



Workplace Violence

Guide to Occupational Health & Safety Regulations
On Prevention of Workplace Violence



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Introduction

Violence in the workplace is an increasingly serious occupational hazard. Like other injuries, injuries from violence are preventable.

Occupational Health and Safety Regulations Part 52 and 53 set minimum requirements for activities to minimize or eliminate the risk of violence toward workers. This guide will present the regulations and provide information on how to interpret them. Employers are encouraged to consult the list of resources at the end of this document to find detailed information about their own work environment.

Definition of Violence

Part 52.1 of the Occupational Health and Safety Regulations defines violence in the workplace.

52.1 *In this part, “violence” means the threatened, attempted or actual exercise of any physical force by a person other than a worker that can cause, or that causes, injury to a worker and includes any threatening statement or behavior that gives a worker reasonable cause to believe that he or she is at risk of injury.*

- This definition says that the threat must consist of a fear of or actual physical violence.
- The definition specifically excludes co-workers.
- The regulations apply anytime the worker is doing assigned duties regardless of the location.
- The regulations set a minimum standard for health and safety. We encourage you to do a careful assessment of hazards and go beyond the minimum where the risk merits this.

Planning and education are the keys to preventing violent incidents. Employers must develop safe work procedures to minimize or eliminate risks. You must also train workers in their use.

52.2 (1) *An employer shall conduct a risk assessment of the workplace to determine whether or not a risk of injury to workers from violence arising out of their employment may be present.*

- (2) *a risk assessment under subsection (1) shall include a consideration of*
- (a) *Previous experience of violence in that workplace*
 - (b) *Occupational experience of violence in similar workplaces*
 - (c) *Location and circumstances in which the work will take place*

High Risk Workers

Research on workplace violence shows that work activities most at risk for violence are:

- Working with the public
- Handling money, valuables or prescription drugs
- Carrying out inspection or enforcement duties
- Providing care, service, advice or education
- Working with unstable or volatile persons
- Working in premises where alcohol is served
- Working alone or in small numbers or in isolated or low traffic areas
- Working in community-based settings particularly in high crime areas
- Working in a mobile workplace (taxi drivers)

Occupational groups most at risk for workplace violence are:

- Retail employees, especially gas station attendants, jewelry store clerks, convenience store attendants and service persons in drinking and eating establishments
- Health care workers
- Correctional officers
- Social services employees
- Teachers
- Municipal housing inspectors
- Public works employees

Risk Assessment

Employers who have workers doing high risk work will need to do a risk assessment.

Risk assessment involves considering the three areas as outlined in section 52.2(2) a-c.

1. The first step in conducting your workplace risk assessment is to review previous experience of violence in your workplace. Research states that the best predictor of risk of assault is a history of assault. This includes a history of all injuries and incidents related to violence. Your risk assessment will include deciding what the chances for injury from violence are for any particular work location or shift.
 - ✓ Determine if you are in the risk categories mentioned above. Consider other factors that could create a risk such as late night opening, potential for access to drugs, location or clients with a history of unpredictable behavior.

- ✓ Survey all your employees about their experiences with workplace violence in the last two to three years. Have them include incidents that happened as well as situations where they might have felt at risk. Your safety committee or safety representative can be a good resource to assist with this.
 - ✓ Look at company records and any investigations or recommendations that may have been made.
2. The second step 52.2(2)(b) involves looking at workplaces similar to yours to determine if they have identified a risk. For example, your convenience store may not have been robbed but branches in other locations or stores in your area may have been. If you have a head office or association, they may be able to assist you. Some suggestions for good internet resources are listed at the end of this document.
 3. The third step in determining the risk is to consider where you work and what you do. Your hours of operation and location can be major risk factors. Look at the nature of your work, lighting, security provisions, number of workers and workplace layout to determine your risk. Work done late at night or in high crime areas is high risk. If there is money or alcohol involved or a single worker giving off site care to clients the risks may be higher. Do a workplace inspection looking at things like lighting, visibility, access control, “entrapment sites”, and access to security. The BC publication *Preventing Violence in Health Care* listed in the resources at the end of this document contains sample inspection checklists.

Once you have done these three steps, determine which workers and which jobs are high-risk. You will need to develop procedures, controls and training for these areas.

53.3 *If a risk of injury to a worker from violence in a workplace is identified by an assessment under section 52.2, the employer shall establish procedures, policies and work environment arrangements*

(a) to either

(i) eliminate the risk of violence to workers in that workplace, or

(ii) if elimination of the risk is not possible, minimize the risk of violence to workers in that workplace; and

(b) to provide for reporting, investigating and documenting incidents of violence in that workplace

Procedures: 53.3(a)

Procedures for prevention must be put in place once the risk is identified. The purpose of the procedure is to eliminate or minimize the risk. Procedures will describe actions to take in the event of a violent incident and what actions and training will be implemented to prevent an incident from occurring in the first place. Procedures must be written and all employees must be trained in each procedure.

