

Workplace Violence Risk Assessment Procedure

The purpose of doing a workplace violence risk assessment is to create an awareness of possible hazards and risks in the workplace. The assessment identifies who is at risk and what the risk(s) may be to an individual. It is also an opportunity to determine if existing controls that are in place are adequate, and allows for the risk(s) to be prioritized and measured.

Step 1 - Establish a risk assessment team

In order to successfully prevent workplace violence it is necessary to first look at all the factors that may contribute to violence in the workplace. Once this has been done the factors can be assessed and controls can be implemented before these factors actually result in violence. Working together, management and employees are in the best position to identify existing and potential risks for their workplace. As such, a team comprised of both management and staff who work in the area(s) being assessed should participate in the risk assessment.

Step 2 - Review previous incidents of workplace violence

There are risk factors, processes, and interactions associated with certain jobs that may put someone at risk. The employees and the location and circumstances in which the work activities take place make each workplace unique. Additionally, the risk of violence may be greater during certain times of the day or year (e.g. night time/early morning, holidays) or because of the geographical location (e.g. near buildings/businesses susceptible to violence, isolated from other buildings/structures). Workplace characteristics, such as demographics, culture, and the presence of new workers, may contribute to the risk of workplace violence.

Managers can learn from experiences, such as incidents that may have occurred in similar workplaces, by obtaining information from any organizations with which they are associated (e.g., industry association, WorkplaceNL). Managers should also review any incidents of violence by consulting existing incident reports, first aid records and occupational health and safety committee minutes. It is critical to take these experiences into account when determining appropriate controls. It is also important to review the information that is collected to identify any common factors or business processes that may contribute to workplace violence. This information can then be used to identify jobs, locations or times when there is elevated risk for violence. Make a note of any potential solutions that may be implemented to prevent similar incidents from occurring in the future.

Step 3 - Obtain staff input

Managers and/or the risk assessment team should also talk to employees for feedback about their experiences with workplace violence and about whether they are concerned for themselves or for their co-workers. Managers should emphasize that perceived or real threats of violence, near misses and actual incidents of physical violence are all important. This information can be gathered from employee interviews or staff surveys. Ensure that all concerns are documented. ***See sample 'Workplace Violence Risk Assessment – Employee Questionnaire'.***

Where personal information is obtained in the course of conducting the risk assessment, the employer shall keep the personal information confidential and shall not disclose the personal information except for the purpose of an investigation or where required by the law.

Step 4 - Conduct a workplace inspection/gather information

A visual inspection of the workplace should be conducted by the risk assessment team to determine the physical layout and workplace design as well as a review of the work procedures taking place in each area. This should include a review of administrative practices, such as visitor policies as well as work practices. This will help determine any vulnerabilities that exist that may encourage or escalate incidents involving workplace violence.

- Determine whether your workplace has any of the identified risk factors associated with violence:
 - *The nature of the work activities such as the type of work (handling valuables, dealing with clients face to face), make-up of the staff and type of client group.*
 - *Working conditions such as working alone or in remote locations or locations/areas under the control of the client. Also consider the neighborhood or region.*
 - *The demographics, culture, and the presence of new workers at the workplace.*
 - *The design of the work activities and surrounding environment such as characteristics of the work area (noise, stuffiness, uncomfortable temperatures and other conditions that may make clients more irritable).*
 - *The frequency of situations that present a risk of workplace violence.*
 - *The severity of the adverse consequences to the employee exposed to a risk of workplace violence.*
 - *Observations and recommendations of the OHS committee or the health and safety representative, and of the employees.*
 - *The measures already in place to prevent & protect against workplace violence.*

Step 5 – Assess Risk

- Record the results of your assessment. For each type of risk that is identified, it is important to determine the frequency of the occurrence and the impact to staff and business operations – i.e. risk factor.
- Once risk factors have been identified, these factors must be assessed in order of priority so that prevention measures can be prioritized, without losing sight of the final objective, which is to control all of the risk factors.

Step 6 – Develop Controls

After each identified hazard has been evaluated for risk, the next step is to develop controls to minimize or eliminate the risk of violence.

Where the employer becomes aware, or ought reasonably to be aware, that family violence that would likely expose a worker to physical injury may occur in the workplace, the employer shall take every precaution in the circumstances for the protection of the worker.

The following are some examples of how to control hazards in a variety of situations:

Working Alone

An effort should be made so that working alone in an area of recognized risk is avoided. If this is unavoidable, the following should be considered:

- Have a check-in procedure and ensure that regular contact is made with all workers.
- Keep a phone nearby.
- Conduct high risk tasks during normal business hours, or when another worker is capable of helping.
- Position workers, where possible, in locations of highest visibility.
- Keep windows clear to allow the worker to be clearly visible to the public.
- Encourage the use of a "buddy system" in high risk situations - ensure that workers are aware that this option is available to them.

Parking Lot Safety

Workers should be encouraged to:

- Park in a highly visible and well-lit area, preferably near a building.
- Use the main building entrance -- avoid rear or secluded exits.
- Always lock your vehicle doors and roll up windows, while in the vehicle
- Plan ahead and know where to go for safety and how to call for help.
- Do not wear headphones or be distracted by a cell phone conversation.
- Carry a whistle.

