



# **PART I**

## **The Basic Steps of Program Development**



## Program Development

### Overview

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There are many different approaches organizations can take in developing plans to prevent and respond to workplace violence. An approach that works well in one workplace may not be suitable for another. This section outlines some broad guidelines that can help an organization in:

- Analyzing its current ability to handle potentially violent situations,
- Filling in any skills gaps that exist,
- Developing a procedure for employees to report incidents, and
- Developing response plans and teams.

### Forming a Planning Group

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Successful organization programs usually begin with the formation of a planning group. The planning group evaluates the organization's current ability to handle violent incidents and recommends ways to strengthen its response capability.

Typically, members of a planning group include representatives from Senior Management, Human Resources, Employee Assistance Program (EAP), Safety, Security, and a psychologist or psychiatrist who is a threat assessment professional. Membership may also include representatives from Health Unit, Medical Department, Office of Equal Employment Opportunity, Public Affairs, Legal Counsel, and other appropriate offices. Smaller organizations may simply involve a group of employees to work with management in this task, or bring in outside professionals to assist them.

While many offices may be represented in the planning group, only a few of them will generally be involved in responding to reported incidents. For example, representatives from Human Resources, EAP, and Security often make up the incident response team. Typically, representatives from the other offices will not be involved in responding directly to incidents, but they will act as consultants to the incident response team or play an active role only in certain types of situations.

## Working with Your Union

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An organization should involve the union early on in the process of planning a workplace violence prevention program. Both management and the union have a shared concern for the safety and well-being of the employees. Unions are the elected representatives of bargaining-unit employees and are legally entitled to negotiate over many conditions of employment. Although some of the substantive issues relating to workplace violence, including issues concerning internal security, may be outside the duty to bargain or consult, this does not mean that consultation and discussion with the union cannot occur.

Union involvement is particularly appropriate where there are labor-management partnership councils. It is a good practice to involve recognized unions up-front, before decisions are made, so that they can have an opportunity both to express employees' concerns and to bring to bear their expertise and knowledge. For example, the union may be aware of employees who have special skills in conflict resolution or crisis counseling. The union may also be helpful in identifying training needs of employees with regard to workplace violence prevention.

Union involvement demonstrates both the organization's and union's commitment to the success of a workplace violence prevention program.

## Steps in the Planning Process

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Workplaces should assess their work environment and occupation(s) to determine their particular risk factors and then customize their planning to address those specific risk factors.

### ***Step 1. Analyze the organization's current ability to handle potentially violent situations***

Conducting an analysis of the organization's current ability to handle potentially violent situations is a necessary effort. Looking at previous incidents that have occurred at your workplace and evaluating how effectively they were handled is a good way to start. Attention should be given to identifying patterns of risk and potential prevention strategies; for example, where a particular workgroup is having a number of complaints in a given period of time.

Also, reviewing the case studies provided in this handbook and analyzing how they were handled by others can help planning groups determine if they would be prepared to handle similar incidents.

- **Staff expertise**

Because of their different structure, purpose and resources, organizations have different areas of staff expertise. Organizations may have employees who have special skills that could be put to good use in a potentially violent situation, such as employees who are skilled in mediation, conflict resolution, crisis counseling, investigations, or threat assessment. Identifying individuals ahead of time, working with them in the planning stages, and agreeing on a coordinated response effort are effective ways of preparing to handle potentially violent situations should they arise.

- **Level of security and jurisdictional issues**

An important part of the analysis is to examine the current level of security at the organization. Follow the advice of the security office or, if the building is without a security staff, contact local law enforcement, consultants, government agencies, or security companies about recommended basic security measures (See Part III for Resources).

Identifying individuals ahead of time, working with them in the planning stages, and agreeing on a coordinated response effort are effective ways of preparing to handle potentially violent situations should they arise.

Jurisdictional issues are sometimes complicated and must be worked out ahead of time. Work out in advance all jurisdictional issues that may be involved should an emergency occur.

Depending on your location, when you need help you may need to call for security, the local police, the Department of Public Safety, or a Federal law enforcement agency. It would be wise to ensure that everyone knows who to call in an emergency.

### ***Step 2. Fill the skills gaps***

Skills deficiencies exist even in large organizations with numerous resources at hand. Training for all employees in basic skills such as prevention concepts, recognizing indicators of potential violence and what to do about them, and who to report concerns to is basic and should be mandatory. In some organizations, specific skills training to deal with potentially and actively violent situations is needed. However, crisis situations occur infrequently and it is often not practical to maintain in-house expertise for every aspect of the organization's response plan.

If this is the case, suggested sources of outside assistance include:

- Government agencies. Government agencies are often able to share expertise, especially when crisis situations occur.
- Local police. Get to know your local police officers. Ask your local police department to have someone speak with your planning group. They may be able to recommend some security measures. They can tell you about jurisdictional issues and what they would do if you called them during an incident. They can talk to employees about personal safety and how to avoid becoming a victim.
- Other community resources. Locate and work with resources in your community. For example, if you don't have immediate access to emergency mental health consultation, you can pre-arrange a consulting relationship with an EAP or a professional who is experienced in threat assessment and management (See Part III for Resources).

### ***Step 3. Develop a procedure for employees to report incidents***

The primary consideration in developing a reporting procedure is to make sure that it encourages employees to report all incidents, even minor ones. Some organizations use hotlines where anonymous reports can also be made. Some arrange for a member of the team to take the calls, usually a specialist from Human Resources or Security. Many organizations require employees to report incidents to their manager (or to any manager), who in turn provides an appropriate response, or reports these incidents to Human Resources, Security, or another designated office or person.

Organizations may consider anonymous reporting via mail or phone. While care should be taken to prevent untrue or vindictive reporting from occurring, the mere fact that a complaint is provided anonymously does not mean that it is baseless. Indeed, a reluctance to identify oneself as a complainant may be a strong indication of how afraid the subject employee makes others feel. Employers cannot ignore such complaints and should appropriately follow up on each, either through a full investigation or by taking enhanced steps to encourage employee reports.

Credibility for any reporting system will be dependent upon whether reports are handled quickly and effectively. Word spreads quickly among employees when a report is made and nothing is done, when a report is handled improperly, or when the allegations are not treated confidentially. Therefore, before a reporting procedure is announced to employees, ensure that the staff who will be responding to reported incidents are trained and able to respond appropriately.

Take concerns about potential workplace violence seriously. Employees may not step forward with their concerns if they think that management will minimize these concerns.

Also important to the success of any reporting system is management's encouragement for reporting incidents. Managers must create an environment that shows they will always respond to reports of incidents and to employee concerns.

Incident reports should be reviewed on a periodic basis to provide feedback on the effectiveness of existing intervention strategies and prevention efforts.

#### ***Step 4. Develop plans to respond to potential workplace violence incidents***

A wide range of incidents and situations can occur at the work site (from disruptive behavior to shootings) and, within that range, a wide variation in threatening and disruptive behaviors. For this reason, while it is vital that there be an appropriate response to inappropriate behavior, there can be a range of responses that are dependent on the totality of circumstances of an event. Some organizations have found it useful to classify incidents in broad categories, for example, emergency/non-emergency, or emergency/threats/bullying/disruptive behavior, or coworker/outsider.

Using these broad categories, organizations can determine who will generally respond to each type of incident and what role they would play in the response effort. Organizations should plan for both immediate responses and long-term responses. For example, in the case of a suicide threat, the plan may state that a mental health professional or an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) counselor determines whether further action is necessary. If the suicide threat seems imminent, the plan may state that the community's emergency services (i.e., suicide prevention hotline, police, or ambulance) are contacted. The plan would also state what management would do if these resources were not immediately available. A management consultant may be able to assist with organizational issues.

To facilitate developing a plan that works for an organization, a series of case studies are provided in Part IV of this handbook.

It will become apparent from reviewing these examples that plans for a coordinated response to reported incidents must be kept flexible. Responsibility for overall coordination and direction is usually assigned to one individual or one office. The coordinator must have the flexibility to use the plan as a guideline, not a mandatory set of procedures. More important, the coordinator must have the flexibility to tailor the recommended response to the particular situation. It is important to recognize that threatening situations often require creative responses. Given this, the importance of flexibility cannot be overemphasized.

One can't always prevent violence because violent incidents are sometimes unpredictable, but one can reduce the risk by planning ahead and being prepared to act swiftly to deal with threats, intimidation, and other disruptive behavior at an early stage.

The case studies highlight the need for backup plans in situations calling for an immediate response where the individual responsible for a certain aspect of the response effort has gone home for the day, is on vacation, or is out of the building at a meeting. Taking a team approach in responding to a potentially violent situation is an ideal way to provide backup coverage. A team approach ensures that all staff who may be called on are thoroughly trained and prepared to work together with the organization to deal with potentially violent situations. It ensures coverage, regardless of which staff is on duty when the incident occurs.



### Development of Written Policy Statement

#### Advantages of Written Policies

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An organization should issue a written policy statement when it implements a workplace violence prevention program. Advantages of issuing a written policy statement are:

- It informs employees about what the violence policy covers;
- It informs employees about how to respond to an incident;
- It informs employees that they should report incidents;
- It informs employees about whom to call;
- It clearly defines management's and employees' responsibilities and consequences; and
- It demonstrates the organization's and management's commitment to dealing with reported incidents.

#### Policy Statement Contents

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A workplace violence policy statement should convey that:

- The policy applies to any act or conduct that causes physical harm or property damage, or that makes an employee feel scared, frightened, threatened, worried, or unsafe about his or her physical safety, about the physical safety of another or fearful of property damage;
- The policy covers acts or displays of violence, threats of violence, harassment, intimidation, bullying, damage to property, and other inappropriate or disruptive behavior;
- The policy also applies to incidents involving coworkers and outside individuals who represent potential threats;
- All employees are responsible for maintaining a safe work environment and reporting incidents of workplace violence;
- The organization will respond promptly and appropriately to all reported incidents;
- The organization will act to stop inappropriate behavior; and
- The organization will support all managers and persons involved in responding to or dealing with violent and potentially violent incidents or situations.

## Recommended Approaches

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### *Keep it brief*

Consider the following recommendations in developing your written policy statement:

**A written policy statement should be brief and simple.** Implementation details can be provided in training and in more detailed backup documents. For example, roles and responsibilities of management involved in responding to potentially dangerous situations can be outlined in memoranda of understanding or in operating manuals/instructions rather than in the written policy. This approach gives management the flexibility it will need to deal creatively with these fluid, unpredictable situations.

### *Consider the advantages and disadvantages of using definitions*

**There are disadvantages to using definitions of terms such as violence, threats, and harassment in your written policy statement.**

Definitions can discourage employees from reporting incidents that they do not believe fall within the definition. The reporting system should not deter employees from reporting situations that frighten them. If you want to clarify the scope of your organization's concept of one or more of the terms in the policy, you could use examples. For example, you may want to give examples of verbal and non-verbal intimidating behavior.

There are also advantages to using definitions, as people do need to know what is meant, and definitions can help to clarify terms in your written policy. Lack of clarity can be a problem. However, definitions should not be constituted to be overly precise or restrictive.

Another consideration is that definitions are often restrictive and may create legal problems in the future when you are taking disciplinary actions against the perpetrators of workplace violence. Use of definitions can make it more difficult to defend a case on appeal.

### *Be cautious with "Zero Tolerance"*

**Although "Zero Tolerance" is a catchy phrase to describe your approach to workplace violence, organizations must define what it means for their purposes.** Does it mean that an employee will be terminated for their first violation or can there be progressive discipline? It is important that disciplinary action is consistent throughout the organization.

However, the term "Zero Tolerance" might appear to eliminate any flexibility an organization has in dealing with difficult situations even if this is not intended. Another undesirable side effect is that the appearance of inflexibility can discourage workers from reporting incidents because they do not want to get their coworker fired — they just want the behavior stopped. This appearance of inflexibility also may discourage early intervention in potentially violent situations.



***Consult with legal counsel***

**Consult an attorney familiar with State and Federal laws in this area who can make appropriate recommendations.**

On the following pages are three examples of written policy statements, which can be tailored in format and tone to meet an organization's particular needs and goals.



## SAMPLE POLICY #1

### VIOLENCE PREVENTION

**Violence Prohibited** – We do not tolerate violent or disruptive behavior. All reports of incidents will be taken seriously and dealt with appropriately. Violence includes physically harming another, shoving, pushing, harassment, verbal or physical intimidation, coercion, brandishing weapons, and threats or talk of violence.

**Safe Workplace Commitment** – We are committed to providing a safe environment for employees, customers, vendors and visitors. In order to provide a safe workplace, the following rules apply:

**Property Access** – Access to our property is limited to those with a legitimate business interest. All employees and employee vehicles entering the property must display the company identification sticker. All visitors and visitor vehicles must register and display our identification tags while on our property.

**Inspections** – Desks, lockers, telephones and computers are our property. We have the right to enter or inspect your work area including, but not limited to, desks, lockers, computers and computer storage disks, with or without notice.

Our fax machines, copiers and mail systems, including email, are for business purposes. Personal business should not be conducted through these business systems. Under conditions approved by the management, telephone conversations may be overheard and voice mail messages may be retrieved in the process of monitoring customer service.

Any private conversations overheard or private messages retrieved during such monitoring that constitute a threat against other individuals may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination from employment.

**Training Programs** – As part of our commitment to prevent workplace violence, we have established training programs for all employees. Training will be included as part of employee orientation. Thereafter, employees are scheduled for annual refresher training during their anniversary month.

Training is mandatory and attendance will be taken. If an employee fails to attend training or make-up sessions, he or she will be subject to disciplinary action up to and including suspension without pay until training is completed.

We encourage all managers, supervisors and employees to enroll in courses to learn more about working with each other. Courses covering communication, problem solving, building effective working relationships, stress management and related or similar course topics may be offered by our training department. Where appropriate, seminars on these topics may be supported by our tuition reimbursement program.

*(continued on next page)*

**Employee Assistance Program** – We provide the resources of an employee assistance program (EAP) to all of our full-time or part-time employees. EAP services are offered to these employees and their eligible dependents. While we receive periodic reports on the number and types of visits made to the EAP, we do not receive any information about individual contacts.

You are encouraged to use our EAP whenever you feel the need for guidance in coping with any problems you have. If you have difficulty with the use of drugs or alcohol, the EAP can provide information on treatment.

The EAP is a confidential service to be used when you need help. We have a dedicated phone line to the EAP. Call (number) to receive assistance 24 hours a day.

**Violence Prevention Team** – We have formed a violence prevention team to create and implement our workplace violence prevention program. The team will also handle the consequences of any incidents of violence we experience, providing assistance to employees and information to the media. The team will take the steps necessary for us to resume business. Employees from all areas of our company work on the team. We believe that a multi-disciplinary approach is best suited to handle workplace violence problems.

The violence prevention team will be comprised of representatives from:

Senior Management • Safety • Security • Risk Management • Human Resources • Supervisors  
Public Relations • Employees • Financial Systems

The violence prevention team may consult with appropriate resources, including but not limited to, threat assessment and management professionals, legal counsel, and union representatives.

**Reporting Potential Problems** – It is everyone's business to prevent violence in the workplace. You can help by reporting what you see in the workplace that could indicate that a coworker is in trouble. Often, you are in a better position than management to know what is happening to those you work with.

You are encouraged to report any incident that may involve a violation of our policies that are designed to provide a comfortable and safe workplace environment. Concerns may be presented to your supervisor, or a designated member of our violence prevention team.

All reports will be investigated promptly and information will be kept confidential, except where there is a need to know in order to resolve the problem, or where management believes that disclosure is necessary for safety reasons.

**Workplace Incidents** – In the event of a major workplace incident that affects, or has the potential to affect, the mental health of our work force, we may provide initial counseling and support services to you and your immediate family members.

As the crisis passes and support systems are put into place for individuals affected by the incident, we will make every effort to return to normal business operations. A reasonable effort will be made to notify employees, customers, stockholders and others who need to know of the status of our business operations directly whenever possible. In cases where direct contact is not possible or practical, an effort will be made to communicate through the news media and other available resources.

## **SAMPLE POLICY #2**

### **THREATS, HARASSMENT, OR VIOLENCE AT WORK**

XYZ Company believes in encouraging a safe work environment, and will not tolerate verbal or physical intimidation, harassment, or threats of violence toward any employee.

Any employee who believes that the actions or words of another employee (includes subordinates and supervisors), customer, client, vendor, or third party constitute physical harm, property damage, or intimidation, harassment, or a threat of violence should report it as soon as possible to the appropriate supervisor, the Human Resources Director, or any other member of management. All complaints of intimidation, harassment, or threats of violence will be investigated promptly and will be kept confidential to the extent possible. Any employee who is found after appropriate investigation to have engaged in any intimidation, harassment, or threat of violence to another employee will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including termination. The Human Resources Director also may direct the employee to possible referral and support groups.

We prohibit retaliation against any employee who has made a good-faith complaint of intimidation, harassment, or threat of violence or who has cooperated with or been a witness during the investigation of such a complaint.

## **SAMPLE POLICY #3**

### **PRODUCTIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT/ WORKPLACE VIOLENCE**

The Company is committed to preventing workplace violence and to maintaining a safe work environment. Given the increasing violence in society in general, we have adopted the following guidelines to deal with intimidation, harassment, or other threats of (or actual) violence that may occur during business hours or on our premises.

All employees, including supervisors and temporary employees, should be treated with courtesy and respect at all times. Employees are expected to refrain from fighting, "horseplay," or other conduct that may be dangerous to others. Firearms, weapons, and other dangerous or hazardous devices or substances are prohibited from the premises of the Company without proper authorization.

Conduct that threatens, intimidates, or coerces another employee, a customer, or a member of the public at any time, including off-duty periods, will not be tolerated. This prohibition includes all acts of harassment, including harassment that is based on an individual's sex, race, age, religion, sexual orientation or any characteristic protected by federal, state, or local law.

All threats of (or actual) violence, both direct and indirect, should be reported as soon as possible to your immediate supervisor or any other member of management. This includes threats by employees, as well as threats by customers, vendors, solicitors, or other members of the public. When reporting a threat of violence, you should be as specific and detailed as possible.

All suspicious individuals or activities should also be reported as soon as possible to a supervisor. Do not place yourself in peril. If you see or hear a commotion or disturbance near your work station, do not try to intercede if doing so would put yourself at risk.

The Company will promptly and thoroughly investigate all reports of threats of (or actual) violence and of suspicious individuals or activities. The identity of the individual making a report will be protected as much as is practical. In order to maintain workplace safety and the integrity of its investigation, the Company may suspend employees, either with or without pay, pending investigation.

Anyone who is found to be responsible for threats of (or actual) violence or other conduct that is in violation of these guidelines will be subject to prompt disciplinary action up to and including immediate termination of employment.

We encourage employees to bring their disputes or differences with other employees to the attention of their supervisors or the Human Resource Manager before the situation escalates into potential violence. The Company is eager to assist in the resolution of employee disputes and will not discipline employees for raising such concerns.



### Prevention

#### Overview

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One major component of any workplace violence program is prevention. The topics in the previous sections, such as program development and union involvement, are important parts of a workplace violence prevention program. This section will focus on additional measures that can be taken to reduce the risk of violent behavior.

#### Warning Signs of Violence

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The first question many people ask when starting to develop a workplace violence prevention program is, “How can we identify potentially violent individuals?” It is understandable that people want to know this — and that “early warning signs” and “profiles” of potentially violent employees are in much of the literature on the subject of workplace violence. It is important to understand, however, that signs and profiles do not predict that violence will occur, rather they merely indicate that there is more of a propensity for violence to occur. The key for employers in violence prevention is to intervene early when these indicators are first recognized.

#### *Indicators of potentially violent behavior*

There are limitations in the ability to predict human behavior and there is no one “profile” of a potentially dangerous individual. However, indicators of increased risk of violent behavior are available. These indicators have been identified by the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime, Profiling and Behavioral Assessment Unit, in its analysis of past incidents of workplace violence. These are some of the indicators:

- Direct or veiled verbal threats of harm, e.g., predicting that bad things are going to happen to a coworker;
- Intimidating, belligerent, harassing, bullying, or other inappropriate and aggressive behavior (physical or verbal);
- Numerous conflicts with supervisors and other employees;
- Bringing a weapon to the workplace, brandishing a weapon in the workplace, making inappropriate references to guns, or exhibiting a fascination with weapons. A weapon is defined or determined by its actual or intended use;
- Statements showing fascination with incidents of workplace violence, statements indicating approval of the use of violence in similar situations or the use of violence to resolve a problem, and statements indicating identification with perpetrators of workplace homicides;
- Statements indicating desperation (over family, financial, and other personal problems) to the point of contemplating suicide; and
- Drug/alcohol abuse.

Additional warning signs or “red flags” include:

- Unusual or extreme changes in behaviors;
- History of violent behavior (including post-employment);
- Paranoia and perception that individuals and/or everyone, is “out to get the employee” or is against the employee;
- Inability to take criticism and/or responsibility for own problems. Perceives that others are to blame and may verbalize the desire for revenge against that person(s) or the company;
- Poor impulse control, displays of anger and an escalating propensity to push the limits of normal conduct, with a disregard for the safety of coworkers;
- Any words or conduct that may cause concern that a person may act out in a violent manner; and
- Person with personal life crisis, e.g., work-related circumstances such as termination, disciplinary action, change in job assignments, and perceived loss of status, as well as personal circumstances such as relationship issues, financial challenges, health issues, and family problems.

The more combinations of indicators that an employee may exhibit, the more concerned the supervisor should be in carefully evaluating the situation. Employers should ensure that they are (or an incident response team is) prepared to assist supervisors and other employees in dealing with such situations. Some behaviors require immediate police or security involvement, others constitute actionable misconduct and require disciplinary action, and others indicate an immediate need for referral to an Employee Assistance Program or Threat Assessment and Management Specialist.

Employers and managers should be aware that terminations, reduction in force, and disciplinary actions can trigger an individual who has a propensity for violence. Employers should ensure that these events are well-planned to provide support and to treat employees with dignity and respect.

## Training

**(Refer to Part III for Resources)**

Training is a critical component of any prevention strategy. Training is necessary for employees, supervisors, and the staff members of each office that may be involved in responding to an incident of workplace violence.

Training sessions conducted by internal or external resources, including the Employee Assistance Program, Threat Assessment and Management Specialist, Security personnel or agency, and Human Resources personnel are particularly helpful, enabling employees to get to know experts who can help them when potentially violent situations arise. Employees and supervisors seek assistance at a much earlier stage when they personally know the resources and personnel who can help them. The following are types of training that have proved effective in preventing violence and other threatening behavior.

Providing appropriate training informs employees that management will take threats seriously, encourages employees to report incidents, and demonstrates management's commitment to deal with reported incidents.

### *Employee training*

All employees should know how to report incidents of violent, intimidating, threatening and other disruptive behavior. All employees should also be provided with phone numbers for quick reference during a crisis or an emergency. In addition, workplace violence prevention training for employees may also include topics such as:

- Explanation of the organization's workplace violence policy;
- Examples of workplace violence and encouragement to report incidents;
- Ways of preventing or diffusing volatile situations or aggressive behavior;
- How to deal with hostile persons;
- Managing anger;
- Techniques and skills to resolve conflicts;
- Stress management, relaxation techniques, wellness training;
- Security procedures, e.g., the location and operation of safety devices such as alarm systems;
- Personal security measures; and
- Employer resources that can assist employees in resolving conflicts, e.g., the Employee Assistance Program, the ombudsman, and peer mediators.

Workplace managers should assess their work environment and occupation(s) to determine their particular risk factors and then customize their training to address those specifics. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)'s publication, *Violence in the Workplace: Risk Factors and Prevention Strategies*, discusses clearly identifiable workplace risk factors, such as dealing with the public, and emphasizes that training will be more useful and credible when it addresses risk factors specific to job tasks or locations (See Appendix A). Information can also be obtained through the Hawaii Occupational Safety and Health (HIOSH) Division, State of Hawaii Department of Labor and Industrial Relations.

***What to do when a workplace violence incident occurs (employee/supervisor/incident response team training)***

A good incident response plan means that there has been a serious position taken by management of the organization to respond appropriately and in a timely manner to a workplace violence event.

In order to properly and swiftly respond to incidents of workplace violence, organizations are responsible for the development of appropriate incident response plans, plan dissemination among the work force and provision of specific training. Training should include elements of the plan specific to workers and work areas within the context of the total emergency response plan, and special training for supervisors and response team members is a requirement. It goes without saying that any plan should be exercised, at the very minimum, as a tabletop exercise. Otherwise, it would be akin to a football team with a playbook playing a game without ever having practiced any plays. Crisis situations tend to be chaotic. A well-developed and exercised plan can minimize chaos.

Training in personal safety should be provided to all employees sufficient to improve their survivability skills in the event of a serious workplace violence incident. When an incident happens, every employee should know what to do.

All members of the organization must understand the plan. There could also be training in human relations issues concentrating on communication style. Assertiveness training, conflict resolution and reflective listening techniques and instruction in the causes of violence in small and large groups could become an important and integral part of an organization's annual training program. Violence drills and simulations may be incorporated into employee safety training programs.

Employee training should include a warning to them that they should not attempt to physically intervene or deal with the situation themselves. It is important that security or the police take charge of any incident that can or does involve physical harm.

## ***Elements of an incident response plan***

An incident response plan should be specific and clear to all employees. For smaller organizations, it may be as simple as getting everyone away from danger and calling the police. For larger organizations, it may include the following elements:

- **Take immediate action.**
- **Call police immediately for crimes in progress, violent incidents, or specific threats of imminent violence.** Use organization's security if properly trained and able. Keep a telephone line open to police until they arrive on scene.
- **Notification/warning.**
  - Emergency communication/notification procedures should be clear.
  - Emergency equipment/implements are available and in working order.
  - A second source of communication (code words, etc.) is available.
- **Activate local crisis incident response team or other pre-identified response unit (trauma trained).**
  - Establish command center with clearly identified chain of command. Include police and other emergency responders.
  - Activate telephone teams.
  - Notify proper persons.
  - Document the incident history (may be accomplished by an employee with note-taking skills assigned to the incident response team).
  - Identify witnesses.
  - Must have necessary tools – charged cellular phones, building plans (including “as built” drawings), aerial photographs of the facility.
- **Evacuate building according to plan to safe areas (account for all employees).**
  - Use designated escape routes or optional routes, i.e., establish contingencies.
  - Place barriers between violent persons and employees as possible.
  - Use “safe room” if available and pre-designated (may be part of a “lockdown” plan).
  - Secure work areas as appropriate and possible.
- **Contain incident (from spreading).**
  - Defuse (if situation has not turned violent and if responder is trained and able).
  - Contain (by police, organization's security and incident response team) as possible and appropriate.

- **Attend to life safety issues.**
  - Activate emergency medical services (first responders may be medically trained employees).
  - Attend to victims in need of medical attention.
  - Provide trauma counseling.
- **Attend to media responsibilities.**
  - “Control” media – determine where they can be (a pre-plan should identify spokesperson as the employee responsible for speaking with the media).
- **Activate post-incident response and evaluation.**
  - Provide Critical Incident Stress Debriefing for responders, victims, and witnesses.
  - Conduct Response Debriefing/Evaluation with responders, security, and management.

### ***Supervisory training***

In addition to the training suggested above, special attention should be paid to general supervisory training. The same approaches that create a healthy, productive workplace can also help prevent potentially violent situations. It is important that supervisory training include basic leadership skills such as setting clear standards, addressing employee problems promptly, and using the probationary period, performance counseling, discipline, and other management tools conscientiously. These interventions can keep difficult situations from turning into major problems. Supervisors don't need to be experts on violent behavior; what is needed is a willingness to seek advice from the experts in threat assessment and management.

Some managers have a level of interpersonal skills that require more assistance than that offered by a general class in leadership. In these cases, providing access to a specialist in executive development and coaching may help prevent these managers from inciting violence in a vulnerable employee.

Some organizations include training on workplace violence as part of general supervisory training, some conduct separate training sessions on workplace violence, and some include it in crisis management training. Whichever approach is taken, supervisory training should cover:

- The company policy or statement concerning its stance on workplace violence,
- Ways to encourage employees to report incidents in which they feel threatened for any reason by anyone inside or outside the organization,
- Skills in behaving compassionately and supportively towards employees who report incidents,

- Skills to identify potentially violent behavior and to learn the appropriate interventions,
- Interpersonal communication skills in taking disciplinary actions,
- Basic skills in handling crisis situations and de-escalation techniques,
- Basic emergency procedures,
- For unionized work environments, labor-management issues and company labor relations procedures,
- How to ensure that appropriate screening of pre-employment references has been done, and
- Management coaching that provides feedback to managers whose communication and supervisory style are abusive or disrespectful of employees.