The Canadian Center of Occupational Health and Safety suggests three categories of preventive measures: workplace design, administrative practices and work practices. Many of these suggestions are examples of '*work environment arrangements*'.

Workplace design is the physical building. To reduce the risk you can do things like:

- Use electronic surveillance and post signs indicating this.
- Use locks or install physical barriers like high counters to separate customers / clients from the worker if necessary.
- Keep the workplace entrances, exits, counter and parking area well lit.
- Limit the number of entrances or exits.
- Position the reception or sales area so the counter is visible to fellow employees or from the street.
- Position furniture so that an employee can exit the room without having to get by a client.
- Place emergency call buttons in strategic areas and post emergency numbers.
- Provide employees with portable phones.

Administrative procedures are decisions made about how business is done. Some things to do are:

- Keep cash to a minimum. Post signs to indicate this. Use electronic payment systems to limit cash.
- Vary the time of day the cash is moved or stored.
- Install a locked safe and post signs to indicate the employee has no access.

- Set up worker friendly procedures for reporting incidents. Train employees to follow the procedures. Follow up on all reports and be proactive about making any recommended changes.
- Include violence prevention procedures early in the orientation of new employees. Review regularly with all employees.
- Develop procedures, make worksite adjustments and train employees in robbery prevention strategies. Appendix A has some suggestions to assist with this.
- Set up a screening assessment to identify unpredictable or potentially violent clients where workers will be off site with clients.

Work procedures are the activities employees do on the job to minimize risk. Some things to do are:

- Set up call-in times or a buddy system for workers who are working off site. Identify a workplace contact and stick to the call-in schedule.
- Lock the doors and limit customer access after a certain hour if the risk rises. Plan escape routes.
- Train workers not to enter any situation where they feel unsafe. Provide a means to communicate and a person to contact if the worker believes there is a risk.
- Train workers how to identify signs of escalating behaviors that could lead to violence. See Appendix C for warning signs.
- Train employees what to do if they are robbed or attacked. Have emergency numbers readily available. See Appendix B for suggestions.
- Train workers on techniques to defuse a potentially violent situation. The Alberta Human Resources Bulletin listed in the resources at the end of this document has suggestions on how workers can conduct themselves to minimize the risk.
- Have employees carry portable phones with them if they are moving around the workplace.
- Have someone available to call or report to if an employee needs to report a suspicious person or activity.

Policy: 53.3(a)

Senior management must issue a clear policy statement to indicate the belief that violence can be prevented and recognizing the importance of efforts to eliminate workplace violence.

The policy should indicate:

- ✓ The responsibilities of supervisors and management in implementing the policy and procedure.
- ✓ How management will address the risks identified to ensure they are minimized or eliminated.

Some of the important things a good policy will address are:

- A definition of workplace violence. The regulations set the minimum but you may want to expand the definition.
- A statement supporting any action that is intended to create a workplace environment free from violence and its consequences.
- Training programs available for prevention, control and elimination of violence.
- A list of measures that will be taken to intervene and manage violent incidents. This will include the level of management responsible for the actions and follow up.
- A commitment to effectively communicate and implement the policy.
- A means to ensure confidentiality.

Reporting, Investigating and Documenting Incidents 53.3(b)

Employees must be trained to report all incidents and accidents. Part of a proactive work place culture is making this easy and comfortable to do. The person responsible should be trained in how to investigate incidents (education sessions are available from the WCB education consultant). It is important to take all incidents seriously and reinforce the benefits of reporting for all staff. Appendix D offers a sample incident report form.

The occupational health and safety committee or representative can assist with recommendations and help ensure they are appropriate and followed up on. Near misses and incidents are an important part of preventing a serious accident. Recommendations for prevention and follow up are essential.

52.4 (1) *an employer shall inform workers who may be exposed to the risk of violence in the workplace of the nature and extent of the risk.*

(2) Unless otherwise prohibited by law, the duty to inform workers under subsection (1) includes a duty to provide information related to the risk of violence from persons who have a history of violent behavior and who may be encountered by a worker in the course of his or her work.

(3) an employer shall instruct workers who may be exposed to the risk of violence in

(a) the means of recognition of the potential for violence

(b) the procedures, policies and work environmental arrangements developed under Section 52.3 and

(c) the appropriate response to incidents of violence in the workplace (including how to obtain assistance).

Informed Workers, The Right to Know

Workers have the ' right to know ' all risks and safe work procedures associated with the job. This may involve identifying individuals with a history of unpredictable or violent behavior.

Training workers to recognize escalating behavior that has the potential to result in violence is a common way to minimize risk. Five warning signs of escalating behavior and possible responses are listed in Appendix C.

In the service sector this may require identifying to employees persons who have a history of aggressive or inappropriate behavior in the store, bar, mall or taxi.

The identity of the person and the nature of the risk must be given to staff likely to come into contact with that person. While workers have the right to know the risks, it is important to remember that this information cannot be indiscriminately distributed.

In the health care sector this will involve documenting unpredictable or violent behavior by clients. This must be flagged in the chart or care plan and all workers with contact must be made aware. It is helpful to document the best or most effective response to the behavior such as what has worked in the past. British Columbia's Work Safe web site has excellent resources for the health care sector on violence prevention. Consult the list of resources at the end of this document for details on where to access this information.

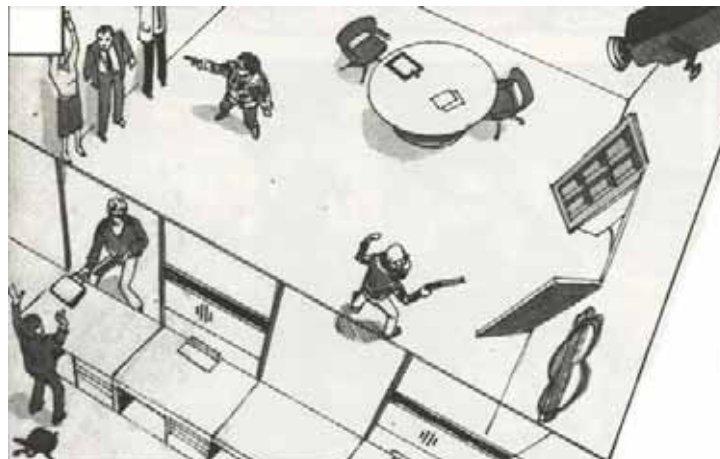
In all cases, details of previous incidents, warning signs, type of behavior to watch for and who to report concerns to must be included in the procedure. If the potential aggressor is known, strategies to prevent escalation or to de-escalate must be communicated to any employee likely to contact the person.

Rapid access to someone who is able to respond and who will know what action to take is essential in preventing a violent incident. Consider the situation where a trained employee notes an escalation in behavior and is looking for backup to prevent an incident. Calling 911 may not be the most appropriate action and the employee may hesitate to do this until it is too late. If your back up is a co-worker or the sales person in the next shop ensure they will know what to do and have the authority to do it.

This information should be reviewed regularly, posted in appropriate places and be guaranteed to get the necessary response. These situations should be included in training and work procedures developed under section 52.3.

52.5 An employer shall ensure that a worker who reports an injury or adverse symptom resulting from workplace violence is advised to consult a physician of the worker's choice for treatment and referral.

Exposure to violence, robbery or threats can have serious long term consequences. Counseling should be considered a normal response to such incidents and should be encouraged as part of the recommendations. A workers compensation claim must be filed if the incident results in medical treatment or lost time from work.



References

Alberta Human Resources: Workplace Health and Safety Bulletin. Preventing Violence and Harassment at the Workplace.
<http://www3.gov.ab.ca/hre/whs/network/hsttopics/generalsafety/harassment>

Canadian Center for Occupational Health and Safety: OHS Answers contains a section on violence prevention. Available at www.ccohs.ca

Department of Labor and Industries, Washington State. Workplace Violence Awareness and Prevention for Employers and Employees. April 2000.

National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has published a comprehensive guide titled "Violence in the Workplace". Available at:
<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/violrisk.html>

U.S. Department of Labor Occupational Safety and Health Administration has developed a Web site for young workers in the service sector.
<http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/youth/restaurant/index.html> It has suggestions for workers and employers in the fast food business in particular.

U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Safety and Health Administration;
Recommendations for Workplace Violence Prevention Programs in Late-Night Retail Establishments. OSHA Publication 3153 (1998), 110 KB PDF
<http://www.osha.gov/Publications/osha3153.pdf>

U.S. Department of Labor Occupational Safety and Health Administration
Violence: Occupational Hazards in Hospitals DHHS (NIOSH) Publication No. 2002-101 This is a comprehensive guide to risk assessment solutions in a health care setting.
http://www.osha.gov/pls/oshaweb/owaredirect.html?p_url=http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/2002-101.html

Workers Compensation Board of British Columbia Work Safe Publication: Take Care: How to Develop and Implement a Workplace Violence Prevention Program. PEI regulations are very similar to BC so information from this jurisdiction is particularly helpful.
http://www.worksafebc.com/publications/health_and_safety/by_topic/assets/pdf/take_care.pdf

Workers Compensation Board of British Columbia Work Safe publication:
Preventing Violence in Health Care Five steps to an effective program.
Available at:
http://www.worksafebc.com/publications/health_and_safety/by_topic/assets/pdf/violhealthcare.pdf