Walking to and from a vehicle after dark or in a high-risk area:

- Always try to walk with a co-worker and give them a ride back to the main entrance so they do not have to walk back alone.

If employees have to walk alone:

- Have a co-worker watch them from a window.
- Encourage them to wave to a window even if no one is watching to give the illusion that someone is there.
- Stay away from hiding spots such as bushes, doorways, alleys and parked cars.
- Cross the road if necessary.
- Look around and inside your vehicle as you enter it.

Working Late

When working late employees should:

- Let a supervisor or co-worker know that they are working late and when they expect to leave.
- Move their cars to a well-lit area near the building prior to darkness.
- Arrange for employees to work late on the same night as a colleague.
- Have a procedure in place to ensure that all windows and doors are locked and that nobody is in the washrooms and storage rooms before employees leave for the day.
- Indicate that they are not alone if they encounter someone unfamiliar. They may want to say something like "my supervisor will be right here and will be able to help you".
- Call the police or if they suspect that someone is lurking outside.

Working Off-Site

When conducting business away from the office employees should exercise extra caution and procedures or safe work practices should be developed to ensure that these employees:

- Have access to a cell phone to allow them to remain in contact with others in case of emergency.
- Prepare a daily work plan so that others know where they are as well as when they are expected somewhere. Develop a check-in procedure.
- Arrange to meet clients in a 'safe' environment where other people are around.
- Keep records and indicate if the client is known to be aggressive, hostile or violent.

Handling Stalking Situation

- Keep a record of all relevant information such as the date and time of incidents, witnesses, and anything that could help establish the identity of the stalker.

- Encourage workers to report incidents to police.
- If possible alter the work pattern of the employee, such as hours and parking arrangements.
- Change the worker's telephone number and having calls screened through voicemail.

Workplace Layout

- Arrange furniture in a way to maintain a minimum distance between the employee and the client.
- Minimize the amount of furniture in a given room and provide a clear route from an employee's work area to the door.
- Provide alternative exits if possible and make employees aware of such alternative exit routes.
- Provide rolling chairs for staff and stationary ones for clients.

NOTE: All information should be documented using the attached 'Workplace Violence Risk Assessment' form OR incorporated into the company's Annual Comprehensive Hazard Assessment. Not only will this documentation assist in any future legal issues that may arise but it will also serve as a baseline for future risk assessments that will be conducted. This will ensure the effectiveness of the program over time.

Step 7 – Communicate

It is the responsibility of management to ensure that employees are made aware of the situations in which workplace violence may arise at their workplace as well as the measures and procedures to take to protect themselves and others. This training may be incorporated in employee orientations or delivered through toolbox meetings etc.

Workplace Violence Risk Assessment Employee Questionnaire

Name:	
Job Title:	
Date:	

Instructions. Please complete the following survey based upon your own personal work experiences. This survey is designed to obtain feedback on employee exposure to Workplace Violence and will be incorporated into the company's Workplace Violence Risk Assessment.

1. Have you experienced verbal abuse ((i.e., swearing, insults, teasing, or bullying) during the course of your employment with this company?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
If yes, did you report the incident(s)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
If yes, how did you report the incident?	<input type="checkbox"/> Verbally? <input type="checkbox"/> In Writing?
What was the relationship of the abuser to you?	<input type="checkbox"/> Co-worker <input type="checkbox"/> Client/customer <input type="checkbox"/> Member of public <input type="checkbox"/> Other (describe)_____
2. Have you experienced verbal or written threats (i.e., 'If you don't get off my back, you'll regret it') during the course of your employment?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
If yes, did you report the incident(s)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
If yes, how did you report the incident?	<input type="checkbox"/> Verbally? <input type="checkbox"/> In Writing?
What was the relationship of the abuser to you?	<input type="checkbox"/> Co-worker <input type="checkbox"/> Client/customer <input type="checkbox"/> Member of public <input type="checkbox"/> Other (describe)_____
3. Have you been threatened with physical harm (i.e., someone shaking a fist, throwing objects, committing vandalism) during the course of your employment?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
If yes, did you report the incident(s)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
If yes, how did you report the incident?	<input type="checkbox"/> Verbally? <input type="checkbox"/> In Writing?
What was the relationship of the abuser to you?	<input type="checkbox"/> Co-worker <input type="checkbox"/> Client/customer <input type="checkbox"/> Member of public <input type="checkbox"/> Other (describe)_____

