

Guidelines for reducing the risk of

Violence at Work

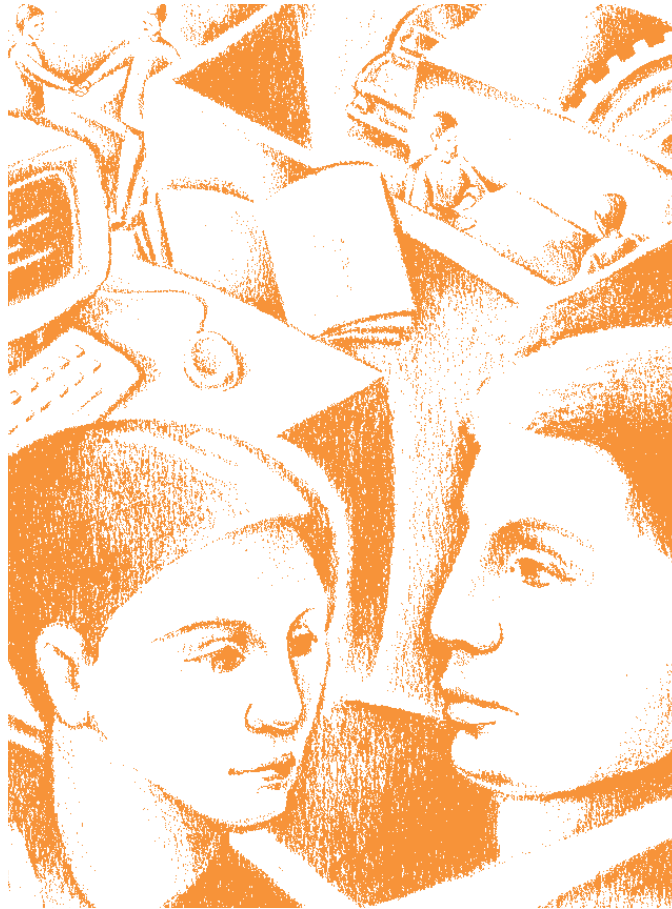
Violence



at Work

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October 2002

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Introduction

Purpose of these guidelines

Violence at work may involve unlawful activities that lead to legal action or police investigation that can result in criminal proceedings.

Violence can have a dramatic impact on the health, safety and welfare of workers and cause significant economic and social costs to the victim, their family, the business in which they work and the wider community.

These guidelines have been designed to help employers, employees and their representatives identify the potential for violence at work and to provide practical guidance for the development of risk reduction strategies. Development of a systematic approach to managing the issue as outlined in these guidelines will be relevant to all workplaces.

Guidelines provide further explanation about aspects of the Act, Regulations or specific hazards. They are advisory documents that are designed to assist those people with responsibilities to comply with the duties prescribed by the Act or the Regulations. The guidelines should be considered as an important source of information and guidance. They are also a useful method for assisting consultation with employees or their representatives and building owners, in order to determine what is appropriate for each workplace.

Acknowledgements

This publication was developed by a working party consisting of:

