



# VIOLENCE

## IN THE WORKPLACE



WorkCover. **Watching out for you.**

## **Disclaimer**

This publication contains industry recommended action or information regarding occupational health, safety, injury management or workers compensation. It includes some of your obligations under the various Workers Compensation and Occupational Health and Safety legislation that WorkCover NSW administers. To ensure you comply with your legal obligations, you must refer to the appropriate acts.

This publication may refer to WorkCover NSW administered legislation that has been amended or repealed. When reading this publication you should always refer to the latest laws. Information on the latest laws can be checked at [www.nsw.gov.au](http://www.nsw.gov.au) or contact 02 9238 0950 or 1800 463 955 (NSW Country only).

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## What is workplace violence?

Violence and aggression include: verbal and emotional abuse or threats; and physical attack to an individual or to property by another individual or group. The impact of violence on a victim depends on the severity of the violence, his or her own experiences, skills and personality.

### ***Violent acts include:***

- Verbal abuse, in person or over the telephone
- Written abuse
- Harassment
- Threats
- Ganging up, bullying and intimidation
- Physical or sexual assault
- Armed robbery
- Malicious damage to the property of staff, customers or the business

Workplace violence may not always be a critical or extreme situation from the outset. It sometimes follows a pattern of escalating behaviour - from agitation, expressed anger or frustration and intimidating body language, to verbal/written abuse and threats, physical threats, or assault.

## How to use this information



### ***What is this booklet about?***

This booklet provides information to assist you to identify, assess and control the risk of violence in your workplace. If you follow the advice set out here, you will be well on the way to complying with responsibilities for providing a workplace that is safe from all types of violence, as required by occupational health and safety laws. This guidance is not a substitute for your legal obligations and you should make yourself aware of the laws that apply.

### ***Who is this booklet for?***

This booklet is for employers, managers, health and safety representatives, contractors and employees interested in or with a responsibility for, preventing and minimising the impact of violence and aggression at the workplace.

### ***When to use this information***

Whether you are setting up a new business or operating an existing business, this booklet is a step-by-step guide to understanding the issue of workplace violence. It will enable you to assess violence risks and develop practical prevention, critical incident and post-incident measures to avoid and minimise the effects of violence on your workers and customers.

The main focus of this guide is to help employers, in consultation with employees, prevent, manage and recover from aggressive and violent incidents.

## Understanding workplace violence

### ***What do the symbols used in this booklet mean?***

To help you work out what you need, a number of symbols are used to highlight things you should take into account and tools to help you do the job.



**Assess the risks in your workplace**



**Legal obligations that you must follow**



**Consult and communicate with employees**



**Questions you (or others) might ask to clarify issues**



**Tools that can help you work out your plan**



**The process of finding things that cause harm, working out how big a problem they are and then fixing them**

Violence can be either *internal* to the organisation or from *external* sources.

#### *Internal violence*

Employees can be at risk of violence from co-workers, supervisors, managers or other staff. Common types of violence include harassment, bullying, peer pressure and verbal or physical abuse. Violence can also come from former employees seeking revenge on the business, its manager or other staff.

#### *Violence from external sources*

This may be of two types:

- Material gain: where offenders are motivated to seek money, drugs or valuable goods.
- Non-material gain: this can include sexual assault, hostage taking and incidental violence to other people in the area immediately near the workplace.

#### *Client-initiated violence*

This is where clients or customers of a service, their relatives or friends take violent or aggressive action against the workers who are trying to help them. Teachers, enforcement officers and health and welfare workers, for example, are at risk of this source of violence. When these clients commit violent acts it is usually not a unique occurrence; they often have a history of violent behaviour or related problems.

*Discrimination and harassment*

In some cases, unwelcome behaviour takes the form of discrimination or verbal and sexual harassment, be it by other staff, clients, customers or the general public. Whilst these sorts of behaviour are clearly inappropriate and stressful, they are not always accompanied by aggression or violence.

Non-violent discrimination or harassment should be dealt with at an early stage, preventing them from becoming more serious and possibly leading to violent behaviour. There are laws in place to protect workers against discrimination and harassment. See the section "Further Information" in this booklet for some useful references.

*Bullying*

"Workplace bullying" is aggressive behaviour that intimidates, humiliates and/or undermines a person or group. Bullying can be defined as the repeated less-favourable treatment of a person by another or others in the workplace, which is considered unreasonable and inappropriate workplace practice. Examples of bullying at work may include: yelling; screaming; abusive language; continually criticising someone; isolating or ignoring a worker; sabotaging someone's work or their ability to do their job by not providing them with vital information, appropriate training and/or resources. Bullying results from one person or a group needing to dominate or show superiority over another person.

**Sources of workplace violence**

Any one or a combination of the following situations could result in workplace violence.

*The need for personal gain or gratification*

Offenders may try to take money, drugs or valuable goods from the business or employees. Attacks may be random but are often planned. The offenders know your business has something they want. They will strike where security and violence control measures are not adequate. Offenders may not be rational at the time of the offence or may be under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.

Some offenders are motivated by non-material gain. Sexual assault is an example. Sex offenders may stalk victims, planning their attack or may choose victims at random in opportune circumstances. Working alone, leaving work at night and travelling home alone can be high risks.

Extreme cases of workers being overloaded and driven excessively or inappropriately to perform by their supervisors can also result in workplace violence.

When people commit violent acts it is usually not a unique occurrence; they often have a history of violent behaviour.

*Service delivery issues*

Clients may be unhappy about any one or more aspects of your business including cost, performance of the product or service, treatment by staff, repeated delays and inconvenience. These things do not excuse violence, but should be recognised as possible contributing factors to an offender's actions.

Clients or customers of a service, their relatives or friends may take violent or aggressive action against the workers who are trying to help them.

In some cases, the incident can come about during a single contact with the service, such as a relative of a seriously injured person trying to have them attended to at a doctor's surgery or hospital. In most cases, however, violence comes about only after a number of smaller conflicts, over some time.

*Opportunism and coincidence*

Violent acts may be committed for their own sake, often with little or no planning. Random vandalism is one example.

Some “smash and grab” and shoplifting offences are random; a spur of the moment thing brought about by opportunity such as no staff in the shop or valuables being left in an accessible position.

Other, less common aggressive behaviour includes sieges and hostage taking.

Clients affected by drugs, alcohol, under the influence of mind-altering substances or the absence of a substance (withdrawal syndrome) may become violent.

It is possible to have strategies to prevent these incidents, as well as having procedures to handle such violent situations should they occur.

Incidental violence such as robbery or assault of other people in the area immediately near the workplace can have an impact on your staff. Whilst they may not be physically assaulted they may suffer trauma from seeing the incident. You may not be able to prevent these situations but you can have procedures in place to minimise their impact.

**Industries and occupations commonly affected**

Workplace violence can occur in any industry or occupation. However, if your business is in one of the following industries or its workers fall into one of the occupational categories, there may be a higher risk of workplace violence occurring.

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<b>Health &amp; Community Services</b>	Doctors, nurses, ambulance officers, cashiers, welfare workers, ward helpers, accommodation service workers.
<b>Government Administration and Education</b>	Police, prison and other government enforcement officers, school teachers, probation officers, collection agency workers.
<b>Business Services</b>	Particularly the finance sector. Counter staff, managers.
<b>Transport and Storage</b>	Guards, bus drivers, taxi drivers, couriers, airline staff.
<b>Retail Trade</b>	All sales & support staff.
<b>Consumer Services</b>	Hospitality staff, managers, administration & other occupations.

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## How to establish the special needs of your workplace



No two workplaces are exactly the same. A combination of many factors will determine the need for protecting against violence towards staff and the physical property of your business. When selecting premises consider the risk of violence or aggression during the selection process.

In looking at these factors you must consult with the people most likely to be affected such as employees and contractors. The consultation process will provide a forum to reveal particular risks at the workplace and give employees the opportunity to contribute to violence prevention.

To work out how to prevent violence at your workplace you must follow three basic steps:

1. Look for the hazards in your workplace in consultation with employees. In particular, look at the history and culture of the workplace. The **OHS Regulation 2001** calls this *identifying the hazard*.



2. Work out how serious your problems might be through employee consultation. Decide who might be affected, the factors contributing to the risk, how likely it is that an incident might occur and how serious the outcome might be. The **OHS Regulation 2001** calls this *assessing the risk*.



3. Eliminate hazards or reduce the risk by making changes that protect people. The **OHS Regulation 2001** calls this *controlling the risk*.



## Identifying violence hazards



Step 1 - Look for the hazards in your workplace: *hazard identification*.