4. Have you experienced a physical assault or attack during the course of your employment?		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
If yes, did you report the incident(s)?		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
If yes, how did you report the incident?	<input type="checkbox"/> Verbally? <input type="checkbox"/> In Writing?	
What was the relationship of the abuser to you?	<input type="checkbox"/> Co-worker <input type="checkbox"/> Client/customer <input type="checkbox"/> Member of public <input type="checkbox"/> Other (describe) _____	
5. Do you ever:		
• Work alone or with a small number of co-workers?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
• Work with the general public?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
• Work late at night or early in the morning?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
6. Are you concerned about work rage on the job?		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
What is the source of your concern?		
7. Are you concerned that family violence could expose you or others to a risk of violence at the workplace?		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
If yes, please discuss the circumstances with your manager or supervisor. Information obtained in the course of conducting the risk assessment shall keep confidential and shall not be disclosed except for the purpose of an investigation or where required by the law.		
8. Do you believe that work rage in your workplace is a:		
<input type="checkbox"/> High Risk? <input type="checkbox"/> Medium Risk? <input type="checkbox"/> Low Risk?		
9. Do you have any other concerns regarding workplace violence?		<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
If yes, explain:		

SAMPLE WORKPLACE VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAM

ABC Company is committed to working collaboratively with employees, contractors, and client groups to ensure a safe, secure and respectful workplace and to prevent all forms of violent behavior and inappropriate conduct.

S.22(1) of the OHS Regulations defines workplace violence as *“The attempted or actual exercise of physical force to cause injury to a worker and includes threatening statements or behavior which gives a worker reason to believe that he or she is at a risk of injury”*

There are several forms that workplace violence can take:

- **Verbal abuse:** is the use of vexatious comments that are known, or that ought to be known, to be unwelcome, embarrassing, offensive, threatening, or degrading to another person which causes the person to believe their health and safety is at risk.
- **Threat:** is a communicated intent, written or verbal, to inflict physical or other harm on any person or to property by some unlawful act. A direct threat is a clear and explicit communication indicating that the potential offender intends to do harm. A conditional threat involves a condition. Veiled threats usually involve body language or behaviours that leave little doubt in the mind of the victim that the perpetrator intends to harm.
- **Physical attacks:** are aggressions resulting in a physical assault/abuse with or without the use of a weapon, including hitting, shoving, pushing, punching, biting, spitting, groping, pinching, kicking, unwelcome displays of affection or inciting a dog to attack.
- **Psychological abuse:** is an act that provokes fear or diminishes an individual’s dignity or self worth or that intentionally inflicts psychological trauma on another.
- **Assault:** is any intent to inflict injury on another, coupled with an apparent ability to do so; any intentional display of force that causes the victim to fear bodily harm.
- **Sexual assault:** is the use of threat or violence to force one individual to touch, kiss, fondle, or have sexual intercourse with another.
- **Near miss:** is an act of striking out, but missing the target.

Responsibilities

Employer:

- Demonstrate a commitment to the prevention of workplace violence and associated behaviors.
- Lead by example in showing respect and dignity in all interactions with others.
- Take a proactive role in the prevention of violent, inappropriate, or objectionable behavior and conduct.
- Become familiar with potentially violent situations by identifying/assessing the risk of violence in the workplace and provide adequate protection to employees from these potential threats.
- Develop procedures to minimize the risk of violent situations occurring.
- Provide proper training and awareness for employees in workplace violence prevention practices and procedures.

- Investigate and takes action on all legitimate reports, suspicions or indications of workplace violence.

Employees:

- Be aware of the workplace violence prevention program.
- Act in a professional and respectful manner towards both co-workers and clients and abstain from conduct that is inappropriate.
- Report to a **supervisor or manager** any incidents or suspicions of workplace violence or other conduct that is affecting the morale or productivity of the workplace.

OHS Committee/WHS Designate/WHS Representative:

- Assist in completing workplace inspections which will help to determine any weaknesses that exist that may encourage or escalate incidents involving workplace violence.

Reporting Acts of Violence

Workers are to report all acts of workplace violence that they are aware of (even if they are not involved) to their immediate **supervisor or manager**. This report can be made confidentially, at the employee's request, with the exception of the necessary steps to ensure the safety of others and prevention of re-occurrence. For example, a police report may be necessary. Reports should be completed as soon as possible and include the following:

- Information about the victim.
- Information about the alleged offender.
- A description of the incident or interaction in question.
- Information about witnesses and their testimony.
- Other relevant information (events leading up to incident, suggested course of action).

The employer must also report all injuries to WorkplaceNL as required by the *OHS Act*.

Investigating Workplace Violence

As soon as possible after an incident of workplace violence, an investigation must be conducted by the **manager or supervisor**. In more serious cases, a qualified and experienced investigator may be required, such as the police. All information related to the incident must be documented as this information may be used to support any legal action that may be taken. It may also be useful in evaluating existing controls and may result in the identification of previously unidentified risks. Ensure findings and outcomes are appropriately communicated to all staff involved; however, the individual's right to privacy must be respected.

Program Evaluation

The effectiveness of the Workplace Violence Program is reviewed annually by management and by the **OHS Committee/WHS Designate/WHS Representative** and with all workers.

Workplace Violence Risk Assessment Form

Date:

Location:

Completed/Reviewed by Supervisor:

Hazard Identification

Risk:

A – Controls must be put in place immediately B – Controls must be put in place within two days C – Controls must be put in place within one week

Description of the Hazard	Risk	How will the Hazard be Controlled	Action By	Date

Other Considerations: