

WORK-RELATED VIOLENCE

LEARNING OUTCOME

Describe the requirements of the Work Health and Safety legislation and standards relating to work-related violence.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

- Identify and define work-related violence.
- Understand the 'risk management' process for work-related violence.
- Understand some controls to manage the risk of this hazard.
- Understand the importance of the development of policies and processes to ensure the elimination or minimisation of harm to workers as a result of work-related violence.

REFERENCES

Work Health and Safety Act 2011

[Preventing and responding to work-related violence guidelines 2014](#)

WORK-RELATED VIOLENCE

Prevention and management of work-related violence is a workplace health and safety (WHS) that requires a multi-faceted organisational approach. Employers have a primary duty of care to identify and control (eliminate and minimise) work-related violence risks.

Who	Duties
Person conducting a business or undertaking (section 19)	Has the primary duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, workers and other persons are not exposed to health and safety risks arising from the business or undertaking. This includes ensuring, so far as is reasonably practicable: • provision and maintenance of a work environment without risks to health and safety • provision and maintenance of safe systems of work, and • monitoring the health of workers and the conditions at the workplace for the purpose of preventing illness or injury of workers arising from the conduct of the business or undertaking.
Officer (section 27)	Officers such as company directors, must exercise due diligence to ensure the business or undertaking complies with its work health and safety duties. This includes taking reasonable steps to ensure the business or undertaking has and uses appropriate resources and processes to manage the risks associated with violence in the workplace
Worker (section 28)	Workers must take reasonable care for their own health and safety and must not adversely affect the health and safety of other persons. Workers must also comply with any reasonable instruction and cooperate with any reasonable policy or procedure.

WORK-RELATED VIOLENCE

Work-related violence is any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work. In accordance with the guide on *Preventing and responding to work-related violence 2014*, work-related violence includes a broad range of actions and behaviours that can create risk to the health and safety of workers. It includes behavior often described as acting out, challenging behavior or behaviours of concern.

Work-related violence can result in a worker sustaining physical and/or physical injuries, and can sometimes be fatal. Workers can be exposed to work-related violence from a range of sources including clients, consumers, patients, visitors and members of the public.

Examples of work-related violence include, but are limited to:

- biting, spitting, scratching, hitting, kicking
- pushing, shoving, tripping, grabbing
- throwing objects, damaging property
- verbal abuse and threats
- using or threatening to use a weapon
- sexual assault.

Work-related violence is most common in industries where people work with the public or external clients. It often causes physical or psychological injury, and sometimes can be fatal.

It can also impose costs to industry and the community through increased workers' compensation and insurance premiums.

Occupations affected by work-related violence include:

- doctors, nurses, ambulance officers, welfare workers, personal carers, hotel receptionists, waiters and housekeeping staff
- police officers, prison guards, sheriffs, teachers, probation officers and debt collectors
- front-office staff, call centre staff, cashiers and security guards
- bus drivers, taxi drivers, couriers, pilots and cabin crew
- sales people, those who work alone or in remote locations and shift workers.

HAZARD IDENTIFICATION IN THE CONTEXT OF WORK-RELATED VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT

The nature and location of work, type of clients, business hours, services and facility access, staffing levels and employee skill mix will affect the hazards present in a workplace and the risk of exposure to work-related violence. The factors listed below may increase the likelihood and risks of worker exposure to work-related violence.

Workplace design:

- unrestricted movement of the general public throughout facilities to areas that are easy to access or are unsecured
- poorly lit areas of a facility
- limited access and exit points, privacy, ease of access to telephone and toilet facilities.

Policies and work practices:

- long waiting times
- low or inadequate staffing levels and skill mix
- visiting times (e.g. visitors may be aggressive, or may trigger aggression in clients)
- poor customer service
- isolated or remote working locations
- denying someone service
- handling cash
- investigating and/or enforcing specific legal requirements (e.g. mandatory reporting of child abuse)
- noise
- activity at night.

Client related:

- physiological imbalances or disturbances
- substance misuse or abuse
- intoxication
- acute and chronic mental health conditions
- distress or frustration.

These examples are not exhaustive and there may be other situations that expose workers to risks of work-related violence, particularly where there is direct interaction with the public.

INCIDENT AND INJURY RECORD REVIEW OR AUDIT

Review of incident and injury records, first aid reports and workers' compensation claims may help analyse trends and identify patterns of work-related violence.

The data should be analysed to establish a baseline for monitoring changes in reporting, measuring improvement, and to monitor and analyse trends. The data can also be used to support decision-making processes associated with setting priorities for further investigation, assessment, action or review.

WALK-THROUGH INSPECTION AND CHECKLIST

A checklist is a useful way of identifying hazards and does not require expertise in WHS. It is a systematic way of gathering and recording information quickly to ensure hazards are not overlooked. A checklist may help identify issues to be considered during risk assessment.

Things to consider in a walk-through inspection are:

- security
- entry and exit points/options
- lighting
- methods of communication
- work schedules
- physical layout and natural surveillance points, and
- service delivery processes.

RISK ASSESSMENTS

A risk assessment involves examining hazards that have been identified in the workplace in detail to assess whether they give rise to a risk of injury or illness.

Risk assessments can help determine whether a hazardous situation may result in harm and can assist employers make decisions about appropriate control measures.

When assessing the risks of work-related violence, the following questions should be asked:

- How likely it is that an act of violence or aggression will occur?
- How severe would the impact of such an act be?
- Is there any information regarding previous incidents of violence or aggression in the workplace?
- Do control measures exist and are they adequate?

A written record of risk assessments will assist with periodic reviews, whether done annually, when operations change or when incidents of work-related violence occur. Risk assessments also help assess the effects of change, provide a body of organisational evidence that will identify achievements and assist in further decision-making.

RISK CONTROL

The most important step is managing risks associated with work-related violence. The WHS legislation requires the PCBU to work through the hierarchy of control when managing risks. This means the PCBU must always aim to eliminate the hazard, which is the most effective control. If elimination is not reasonably practicable, the PCBU must minimise the risk so far as is reasonably practicable.

WORKPLACE DESIGN

The physical work environment can affect the likelihood of WVA and the ease in which people can respond. The objective is to eliminate or minimise, so far as is reasonably practicable, the likelihood of work-related violence occurring by using safe design, as this may be more effective in reducing risk than relying on work procedures or training alone.

Multiple control measures should be used and the following are the most reliable and provide the highest protection for workers:

- Ensure the building is secure, maintained and fit for purpose.
- Use security measures such as CCTV, anti-jump screens and timer safes.
- Separate workers from the public where possible, for example with protective barriers or screens.
- Control access to the premises and vulnerable areas.
- Prevent public access to the premises when people work alone or at night. Ensure workers can see who is coming into the premises and can restrict access if necessary.
- Fit communication and alarm systems and ensure they are regularly maintained and tested.
- Limit the amount of cash, valuables and drugs held on the premises.
- Store cash, valuables and drugs securely.
- Develop and implement cash-handling procedures, for example, electronic funds transfer only, locked drop safes, carry small amounts of cash, vary banking times and display 'limited cash held' signs.
- Use safe glass, for example laminated, toughened or substitute glass for an alternative product like Perspex (in picture frames and mirrors also).
- Prevent access to dangerous implements or objects that could be thrown or used to injure someone.
- Use internal and external lighting to assist visibility.
- Provide a safe retreat for workers and others so they can avoid violent situations.
- Arrange furniture and partitions to allow good visibility of service areas and avoid restrictive movement.
- Use appropriate signage to direct clients and visitors.

POLICY, PROCEDURES AND PRACTICE

Work systems and procedures are administrative controls and should form part of overall workplace prevention strategies. They are insufficient on their own to reduce the risk of violence and should be used together with control measures relating to the physical work environment and security. Work systems include:

- procedures for working in isolation and in uncontrolled environments
- policies that include appropriate action to be taken to protect workers and others from violence
- responsible service of alcohol policies and practices
- procedures for opening and closing the business
- monitoring staff working in the community or away from the workplace, for example supervisors check in regularly throughout shifts
- systems to map and record areas of concern for safe access and egress
- regular handover of information—with workers, other agencies, carers and service providers
- processes to assess client needs and provide appropriately skilled workers
- identification of behaviours and their triggers and strategies to address them
- identification systems—workers and authorised visitors are clearly identified

- understanding client condition/disability/triggers/care and behaviour management plans
- the review of behaviour and treatment programs after incidents or changes in behaviour
- management plans for clients known to have a history of aggression, developed in consultation with appropriately qualified people
- policies on the ongoing treatment of clients known to be aggressive or abusive, such as treatment contracts
- evaluation of work practices to see if they may contribute to aggression or violence.

Developing and implementing a prevention policy clarifies behaviour expectations and demonstrates a commitment to WHS. The policy should be developed through consultation across the workplace with HSRs, workers, managers and other relevant stakeholders. A policy should include a purpose statement, definition of scope, objectives, responsibility, risk management, and be endorsed by the safety committee and senior management,

TRAINING

Training and education is considered an administrative control measure. It can compliment and support higher order control measures, such as design, policy and work practices.

Training that is based on a comprehensive needs analysis will be more effective than training that is not. Training programs should be relevant to the workplace, be based on organisational needs and appropriate to the needs of workers and the client group involved. Training programs should also be practical and accessible. Such programs should be based on principles of adult education to ensure relevance and support for programs. Special needs of workers, such as skills, gender, disability, literacy and first language need to be considered in the development and delivery of these programs.

REVIEW

When reviewing control measures, check if the introduced controls have reduced the risk from when it was previously assessed. This may require hazard identification and risk assessments to be repeated to ensure all risks to health and safety have been controlled so far as is reasonably practicable.

Where the review of risk control measures reveals some remaining risk, a new risk assessment should be conducted and new control measures considered and implemented to ensure the risk is minimised so far as is reasonably practicable. Satisfactory control of risk is often a continual consultative process that involves trialing and refining control measures and considering worker feedback, new technology and changes in knowledge.

The review of risk controls should also analyse data such as incident data to guide ongoing decisions about further actions.

Note: Content for this module was sourced or adapted from the Guide for [Preventing and responding to work-related violence](#). For more information on work-related violence, please consult this document.

Version	Date	Author
1	30/06/2018	WHSQ