

Managing the risks of

Violence at work in the hospitality industry



introduction

Violence at work is defined as any incident where an employee or employer is abused, threatened or assaulted in situations related to their work

Workplace violence can have a significant impact on the health, safety and welfare of employers, employees and customers.

The business also can suffer as a result of:

- lost productivity/business
- increased general insurance premiums
- increased workers compensation costs.

WorkCover Corporation has developed *Guidelines for reducing the risk of Violence at Work*. The guidelines are designed to assist workplaces identify the potential for violence and provide practical guidance for the development of prevention strategies. The guidelines also provide advice for compliance with the occupational health, safety and welfare legislation.

This brochure is designed to provide the hospitality industry with specific information on the risk factors associated with:

- client aggression
- robbery
- opportunistic violence (violence that is committed for the sake of violence: no motivation is necessary or apparent and includes violence against particular cultures or individuals).

The risk of violence at work in the hospitality industry increases:

When staff are working alone or in isolated locations

Employees who work alone or in isolated locations are at an increased risk of violence from client aggression. Possible control measures include:

- rostering more than one staff member on at all times
- designing counters to ensure their height and width makes physical contact between customers and employees difficult
- ensuring employees have an effective means of communication to summon help in case of an emergency (mobile communication systems, duress alarms, movement notification/regular check etc)
- providing employees with safe areas that they can retreat to in the case of an emergency
- engaging the services of security officers for high risk situations
- restricting unauthorised access to the workplace by limiting public access to one main entrance and securing windows, back doors etc
- installing devices to increase detection of people entering the workplace:
 - surveillance equipment
 - mirrors
 - alarm systems
- ensuring surveillance equipment is monitored
- making the workplace less attractive to potential offenders by advertising the security measures that are in place to increase the detection of offenders
- making money handling and service areas clearly visible to the public.

Employers also are encouraged to consider situations where violence may occur outside of the workplace, such as in staff car parks.

Control measures for these situations include:

- ensuring walkways between work premises and staff parking areas are well lit and designed to minimise potential hiding spots for offenders
- providing employee training on the types of security threats and the procedures for emergency situations
- developing procedures for staff leaving the workplace, such as providing security services, leaving in groups and moving their cars closer to the work premises.

When employers have not helped employees develop the skills to recognise and deal with the early stages of client aggression

Hospitality workers deal with a wide range of clients who are rarely preselected. Clients can have an unknown potential for aggression, which often is promoted by factors such as:

- alcohol consumption
- substance abuse (drugs and alcohol)
- personal/social problems
- fatigue/tiredness levels
- personality disorders.

Employees need to know how to recognise the early signs of client aggression and should be familiar with the procedures that have been developed to effectively deal with it. Possible risk control measures include:

- developing workplace procedures that deal with the management of client aggression
- developing and enforcing a code of conduct concerning acceptable client behaviour
- ensuring employees (especially new staff) know what is acceptable client behaviour and the action that needs to be taken if a client becomes aggressive
- ensuring the issue of client aggression is regularly raised with staff (using relevant examples wherever possible)
- ensuring employees are constantly aware of the signs of client aggression and rehearse the range of strategies that they can apply.

When there are inadequate barriers to prevent robbery

Minimal barriers to prevent robbery make sales areas attractive targets to potential offenders. Possible control measures include:

- making the workplace less attractive to potential offenders by advertising the security measures that are in place to increase the detection of offenders
- developing procedures for cash handling, storage and transfer that make cash less visible and less accessible
- designing counters to ensure their height and width makes physical contact between customers and employees difficult
- ensuring employees have an effective means of communication to summon help in case of an emergency (mobile communication systems, duress alarms, movement notification/ regular check etc)
- ensuring employees have received training on what they should do in the event of a robbery
- rostering more than one staff member on at opening and closing times
- developing opening and closing procedures that focus on personal safety to minimise risks
- providing security services for staff working during opening and closing times.

For more information see the *Guidelines for reducing the risk of Violence at Work* available from WorkCover Corporation Customer Centre. The guidelines and industry brochures also are available for download from the Corporation's Internet site.

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