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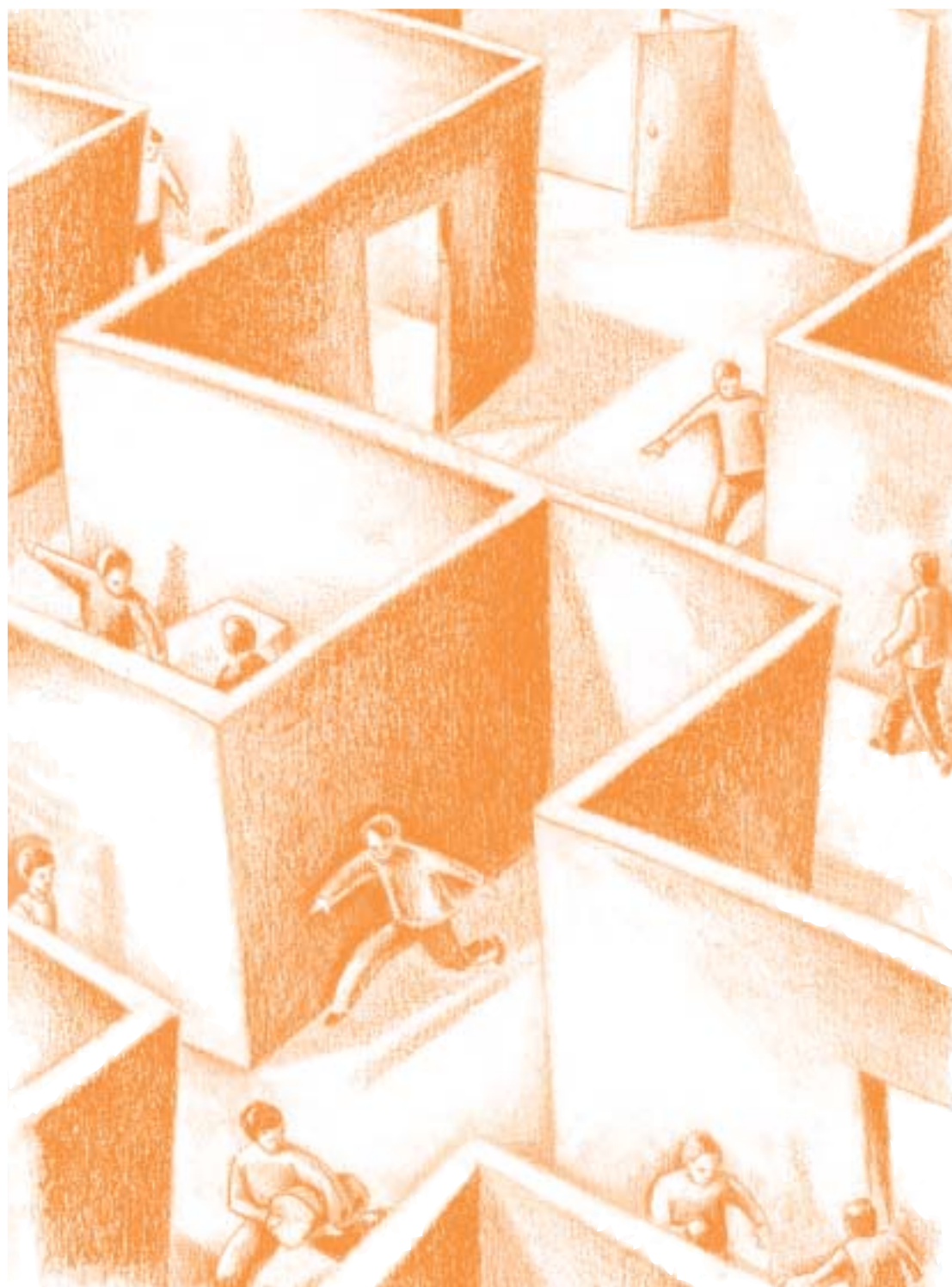
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Part one

The essentials

What is violence at work?

Violence at work is defined as any incident where an employer or employee is abused, threatened or assaulted in situations relating to their work. Within this definition:

- “abuse” is any unreasonable behaviour that involves the misuse of physical or psychological strength or power;
- “threat” is a statement of the intent to harm a person or damage their property; and
- “assault” is any attempt to cause injury to a person and includes actual physical harm.

To assist in reducing the risk of violence at work, these guidelines have grouped violence into the following categories:

- **Client aggression** (violence from clients such as patrons, patients, customers etc);
- **Robbery**;
- **Occupational violence** (workplace violence such as bullying, sexual harassment/assault etc); and
- **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).

What are employers required to do?

Legislation requires employers to ensure so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of employees, and to consult with employees and their representatives in the management of risks. Consultation with employees and their representatives helps to properly identify risks and will help the workplace develop practical control actions.

(Want to know more? See page nine - Legal requirements)

With regard to violence at work, one of the most effective ways for employers to meet their legal duties is to develop a violence prevention plan in consultation with employees. The plan should be an integral part of the overall approach to safety in the workplace and include the following steps.

1. Identifying the risk factors:

- Consult with your employees or their representatives.
- Decide on the category(s) of violence that could occur in the workplace.
- Conduct an audit of the workplace (see Appendix one for sample violence identification checklists).
- Review incident and injury reports.
- Keep records of your risk identification.

(Want to know more? See page 11 - Identifying the risk factors)

2. Assessing the risk of violence:

- Consider your identified risks.
- Determine the method of assessment.
- Determine the likelihood that violence will occur.
- Determine the outcome (injury/illness) if violence does occur.
- Decide whether or not your current control measures are adequate.
- Keep records of your risk assessment.

(Want to know more? See page 12 - Assessing the level of risk)

3. Controlling the risk of violence:

- Consider the work environment and workplace layout.
- Consider the types of interactions that occur in the workplace.
- Consider the work processes.
- Determine the control actions:
 - Can the potential/motive for violence be eliminated?
 - Can the level of violence be restricted or deterred?
 - Can the violent interaction be limited or removed?
 - Can you increase the defence of the potential victim of the violence?
- Implement the control actions.
- Keep records of your control actions.

(Want to know more? See page 12 - Controlling the risk)

4. Developing workplace procedures:

- Ensure employees know what to do if violence occurs.
- Develop procedures for:
 - induction, training and supervision;
 - work systems;
 - effective grievance, conflict and complaints resolution;
 - reporting and recording of workplace violence; and
 - emergency situations.
- Regularly review your violence prevention plan and violence control actions.
- Keep records of:
 - induction and training;
 - violence prevention plan; and
 - incident reports and injuries.

(Want to know more? See page 15 - Workplace procedures)

What are employees required to do?

Legislation requires employees to protect their own health and safety, follow set work procedures and avoid adversely affecting the health and safety of others. Employees need to ensure they do not contribute to workplace violence or participate in activities that may lead to violence such as horseplay, workplace initiation, bullying etc.

Although employees should report any risk or incident of violence to their employer, it is recognised that there are a variety of reasons why some employees may be reluctant to report these incidents. In these situations, employees are encouraged to report the issue to their elected health and safety representative (HSR). Employees can also obtain advice or assistance from organisations as detailed in Appendix three - Where to go for help.

Employees have the right and obligation to withdraw to a position of safety if they are exposed to violence. They do not have the right to retaliate physically or verbally unless it is in self defence. Under the *Criminal Law Consolidation (Self Defence) Amendment Act, 1997*, reasonable force can be used to defend yourself or another person if assault is imminent and there is no way out. However, the force used should only be enough to ward off an attack as unreasonable force may result in legal action being taken against the employee or their employer.



Part two

Filling in the gaps

Legal requirements

Employers have the principal responsibility for the management of occupational health and safety in the workplace. Occupational health, safety and welfare legislation requires employers to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable¹, that employees are safe from injury and risks to health, and that they have a safe working environment and safe systems of work.

In general terms, employers are required to manage the potential for violence at work by:

- providing employees with induction, training, information and supervision;
- monitoring the welfare of employees by ensuring regular communication with employees working in remote or isolated situations;
- developing workplace policies and procedures;
- ensuring that emergency facilities, procedures and training are adequate in the event of an emergency;
- identifying, assessing, controlling and monitoring workplace hazards and risks;
- reporting and recording workplace incidents including dangerous occurrences and notifiable injuries; and
- consulting² with employees or their representatives.

As part of an overall approach to managing violence at work, employers are encouraged to consider situations that can expose employees to violence away from work. For example, situations where an employee is assaulted in the car park at the end of a shift, or threatened by clients outside of work, can create a significant liability for employers.

¹ Reasonably practicable means taking into account what is foreseeable and reasonable; considering the cost of implementing controls; the current industry standards; and the likely severity of an injury.

