

# Violence at Work

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines work-related violence as:

**Any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work**

This can include verbal abuse or threats as well as physical attacks.

Those most at risk of harm include anyone involved in the following:

- providing a service to the public or other employees
- telephone sales or support
- caring for individuals
- training and education
- cash transactions
- delivery/collection of goods
- controlling and supervising others
- representing authority in any form, but especially regulatory personnel.

Employers have a legal duty to protect their staff from foreseeable violence at work and should establish an effective strategy to protect both employees and customers from violence in the workplace.

## Why should you be concerned?

### Impact on your staff

- Physical injury
- Work-related stress – which can have long-term effects on health
- Fear and anxiety
- Job dissatisfaction and poor performance

### Impact on your business

- Lost staff time from injuries and stress
- Higher staff turnover, leading to increased recruitment and training costs
- Damage to the reputation of your business
- Potential compensation claims by staff

Employers need to adopt a risk management strategy, which enables them to check to see if there is a problem in the workplace, if there is a problem, to decide which action to take, take the action and then check the control measures have been successful.

## **Find out if there is a Problem of Violence**

All potential hazards need to be examined. Employers may not be aware where there is a problem, so it is important to talk to employees as well as looking at incident records. A checklist is available at the end of this document in order to assist the employer in identifying if there is potential for violence at work.

The British Crime Survey shows these occupations most at risk of assault (NB, average risk = 1.2%):

- security and protective services (11.4%)
- nurses (5.0%)
- care workers (2.8%)
- public transport (2.8%)
- catering/hotels/restaurants (2.6%)
- other education and welfare (2.6%)
- teachers (1.8%)
- retail sales (1.8%)
- management and personnel (1.7%)
- leisure/service providers (1.7%)
- other health professionals (1.4%)

## **Risk Assessment of Violence**

This follows the familiar procedure however it focuses on a single hazard. Don't forget that exposure to verbal abuse is included in the definition of violence. A generic form can be utilised, please refer to the risk assessment section in the document library. However, a separate checklist and specific risk assessment form can be found at the end of this document should you wish to utilise them.

## **Decide What Action to Take**

If violence is a problem, employers must decide what action to take by:

- identifying who may be harmed and how
- evaluating the risk
- assessing the level of training and information needed
- providing an adequate work environment
- looking at the design of the job to see how exposure to violence can be eliminated or the threat minimised
- recording the findings and reviewing the assessment.

## **What can you do to control the risk of violence?**

There are many different ways of reducing the risk of violence, which can be separated into the following areas:

- work environment
- working practices
- training
- legal options
- partnership working and special schemes

## **Implement a Policy on Violence at Work – and Take Action**

Where the threat of violence is real, introduce a policy that can be written into the overall health and safety policy statement. Ensure employees are aware of it and the procedures to follow in the event of a violent incident. For example, the NHS has adopted a policy of non-tolerance of violence against its staff.

Cases where the NHS has taken legal or other action include the following:

- in June 2004, following violent or abusive behaviour the NHS successfully applied for the first ever national Anti-Social Behavioural Order (ASBO) covering the entire NHS against a specific named patient. The ASBO prevents him from entering medical premises in England and Wales without lawful excuse or prior permission from the NHS organisation involved. He was jailed in January 2005 for three years
- a violent arsonist was sentenced to life imprisonment on 13 June 2005 for stabbing a staff nurse at York Hospital in September 2004
- in March 2005 successful trials were completed of a device to help protect those who work in the community. Using mobile phone technology, the device helps workers raise the alarm if they feel threatened or are attacked. It allows them to covertly record threats of violence or abuse, which may later be used in evidence.

## **Violence at Work Policy**

Employers should appoint an individual with appropriate authority to have overall responsibility for developing an integrated policy, ensuring it is implemented, and then overseeing it. The policy should outline the arrangements in place for dealing with violent incidents, both verbal and physical and should be made available to all employees. From time to time the policy will need to be reviewed to ensure that it remains valid and useful.

An example policy is contained in the document library – Violence at work Policy. It is only an example and should be used with caution and amended to your particular circumstances.

## **Overview**

- Do you know if your business or your type of business has a problem (including potential problem) of violence at work?
- Do you keep records of violence at work incidents?
- Have you carried out a risk assessment on those activities where there is a potential for violence at work?
- Have you established a policy and procedures to deal with violence at work and are they reviewed/monitored as necessary?
- Do you have a system in place to deal with the victims of violence at work incidents?
- Do you know where to go for further advice and information

## **Further Information**

**Preventing violence to retail staff (HS(G)133**, HSE Books, 1995, ISBN 0 7176 0891 3, price £6.95)

**Violence in the education sector (Education Service Advisory Committee<sup>1</sup>**, HSE Books, 1997, ISBN 0 7176 1293 7, price £6.95)

**Violence and aggression to staff in health services - Guidance on assessment and management** . (Health Services Advisory Committee, HSE Books, 1997, ISBN 0 7176 1466 2, price £8.50)

Work-related violence: Case studies – Managing the risk in smaller businesses HSG229 HSE Books 2002 ISBN 0 7176 2358 0

A range of case study examples for a range of businesses are available at:  
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/violence/smallbusiness.htm>

# Identifying Violence Checklist

Tables 1 and 2 form part of the initial risk assessment process for identifying potential of violence and aggression for staff. Before the 'Assessor' completes the Form they should satisfy themselves that they are able to answer the questions raised in Table 1 and should check with staff that they are able to answer the questions in Table 2.

TABLE 1			
	Yes	No	N/A
<b>Are your staff:</b>			
In your department/business in contact with the public where violence may or is likely to occur? If No- no further action necessary – review at least every 12 months			
Aware of whether violence has been identified as a problem in the department?			
Briefed about the area where they work?			
Aware of attitudes, traits or mannerisms, which can annoy clients/customers etc?			
That verbal aggression by telephone could be perceived as a problem?			
Provided with a sound grasp of the departments preventative strategy?			
Provided with training appropriate to the risks for managing potential violence and/or aggression?			
<b>Do they:</b>			
Have access to forms for reporting incidents?			
Appreciate the need for this procedure?			
Use the forms?			
Appreciate their responsibilities for their own safety?			
Understand the provisions for their support by the department e.g. Police liaison, counselling, etc.?			

TABLE 2			
	Yes	No	N/A
<b>Have you:</b>			
Had appropriate training regarding violence and aggression to staff?			
A sound grasp of your department's safety policy?			
A clear idea about the area into which you are going to work?			
Out-of hours telephone numbers etc to summon help?			
Access to forms to record and report incidents?			
A personal alarm, mobile phone (where appropriate)? Does it work?			
<b>Are you:</b>			
Aware that your approach, body language or mannerisms may influence the clients/customers behaviour?			

<b>Date of Assessment:</b>
<b>Name and signature of Assessor:</b>
<b>Position:</b>

# Violence Risk Assessment Form

Work Base  Department  Ref

Staff group/  
named  
individual  Location

Description of activity where violence and/or aggression could occur:

## Frequency of Exposure

Infrequently ☐ Annually ☐ Monthly ☐ Weekly ☐ Daily ☐ Hourly ☐ Constantly ☐

Control measures already taken to reduce risk of violence and/or aggression (if any):

New/Additional Control Measures Required to reduce further the risk of violence and/or aggression:

If the above action is implemented the perceived residual risk is:

Residual Risk Remaining Assessors Low Risk ☐ Medium Risk ☐ High Risk ☐

Name	Signature	Position
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Date of Assessment <input type="text"/>	Review Date <input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>