Training sessions conducted by internal or external resources, including the Employee Assistance Program, Threat Assessment and Management Specialist, Security personnel or agency, and Human Resources personnel are particularly helpful, enabling employees to get to know experts who can help them when potentially violent situations arise.

### ***Incident response team training***

Employers should identify and train an individual and/or team (preferable) to respond to threats and incidents of violence in the workplace. Teams are generally referred to as “incident response teams” or as “threat management teams” and are typically staffed by the following personnel: human resource specialist, security, representatives from both management and employee groups, union representative, employee assistance provider, threat management specialist, and legal counsel or attorney.

Team members also need to understand enough about each other’s professions to allow them to work together effectively. Response team training should allow discussion of policies, legal constraints, technical vocabulary, and other considerations that each profession brings to the interdisciplinary group. Part II of this handbook is intended to introduce team members to key issues in professions other than their own.

Much of the incident response team training can be accomplished by practicing responses to different scenarios of workplace violence. The case studies in Part IV of this handbook are intended for this purpose. Practice exercises can help the staff understand each other’s responses to various situations so that there is no confusion or misunderstanding during an actual incident. In addition, practice exercises can prepare the staff to conduct the supervisory training suggested above.

Use practice exercises to see how the incident response team would deal with different situations.

The team members also need to consult regularly with other personnel within the organization who may be involved in dealing with potentially violent situations. Those who are consulted on an *ad hoc* basis should receive some appropriate training as well.

### **Using Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) as a Preventive Strategy**

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Employers should not tolerate interpersonal conflicts between employees which, if left unresolved, can escalate to serious incidents of workplace violence. Some employers use ombudsman programs, facilitation, mediation, and other methods of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) as preventive strategies in their workplace violence programs. ADR approaches often involve a neutral third party who can assist disputing parties in resolving disagreements. ADR is most helpful in workplace violence programs at the point when a problem first surfaces, i.e., before an employee's conduct rises to a level that warrants a disciplinary action. Caution should be exercised in using ADR with employees who may have serious emotional conditions. Whether or not ADR is employed as a violence mitigation strategy is best considered by the organization's threat management team or employee assistance program. Refer to Part III for ADR Resources.

### **Pre-Employment Strategies**

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Employers may take a number of steps before hiring that can reduce the risk of workplace violence. These include workplace pre-employment screening and managerial selection techniques.

#### ***Screening and Application***

The employment application should include applicant's work history, supervisor's name, reason for leaving each position, and contact phone numbers for previous supervisors. It should also advise the applicant that the employer has the right to deny employment, or terminate employment if the applicant is hired, if the employee misrepresents or omits any fact included in the application. The application should require a list of references, and these references should be contacted. The application should also release the company from liability for engaging in a background search, and employers should be careful to comply with any legal requirements.

Pre-employment screening is an important part of workplace violence prevention. It is before a person is hired that the company has the most complete opportunity for avoiding future workplace conflict and potential violence. The organization should establish a regular pre-hire screening process which includes, but is not limited to:



- Professional and personal references;
- Prior employment history;
- Education verification; and
- Skills/personality testing.

It is important that the employer review the process with legal advisors to ensure that the methods employed conform to State and Federal laws. The starting point for any investigation should be a meaningful interview of the applicant in which the applicant is given the opportunity to discuss any history of conflicts at previous positions.

At minimum, the following should be received from all applicants:

- a) a complete written application with an accompanying authorization to conduct an employment verification, and
- b) a signed release of liability for persons participating in the employment verification.

The contents of the application, along with all relevant education and qualification information provided should be verified. Provided references should be interviewed. Likewise, efforts should be made to talk to the person who was the applicant's immediate supervisor for information.

Where the organization does not have the resources to conduct the background investigation in-house, the use of background research firms is a common solution employed by both large and small organizations. Certain notice and consent provisions may apply. The background investigations firm or the organization's legal advisors can explain them. The investigation should certainly seek out information relating to any prior indications of threatening, assaultive, or bullying behavior by the applicant in addition to the normal performance questions naturally of interest to employers.

Hawaii law provides protections to former employers who provide information in good faith in such investigations. Many employers will provide information when provided a copy of the signed authorization and release obtained from the applicant.

It should be stressed that even the smallest employer has the ability to find out useful information simply by fully exploring the information provided on an employment application. Failing to do so may prove to be a costly mistake, both in terms of physical harm and subsequent legal liability.

Special screening precautions should be undertaken in the selection of supervisors and managers. It is important to select managers who have not only the right technical knowledge and experience, but also the appropriate temperament and interpersonal skills. Interview questions and questions asked of references should help to evaluate the management applicants for interpersonal skills, managerial style, and personal skills in managing stress and conflict. Psychological testing for managerial temperament is another alternative available.