*There are a number of ways to identify workplace violence including:*

- Check incident and injury reports, and Workers Compensation records to identify past injuries.
- Ensure you have an effective consultation process in place. Consult your employees who can use their own experiences to highlight problem areas or procedures. Encourage them to express their feelings and concerns regarding workplace violence.
- Consult with the local police about what is happening in your area.
- Survey staff (in confidence if necessary). Ask about incidents that may have occurred or other matters that had the potential to become violent.
- Collect information about incidents or situations in workplaces similar to yours.
- Consult industry experts who have experience with workplace violence.
- Conduct workplace inspections to assess potential for workplace violence.
- Set up a system for the reporting of incidents and injuries and ensure all staff are aware of and encouraged to report all incidents.
- Check procedures implementation, how staff deal with hazards and check that existing control measures are being followed.
- Employee Assistance Program information/data (if you have a program in place).

Some examples of tasks which expose workers to violence risks are shown in the following table, including those where the offender may be an internal person, a client or someone external to the business.

<b>Task</b>	<b>Violence Risk</b>
<b>Working in competing or conflicting groups</b>	Harassment or bullying
<b>Providing service to injured, ill, distressed or disturbed clients</b>	Threats, verbal or physical assault
<b>Working for a service that may be seen as a political, social, economic, racial or other "target"</b>	Threats, harassment, verbal or physical assault, hostage taking, sieges, property damage
<b>Working alone, in isolated places, or late at night</b>	Armed hold-up, sexual or physical assault
<b>Working with valuable goods or cash handling (receiving, counting, sorting, transporting to bank, payroll)</b>	Armed hold-up, physical assault
<b>Working in the immediate vicinity of "high risk" businesses (eg: service stations, banks, liquor stores, late night stores, chemists)</b>	Incidental violence - emotional trauma, physical injury, hostage taking

## Assessing the risk

## Eliminating hazards or controlling the risk



*The principles of risk control are:*

Step 2 - Work out how serious your problems might be: *risk assessment*.

Once you have completed the hazard identification, the next step is to assess risk associated with each hazard. The purpose is to determine:

- which of the identified hazards is most likely to occur;
- what are the likely injuries that may result;
- how severe the injuries are likely to be; and
- how many employees and others are likely to be exposed or affected.

By focusing on all the issues in this manner you should be able to determine priorities. If a risk means violence is likely to occur and injure many employees, controlling the risk should be given a high priority. On the other hand, if a risk has been identified and then assessed as unlikely to occur or will not expose employees to an injury, it should be given a lower priority and dealt with at a later time.

Step 3 - Eliminate hazards or control the risk by making changes that protect people: *risk control*.

Having established where you may encounter hazards, you must now take preventative action to eliminate the hazards or reduce the risk.

There are a number of ways of reducing and/or managing workplace hazards. In some cases a combination of actions may be required to manage the hazard. On other occasions it may be necessary to employ both short and long term measures to reduce the risk to an acceptable level effectively.

The preferred option is, of course, to eliminate the risk in total, and every effort must be made to achieve this goal. This may not always be possible and in these cases you will work through other options until agreed and acceptable alternatives are found.

### ***Eliminate the hazard***

Change the system of work or workplace so as to eliminate any risk for workplace violence. Eliminating the reasons for workplace violence is the best method of protecting employees and others from the risk of workplace violence.

### ***Replace the hazardous procedure with a less hazardous one***

This applies to situations where it is not possible to eliminate the hazard. For instance, it would not be possible to remove cash from a financial institution totally. Look for safer alternatives that reduce the risk, for example counter cash levels and compartments.

### ***Design safety and security into the premises and procedures***

Consider hazardous situations when designing, building or modifying a workplace. It is possible to remove or reduce risk by design. This includes things such as improving visibility in and out of the workplace, location of workstations and counters, lighting, screens, alarms, surveillance systems and the like.

***Provide training***

Training is essential if any job is to be done safely. All employees must be trained in all safety policies and procedures and in the operation of any security equipment.

Appendix 1 lists some suitable violence control measures for a number of situations. It is also a good idea to talk to people who have experience with workplace violence in your industry. This may include Unions, Police, reputable security firms and other businesses.

An essential part of your plan is to be prepared. Despite preventative measures, incidents of workplace violence may still occur, and in case this happens an incident management plan should be developed detailing:

- what to do during a violent incident;
- what to do after a violent incident;
- incident reporting mechanisms.



