote locations	Those working outside of normal hours, maintenance staff, cleaners.

If the systematic review of activities shows none with the potential for violence, and therefore no individuals are at risk, there is no need to go any further than to record this result, in a departmental generic risk assessment.

Assess the risks associated with the work and decide the safe working arrangements to control these risks

Where the potential for violence has been identified, existing working arrangements should be evaluated to decide whether they control the risk adequately.

Control strategies should be designed primarily to prevent violence from occurring. A combination of physical controls, safe systems of work and staff training are likely to be needed.



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Physical controls	- separate those at risk of physical violence from their potential assailants.
Safe systems of work	- attempt to minimise the chance of a potentially violent situation arising and provide support systems should violence occur.
Training	- ensures that those who might be exposed to violent situations are capable of reacting in ways that minimise the risks.

In many instances where the possibility of violent situations has been identified the likelihood of such situations occurring will be assessed as low. This would be the case for example for those working outside normal hours carrying out routine maintenance work. Where the risks are low the requirement for physical control measures may be minimal and the control strategy will rely on designing safe systems of work and the provision of information, instruction and training. Consideration of physical controls is essential where there is likelihood of physical violence.

Where appropriate risk assessments should include contingency plans detailing the actions that will be taken following a violent incident. These plans should not only deal with the immediate consequences of an incident such as summoning assistance, but should also look to the longer term needs such as consideration of counselling and other victim support measures.

Use of Personal alarms and Panic Buttons

One of the first control measures often considered is the provision of personal alarms and/or panic buttons. These can play a role in the control strategy but unless their use has been evaluated thoroughly, they can be ineffective in practice. The following questions need to be answered when considering the use of such devices:

- Will they act as a preventative tool in the way their use is proposed or could they possibly cause violence to escalate?
- Are they just a cheap and easy attempt to deal with a more complex problem?
- Will they give a false sense of security and deter from training and other preventative strategies?
- Will they be heard by anyone who will know what they are and be willing to offer help?
- Will people be encouraged to use them freely or will anyone using them be seen as a nuisance or incompetent for doing so?

An alarm is only useful if a clear and effective strategy for responding to it has been devised. Such a strategy, which will need to be recorded as part of the assessment, should include details about:

- who will respond - will there always be someone available if needed?
- how rapid the response will be
- what those who respond should do when they arrive
- the training that those who respond require.



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Training

Training will be a significant component of the majority of control strategies for violence. However, training is not a substitute for a safe place of work or safe systems of working and can only make a contribution to the overall strategy once an assessment has been made. Where a need for training has been identified advice should be obtained from the Head of Security.

A basic training programme for those identified by the assessment to be at risk of violence should include as minimum information about:

- causes of violence
- recognition of warning signs
- relevant interpersonal skills
- details of working practices and control measures
- incident reporting procedures.

Whenever the training of staff is required as part of a control strategy, an indication of how often refresher training should be given must be included in the risk assessment.

Recording violent incidents

Departments should establish systems for recording violent incidents. Records built up over time enable a broader view to be gained of the extent to which violent acts are occurring, and allow the effectiveness of the control strategies to be monitored. Such records also help to identify training needs. Some staff may be reluctant to report matters such as verbal abuse because it is considered 'part of the job', or for fear that it may reflect on their professional ability to manage. Both attitudes contribute to under-reporting of all but the most serious incidents, and staff should be aware that any form of violence is unacceptable and should be reported.

Reporting and investigating incidents

Incidents involving violence should be reported to the Head of Department following normal departmental procedures. Additionally in cases of physical violence, a report must also be made to the Safety Office using the normal accident report form.

All reported incidents of violence should be investigated to identify the failings of the control strategy and to decide how to reduce the risk in future. An investigation, which focuses on, who was to blame is generally unhelpful.

Record the findings of the assessment

Records need to be made and kept locally of the risk assessment and should include:

- **The hazardous situations that could arise, the potential assailants and high risk areas**
- **The staff groups exposed to risks**
- **The safe working arrangements to control the risks, including the physical controls, systems of work and the training requirements**
- **Contingency plans should violence occur**
- **Date of the assessment and the latest date for review.**



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The aim should be to record the findings of the assessment in a way, which provides a useful working document for supervisors and staff. They will then understand the action they need to take and will find it easier to decide when the assessment needs to be reviewed, or if further preventative measures are necessary.

Implement the safe working arrangements

The risk assessment will have identified the physical controls, systems of work and training necessary to control the risks of violence towards staff. If not all of these arrangements are already in place they will need to be implemented in a structured way. An Action Plan with target dates for completion is often the most appropriate way of ensuring that the necessary arrangements are put into place effectively.

Monitor and review the safe working arrangements

Once the control strategies have been implemented they need to be regularly monitored and reviewed to ensure they remain effective. Monitoring the way in which people are working is a routine day-to-day management function. More formal monitoring of the control measures should also take place during departmental safety inspections, and all incidents relating to violence should be investigated.

All risk assessments should be reviewed at regular intervals, at least every year, or when there is any reason to believe that the existing assessment is no longer valid. The findings of incident investigations and the records of all reported incidents should be used when reviewing the assessment. A record should be made of every review carried out.

Should Violence occur

Record the event

Investigate it

Offer counselling

Those who consider themselves to be in a situation where physical violence might occur should immediately contact the Security staff, especially if it is thought that a weapon might be involved.