***Post-Offer/  
Pre-Hiring Strategies***

After a conditional offer of employment, the employer can get authorization to conduct a “criminal history record check” to determine if the applicant has any prior convictions. However, the employer may not refuse employment based on a conviction unless it is related to the position for which the individual has applied and occurred less than ten years ago.

***Post-Hiring Strategies***

Employers should include personnel policies that advise employees that they do not have a reasonable expectation of privacy in their voice mails, emails, and internet usage, because the systems are company property. The policy should reserve the employer’s full right to review such company property, and to monitor calls and emails accessed on office equipment. Inappropriate use of such company property and/or non-compliance with standards of conduct as addressed in the workplace violence prevention policy should be explained.

**Termination,  
Dismissal, and  
Reduction-In-Force**

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The termination process may be a traumatic event for the employee. Every effort should be made to conduct the termination in a way that respects the dignity of the employee. Employers may provide counseling, EAP services, or job counseling services to employees who are laid-off, dismissed, terminated, or subject to reduction-in-force (RIF). The offering of out-placement assistance may reduce the stress felt by such an employee. Additionally, employers should consider utilizing special measures in circumstances where a violent response is a possibility. While the measures used should be tailored to each employer’s individual circumstance, employers may wish to consider the following:

- In planning for RIFs, employers may choose to retrain supervisors in the company’s workplace violence policy and in general workplace violence awareness. Additionally, the company may choose to train all employees in coping with change.
- Consideration should be given to timing issues. Some dismissals may need to be handled immediately, while others may be planned for a specific day of the week or time of day (for example, beginning or ending of a shift).

- Preserve the employee's dignity. If the employer feels that the employee may pose a threat, alternate arrangements should be made depending upon the level of threat. For example, the employer may arrange to conduct the dismissal off-site or the employee may be escorted by security to retrieve personal belongings.
- Retrieve all equipment, identification cards, keys, access cards, etc., that belong to the organization; cancel the employee's passwords and safe combinations.
- Make termination a statement of fact and not a discussion or debate.
- If the employer feels that a violent reaction is a possibility, the employer should take appropriate precautions. For example, the employer should brief its security department and have them present at the dismissal; or, the employer may need to contact a private security firm or local police for assistance.
- Secure union concurrence and support for termination, if possible.
- Suggest support services to the terminated employee. Support services may include job counseling services, EAP services, or assistance in obtaining unemployment benefits.
- During Termination Meetings:
  - Maintain privacy. Ensure that other employees cannot overhear the conversation; however, as a precaution, the supervisor may choose to arrange for a witness or even two people to be present. As a further precaution, keep emergency and security personnel nearby but out of sight.
  - Understand the parameters of the meeting and stay within them.
  - Put the termination notice in writing.
  - Stick to the matter at hand. Do not debate.
  - Do not heighten tension.
- If the employee poses a threat, have the employee escorted from the building. Have security measures in place so that the employee is not permitted further access to the building.
- Post-termination communications should be future-oriented. For example, ask the employee what he would like future employers told about his employment or where he would like his personal mail sent.
- Change locks, combination codes, passwords, etc., on a regular basis.

- Communicate with all employees in a timely matter regarding downsizing and RIFs, and ensure that employees are aware of the disciplinary consequences of behavior.
- Periodically evaluate the adequacy of the organization's physical security.

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## After Termination

An employer's responsibility for a potentially violent employee may not end at termination. There have been cases when employers have been held liable for violence committed at a company by a terminated employee.

If a company is concerned about terminating a potentially violent or frightening employee, consultation with internal and external resources is recommended. The need is to plan for strategies during and after termination that would assist in supporting the employee's dignity, monitoring his or her behavior, and managing risk for the company. Resources to develop these strategies include, but are not limited to: security, threat assessment professionals, Employee Assistance Programs, and legal counsel.

Providing the terminated employee with information on their retirement, medical and insurance programs that may need to be addressed can help the employee to feel that he or she is being treated fairly.

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## Security Measures

Maintaining a physically safe workplace is part of any good prevention program. The most crucial aspect of a physically safe workspace is ensuring that access to specific areas of the workplace is properly controlled. Denying unauthorized access to non-public areas is important for protecting both the organization's property and the safety of its employees, visitors, and customers.

When problems begin developing in areas controlled by the employer, it is important that employees have the means of obtaining assistance.

Employers use a variety of security measures to help ensure safety. These include:

- Employee photo identification badges;
- On-site guard services and/or individually coded card keys for access to buildings and areas within buildings according to individual needs;
- Guard force assistance in registering, badging, and directing visitors in larger facilities;
- Duress alarms, telephones (both wired and wireless), and monitored closed circuit television (CCTV) systems;

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- Posted signs prohibiting carrying of unauthorized weapons and limiting access, etc.; and
  - Fences, cipher locks, gates, ballistic-resistant glazing, and other intruder barriers.

Part II: Section 5 contains additional suggestions for preventive security measures and resources for obtaining additional information.