² Consultation involves sharing information and the exchange of views between employers and the persons or bodies that must be consulted and the genuine opportunity for them to contribute effectively to any decision making process to eliminate or control risks to health and safety.

The effects of violence on employees

Violence can cause both physical and psychological injury and illness. Victims respond differently to violence, both in terms of the emotions they experience and the time taken to recover from the incident. Their reaction will depend on a number of factors that include, but are not limited to:

- the category and nature of the violence they have experienced;
- their previous experiences and coping skills;
- the assistance they receive and the way they are treated by others including co-workers; and
- the opportunity to openly discuss their feelings with their colleagues.

A victim's psychological response to violence can be immediate or delayed and their trauma can be short or long term. Typical psychological responses to violence include sleeping difficulties, anxiety (fear of returning to work, flashbacks, disturbing dreams etc), changes in personality (aggression, anger, depression, hypersensitivity etc), grief and even feelings of guilt.

A common reaction of victims is to experience a period of emotional numbness and they may behave in a way that is mistaken for them "coping well". Depending on the individual, this phase may last for minutes or months before they experience psychological trauma.

Employees who work in areas where the risk of violence is high may benefit from additional information and training that gives them an appreciation of the ways in which people react to violent incidents. The benefit of such training enables employees to recognise that their reactions to violence, although unpleasant, will pass as they recover with support and counselling.

It is important to note that:

- an experience may be perceived as violent by one employee, but not necessarily considered violent by another;
- the psychological injuries that result from violence may be more debilitating to the victim than the physical injuries; and
- verbal abuse and threats are the most common types of incident, physical attacks are comparatively rare.

Identifying the risk factors

Potential aggressors are present in nearly all workplaces and the opportunity for violence will exist in almost all workplaces. The aggressor could be the employer, another employee, a client of the organisation or a person who is unknown to the organisation, such as an intruder.

When identifying the potential for violence, it is often the case that workplaces have little previous history of violence at work. It is important to predict what may happen and consider all likely sources of violence, regardless of how unlikely they are.

The nature of an industry may mean that exposure to violence is a regular feature of the work, such as in the police force or correctional services. However, there will be specific tasks or situations in these occupations that can increase the risk of violence to an unacceptable level. In other industries, the risk of violence may be low except when specific tasks are performed, for example when handling cash, visiting home clients, or when working alone or in isolation.

Employees who work alone or in isolation may be an easier target for violence and consequently their injuries may be more severe due to the lack of assistance. When combined with activities, such as cash handling or dealing with potentially aggressive clients, working alone or in isolation increases the likelihood of violence occurring.

There are a number of different methods for identifying the risk of violence at work:

- Conduct a violence audit of the workplace (see Appendix one for sample violence identification checklists).
- Review incident and injury reports.
- Encourage employees to report violent incidents to their supervisor or elected HSR.
- Obtain information from relevant industry groups.
- Seek data and advice from various government and non-government organisations³.

³ A list of government organisations and resources is included in Appendix three.

Assessing the level of risk

The assessment process involves analysing the risk factors associated with each category of violence to determine the level of risk. When assessing each category of violence, the following questions need to be considered:

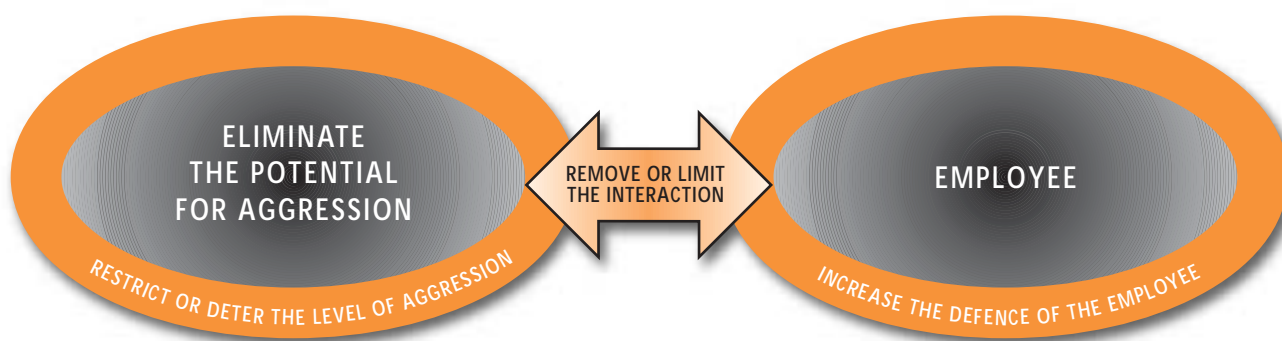
- What is the probability that an act of violence will occur given the nature of the workplace, potential aggressors, interaction, work systems and work environment?
- How severe is the outcome of the violence likely to be, given the probable nature of the violence, work systems and work environment?
- Are there existing violence control measures in place and do they adequately protect the health, safety and welfare of employees?