Appendix A

Suggestions for Prevention of Robberies

- Make the store attractive to customers and unattractive to robbers by keeping the store clean, tidy and well lit.
- Get away from the sales counter when there are no customers.
- Ensure the sales counter is clearly visible from outside the store. A cash register hidden behind posters and hard to see from the street helps robberies go unnoticed.
- Workers should be alert at all times. Know the escape routes, the location of phones or assistance; be aware of any areas of poor lighting.
- Avoid looking directly at suspicious persons. Prolonged eye to eye contact, especially if there is a group involved may be seen as a challenge and may escalate the situation. Fill out a description sheet. If loiterers arouse suspicion, call police and ask for a patrol check.
- Greet everyone who enters the store.
- Be friendly and briefly make eye contact.
- Ask the customer ahead of someone suspicious, "Are you together?" The customer will usually turn to look at the person which may deter the robber.
- Keep the cash register fund to a minimum. Post signs advising "minimum cash kept on premises." Use electronic banking to minimize cash transactions.
- Remove all \$50 and \$100 dollar bills from the cash register as soon as you receive them.
- Take extra precautions after dark and during slow periods. Check to ensure outside lights are on and working.
- Operate only one register late at night and leave the closed one open and tipped up to show there is no cash.
- Where possible, limit service to the drive through late at night and keep the store locked.

Taken from Workers Compensation Board of BC "Take Care" document.

Appendix B

Safety Practices in the Event of Robbery

1. Remain cool and calm and handle the entire procedure as if you are making a sale. Most robberies last under two minutes. The longer it takes the more nervous the robber becomes so keep it short and smooth.
2. Listen carefully to what the robber says and obey instructions.
3. Don't fight. Do not use weapons. Don't jeopardize your own safety or that of co-workers. Don't be a hero.
4. Give the robbers all the cash or merchandise they want. Your life and health are worth much more.
5. Do not delay or argue.
6. Warn the robbers of any surprises. Inform them about employees in a back room so they are not startled if someone appears.
7. Observe what the robber is wearing, their size, coloring, mannerisms and distinguishing characteristics but do not stare.
8. Activate the alarm after they have left the store. Observe which direction they go and what type of vehicle they are driving.
9. Call police and give them information you have.
10. Do not touch the crime scene or disturb evidence. Ask witnesses to wait for police. Call any other designated person who should be notified according to your store procedure.

(Taken from Workers Compensation Board of BC "Take Care" document.)

These recommendations can be turned into written work procedures. Write steps to take as actions. Post specific phone numbers and names of persons to call. Include specific times and particular actions such as when to lock doors or empty cash registers.

Appendix C

Five Warning Signs of Escalating Behavior

Warning Signs by client/ customer	Possible responses
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Confusion</u></p> <p>Behavior that indicates person is bewildered or distracted. Person may seem unsure of what to do.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to concerns • Ask clarifying questions • Supply facts
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Frustration</u></p> <p>Behavior will indicate resistance to information or reaction, impatience or a sense of defeat. May try to bait you.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relocate to a quiet, safe location • Reassure person • Be sincere in an attempt to clarify
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Blame</u></p> <p>Behavior will escalate. Person may find fault with other's actions, accuse you, hold you responsible or blame you. This is the start of a potentially hazardous situation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disengage and bring another person into the discussion where possible. • Use a team approach. • Draw client back to the facts • Use probing questions to indicate an attempt to understand.
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Anger</u></p> <p>Characterized by a visible change in body posture. Actions may include pounding fists, pointing fingers shouting. This signals very risky behavior.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use venting techniques • Don't offer solutions • Don't argue with comments made • Prepare to evacuate or isolate • Contact supervisor or security
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Hostility</u></p> <p>Physical actions of threats which appear imminent. Acts of physical harm or property damage. Out of control behavior signals they have crossed the line.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disengage and evacuate • Attempt to isolate person if it can be done safely. • Alert help and leave if possible.

Taken from: Workplace Violence Awareness and Prevention for Employers and Employees Department of Labor and Industries, State of Washington.

Workers can be trained to watch for these signs. Written procedures can indicate a specific action to take at different points in the escalation of the behavior.

Appendix D Violent Incident Report Form

Date of Incident:	Time:	Location of Incident:	
Name of Victim:		Job Title:	
Medical Attention Required? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>	WCB Form completed? YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>	Supervisor Notified? YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>	Police Called? YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Description of Incident: 			
Was victim injured? Describe in 5-6 lines		Were weapons used? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Describe:	
Witnesses (if any) & contact information 1. 2. 3.			
Description of the offender if not known or name and status with respect to worker if known . (client? co-worker?)			
Recommendations for prevention.			