Controlling the risk

There will often be a number of different risk control actions that are available to control a particular category of violence. Some may be easier to establish than others; some may be more effective than others. It is important that new control actions are tailored to meet the individual circumstances of a workplace.

The ideal way to prevent violence at work is to design work environments and work systems that eliminate the potential for aggression. In many cases the ability to eliminate the potential for aggression is not feasible, as interaction with potential aggressors is a fundamental feature of normal operations (eg correctional institutions, nursing homes, schools etc). In situations where it is not feasible to eliminate the potential for aggression, consideration needs to be given to:

- restricting or deterring the opportunity for aggression;
- removing or limiting the opportunity for interaction between an aggressor and an employee; and/or
- increasing the defence of the employee.



Depending on the category of violence involved, your control actions may include:

Eliminating the potential for aggression

- Remove the opportunity for an aggressor and target to interact.
- Withdraw or limit a level of service to an aggressor.
- Ensure work systems do not promote aggression (poor levels of service, abrupt staff etc).
- Remove the incentive for violence by not having valuables in the workplace.
- Ensure that workplace policies and procedures for occupational violence are effectively managed.

Restricting or deterring the opportunity for aggression

- Ensure work systems provide prompt, efficient and equitable services.
- Ensure employees have the necessary skills to deal with difficult clients.
- Where practicable, ensure employees are not working alone or in isolated situations.
- Ensure the work environment does not promote aggression due to overcrowding, excessive noise, poor comfort/tidiness etc.
- Ensure public contact areas are well lit, well ventilated and decorated with muted colours.
- Remove or restrict access to equipment that could be used as a weapon (furniture, tools etc).
- Increase the availability of employees to others in and around the workplace.
- Limit the quantity of valuables stored on the premises.
- Advertise the measures taken in the workplace to increase the detection of aggressors (grievance procedures, security and surveillance measures etc).
- Promote the fact that noncompliance with workplace policies for harassment, bullying etc will not be tolerated and may result in strict disciplinary action.
- Provide a clear process for resolving complaints or conflicts.

Removing or limiting the interaction

- Change the method of contact between clients and employees to a remote service (telephone contact, written correspondence, distance education etc).
- Change the method of payment for goods or services (encourage the use of credit cards, electronic transfer etc).
- Limit client interaction to a time where physical and human resources are most available.
- Design service counters to ensure their width and height makes physical contact between clients and employees difficult.
- Install permanent or temporary barriers (unbreakable screens, security doors etc).
- Install security devices (deadlocks, keyed window locks, security keys, pass systems etc).
- Provide safe areas that employees can retreat to in the event of aggression.

Increasing the defence of the employee

- Ensure employees are not alone when interacting with potentially violent clients.
- Ensure employees who work alone can get assistance easily and quickly if required.
- Provide trained emergency response teams.
- Provide employee training on handling aggression and self defence.
- Ensure occupants of interview rooms can be seen from the outside and that the interviewer has an easy route of escape in the case of an emergency.
- Install mirrors behind counters.
- Ensure employees who work alone or in isolated situations have an effective means of communication to summon help in case of an emergency (mobile communication systems, duress alarms, movement notification/regular check etc).

Workplace procedures

While control measures may reduce the risk of violence, it can still occur. Procedures are necessary to ensure the workplace is equipped to deal with violence at work both during and after an incident. Workplace procedures should also ensure that employees have the necessary skills, training and information to enable them to protect their own health and safety.

Employees directly affected by violence should be debriefed and given the opportunity to be relieved from work duties to enable them to defuse any anger or tension. Not providing or delaying the opportunity for debriefing may have adverse effects for both employees and the organisation.

Incident debriefing allows individuals to rationalise the event, gain support from co-workers and, if required, provides an opportunity for more personalised support such as counselling and rehabilitation. Each person directly or indirectly affected by the event should be given the opportunity to discuss the event and its consequences.

Depending on the category of violence involved, the workplace procedures should detail:

- how training, induction and information will be provided to employees concerning:
 - interpersonal and communication skills to improve the employee's ability to detect signs of imminent aggression and to defuse potential violence,
 - recognising normal reactions and ways of coping following violent incidents to reduce their effects, and
 - procedures for working in unfamiliar environments;
- the level of skills and experience required by employees in "front line" positions;
- how employees should seek help both during and after an act of violence;
- how employees should respond to aggression;
- what observations should be made by employees during the aggression such as details of the aggressor, the events leading up to the aggression etc;
- under what circumstances work areas should be cleared of people;
- how access to first aid will be provided;
- how employees will be temporarily relieved from their work duties;
- who will communicate the incident to family members, senior managers, media etc;

- who will debrief the victim(s) of the incident;
- who will provide counselling if required;
- how employees should report acts of aggression and violence risk factors;
- who will investigate and report the incident for occupational health and safety purposes; and
- under what circumstances police will be called into the workplace and who will be responsible for such action.

Employers should keep records of employee induction and training and establish a mechanism to facilitate the regular review of workplace procedures.

Part three





Putting it into practice

This part of the guidelines is a step-by-step guide to help employers, employees and employee representatives to develop their own **violence prevention plan**⁴. Each step of the procedure needs to be completed in consultation with employees and their representatives.



⁴ See Appendix two - Sample violence prevention plan.

Step one - Identifying your violence risk factors

-  *Work out the category of violence that is likely to occur in your workplace.*
-  *Select and complete the appropriate violence identification checklist as detailed in Appendix one.*
-  *Identify the violence control measures that are being used.*
-  *Enter the risk factors that were identified in your violence prevention plan as illustrated below.*

(Note: a new plan should be developed for each category of violence.)

Violence prevention plan

Workplace:

Violence category:

Date completed:

Completed by:

Violence risk factors	Current controls
Employees working alone	None
Certain patients become agitated during the night	None


Step two - Assessing your violence risk factors

Assess the level of risk by deciding on the probability that violence will occur and the severity of any physical or psychological injuries if violence does occur. Take into account the:


- category of violence that is likely to occur;
- way that work is organised;
- layout of the workplace;
- type of interpersonal interactions that occur in the workplace;
- level of employee induction, training, skills and knowledge; and
- current control measures.

 *Decide if the probability of violence occurring in the workplace is:*

- High** - violence is likely to occur, or has already occurred.
- Medium** - violence has not occurred but indications such as industry trends and local crime rates suggest that there is potential for it to occur.
- Low** - there is little evidence to suggest that the potential for violence will occur in the workplace.

 *If violence does occur, decide whether the severity of any likely injuries would be:*

- High** - may cause physical or psychological trauma that results in either an extended absence from work or the need for specialist medical intervention or counselling.
- Medium** - may cause physical injury or psychological distress that may require absence from work.
- Low** - may cause physical injury that results in a first aid treatment, or short-term psychological discomfort.

 *Using the risk assessment table (below), establish the overall risk assessment value by cross referencing your probability and severity values.*

 *Enter the details of the risk assessment in your violence prevention plan.*






Risk assessment table

	High probability	Medium probability	Low probability
High severity	High	High	Medium
Medium severity	High	Medium	Medium
Low severity	Medium	Low	Low

Step three - Controlling your risk

Often there will be a number of options available to control a particular category of workplace violence. Some may be easier to put in place than others; some may be more effective than others. It is important that the controls introduced are tailored to meet the circumstances of the workplace.

Ideally your controls should focus on the redesign of work systems and work environments to eliminate the potential for violence. In situations where it is not practical to eliminate the potential for violence, consideration needs to be given to controls that limit or deter the opportunity for aggression; remove or limit interaction; and/or increase the defence of the employee.

-  Consider each of the violence risk factors that you identified in step one.
-  Consider the types of controls that can be put in place to reduce the level of risk (for more details see page 12 - Controlling the risk).
-  Choose your violence control option(s) and re-assess to ensure that the risk can be reduced and that new hazards have not been introduced.
-  Put in place your control measures.
-  Enter details of the control measures, the person responsible for implementing the controls, and the action date in your violence prevention plan as illustrated below:

Risk assessment: High Medium Low


Controls required	Action	Date
Changes to work systems need to be developed so that two employees are on roster between 22:00 and 06:00	M. Smith	5-1-2002
Review medication needs of high risk clients	M. Smith	19-1-2002
Duress alarms need to be purchased	M. Smith	5-12-2002

Risk re-assessment: High Medium Low No risk


Step four - Workplace procedures


The final step of this procedure is to make sure:

- the workplace and employees are equipped and prepared to deal with aggression both during and after the event; and
- a review process exists that ensures control actions have been implemented and new risks or hazards have not been introduced.

 *Check your current workplace procedures for the management of violence at work (for more details see page 15 - Workplace procedures).*

 *Consider the procedures that need to be developed/modified.*

 *Enter details of the procedures to be developed/modified, the person responsible for the action and the action date in your violence prevention plan.*

 *Finally, enter your 'Review by' date in the violence prevention plan as illustrated below.*

Risk re-assessment: High Medium Low No risk

Are current workplace procedures adequate? Yes No

New procedures required	Action	Date
Induction procedures for new employees and temporary staff need to be developed	M. Smith	1-12-2002
Training on resident aggression needs to be conducted	M. Smith	1-12-2002
A reporting system for unpredictable behaviour needs to be established	M. Smith	8-12-2002

Review by date: 25-05-2003

Client aggression

✓ = Risk

Are clients of the organisation likely to be distressed or aggressive?

Is the behaviour of the client unpredictable?

Is the aggressor likely to have a weapon?

Is there likely to be more than one aggressor?

Is the aggressor likely to be under the influence of alcohol or other drugs?

Have employees been threatened in the past?

Are there inexperienced employees in front line positions?

Have employees received training on how to deal with aggressive clients?

Does the employee have the appropriate workplace knowledge and skills to deal with clients?

Are employees working alone or in isolated locations?

Is the work performed in unfamiliar environments?

Is it easy for an aggressor to get physical access to an employee?

Is it difficult for the employee to retreat to a safe place?

Would it be difficult to get immediate assistance if threatened or attacked?

Is the workplace uncomfortable for clients?

Would it be difficult for another person to see that assistance was needed if an attack occurred?

Would it be easy for an aggressor to break into the workplace after hours?

Is access to alarms difficult or too obvious?

Is there a clear process for dealing with conflict and aggression?

Do procedures exist to deal with violence during and after an event?

Other (specify)

Robbery

✓ = Risk

- Is violence a common occurrence in the business district?
- Is violence a common occurrence in the industry sector?
- Is the workplace isolated from other businesses/workplaces?
- Is it obvious that employees are working alone?
- Is it easy for an aggressor to get physical access to an employee?
- Is it difficult for employees to retreat to a safe place?
- Does your business operate late at night?
- Is the lighting inside the workplace brighter than outside the workplace?
- Have employees received training on how to deal with robbery?
- Are there areas inside or around the workplace where an aggressor could hide?
- Would it be difficult for employees to get assistance immediately if threatened or attacked?
- Would it be difficult for another person to see that assistance was needed if an attack occurred?
- Do posters and/or displays block the view of employees from the outside?
- Are valuable items or cash in public view?
- Have employees received training on cash handling procedures?
- Do procedures exist to reduce the risk of violence at opening/closing times and during cash transfers?
- Are employees working with large quantities of valuables such as cash or drugs?
- Do you keep more cash than needed as a float in the cash register?
- Do you advertise that only minimal cash/drugs are stored on the premises?
- Are effective security measures in place and well maintained?
- Are security measures apparent/promoted to potential aggressors?
- Is employee access to alarms difficult or too obvious?
- Can an aggressor gain access to the workplace undetected (rear doors, windows, roof etc)?
- Other (specify)
-
-
-
-
-

Occupational violence

(sexual harassment, bullying, intimidation etc)

✓ = Risk

Are workplace procedures and reporting mechanisms relating to occupational violence in place?

Have grievances or complaints been raised by employees concerning occupational violence?

Do absenteeism or sickness rates suggest that occupational violence may be a workplace issue?

Are there blatant incidents of occupational violence that are accepted or rewarded in the workplace such as the initiation of new employees; offensive literature, pictures or behaviour etc?

Is the workplace receptive to differences in gender, age, nationality, religious beliefs etc?

Is there a potential for racial or cultural tension in the workplace?

Are there unusual levels of employee turnover or requests for transfer that may be attributed to incidents of occupational violence?

Would it be difficult for another person to see that assistance was needed if an attack occurred?

Are employees made aware of procedures and appropriate behaviours concerning occupational violence?

Is there a clear process for dealing with conflict and aggression?

Other (specify)

Opportunistic violence

✓ = Risk

Is it likely that violence may be directed at employees due to their type of employment (parking inspectors, private investigators, locksmiths, journalists etc)?

Are employees working alone or in isolated situations?

Are there any overt personal characteristics of individual employees that may increase the risk of unprovoked violence from third parties (gender, disability, religious belief, nationality etc)?

Is it likely that employees may be indirectly affected by violence directed at other employees?

Would it be difficult for another person to see that assistance was needed if an attack occurred?

Other (specify)

Violence prevention plan

Workplace:

Violence category:

Date completed:

Completed by:

Violence risk factors	Current controls

Risk re-assessment: High Medium Low

Controls required	Action	Date

Risk assessment: High Medium Low No risk

Are current workplace procedures adequate? Yes No

New procedures required	Action	Date

Review by date:

Where to go for help

Equal Opportunity Commission

2nd floor
45 Pirie Street
Adelaide SA 5000

(08) 8207 1977
1800 188 163 (country callers)
www.eoc.sa.gov.au

Department for Administrative and Information Services

Level 3
1 Richmond Road
Keswick SA 5035
(08) 8303 0400
1800 777 209 (emergency/after hours)
www.eric.sa.gov.au

Office of the Employee Ombudsman

6th floor
63 Pirie Street
Adelaide SA 5000

(08) 8207 1970

SA Police Crime Reduction Section

30 Flinders Street
Adelaide SA 5000
(08) 8226 2919
www.sapolice.sa.gov.au

Business SA Occupational Health and Safety

136 Greenhill Road
Unley SA 5061
(08) 8300 0104
1800 088 105 (country callers)
www.business-sa.com

The United Trades and Labor Council of SA

Trades Hall
11 South Terrace
Adelaide SA 5000

(08) 8212 3155
www.utlc.org.au

Victim Support Service

11 Halifax Street
Adelaide SA 5000
(08) 8231 5626
1800 182 368 (country callers)
www.victimsa.org

WorkCover Corporation Customer Centre

100 Waymouth Street
Adelaide SA 5000
13 18 55
www.workcover.com

Working Women's Centre

PO Box 8066
Station Arcade
Adelaide SA 5000
(08) 8410 6499
1800 652 697
www.wwc.org.au

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