All employees must understand the details of your incident management plan. All workers likely to be exposed to violence and aggression must be aware of and trained in (ie: practise) handling the types of situations that may happen in their workplace. Appendix 3 lists some general guidelines to follow.

## **Preventing workplace violence – practical ways to avoid violence situations**

### *Controlling violence risks*



This section outlines practical ways to eliminate or minimise violence and aggression in your workplace.

You should select the most suitable risk controls for your business. Having more than one control measure for a particular risk would be an effective way of preventing workplace violence.

Drawing from this range of risk controls, you should select those most suitable for your business. Customers too can benefit from your workplace violence prevention efforts.

- ✓ Provide a secure work environment:
  - externally, buildings should be well lit, have ready means of access and egress and be maintained free of possible hiding places for aggressors;
  - remove or restrict access to equipment that could be used as a weapon;
  - ensure that staff are not working alone or in isolated locations;
  - restrict business hours to safe times and locations.
  
- ✓ Install and use physical barriers and security systems:
  - provide a workplace that has service counters that act as a barrier to physical contact between clients and staff;
  - lock doors to “staff only” areas and ensure that only staff have (and use) keys;
  - install security and access key/card/code systems;
  - provide a “safe area” for workers to retreat to in the event of an emergency.
  
- ✓ Remove the motivation or incentive for violence:
  - reduce cash holdings by encouraging use of electronic payment methods;
  - reduce stocks of valuable items to minimum levels;
  - advertise that your business has security measures to detect aggressors;
  - Ensure that staff limit their personal valuables in the workplace.
  
- ✓ Ensure effective management including selecting the right people for the job, fair employment conditions, training, employee consultation and regular supervision:
  - promote the fact that harassment and bullying will not be tolerated and will result in disciplinary action;
  - provide effective management and supervision - know where your workers are and what is happening in the workplace, both immediately and in the longer term;
  - develop and implement grievance procedures to allow reporting and action.
  
- ✓ Change the method of contact between clients and employees to a “remote” service - use telephone or correspondence instead of face-to-face interaction.
  
- ✓ Limit client interaction to times when there is “safety in numbers” for your staff.

*Increasing the protection of workers by providing personal protection from risks*

- ✓ Ensure that work systems and service do not provoke aggression from clients:
  - provide reasonable waiting times and facilities;
  - ensure staff are trained in violence detection and management including complaint and grievance handling;
  - provide clients with information about rights and responsibilities including their responsibilities to behave in an appropriate manner.
- ✓ Deter offenders by making it known that security measures are in place.
- ✓ Provide detection measures - security video cameras, mirrors, “beepers” to announce customers’ entry to certain areas, and duress alarms.
- ✓ Where staff must work alone or in isolated locations, keep in contact with them:
  - provide an effective means of communication in case of emergency (mobile telephone, duress alarm);
  - know where staff should be (movement notification, itinerary) and keep in contact regularly.
- ✓ Ensure that workers can get to and from work in safety:
  - provide security or other staff to escort them to their car at night or provide a taxi;
  - provide security staff internally and externally at night or during the day in high-risk industries or areas;
  - provide personal alarms, or mobile telephone.
- ✓ Ensure that workers are not alone when dealing with potentially violent clients or when they have to raise and handle issues that may cause violence, such as collection of money or goods or dealing with disputes.
- ✓ Where it provides an additional, back-up safety measure, which is necessary and acceptable to employees, provide employees with training in self-defence. It is always preferable to withdraw from a violence situation. Self-defence should be used only when a person under attack believes it is life threatening. The self-defence response should only be of sufficient force to enable the victim to escape further harm.

## Training

### Who needs to know the details about your risk controls for workplace violence?



### Checking that your preventative measures are adequate

An important step in implementing violence risk controls is providing any information, instruction and training necessary to ensure your staff's health and safety. This will be a natural step, since you will have consulted with and involved workers in the entire risk management process. Your staff training program should be customised to cover the specific violence controls in your workplace.

Appendix 2 provides a list of topics you could cover when training staff in workplace violence issues. An essential part of training is to be trained in (ie: practise) handling the types of situations that may happen in their workplace. Appendix 3 lists some general incident management strategies.

#### **Employers / Managers**

Employers and managers must know the effects of workplace violence hazards. Managers and supervisors are accountable for: developing preventative measures in consultation with employees; making sure that preventative measures understood by employees; and the preventative measures are monitored and are working.

In many smaller workplaces, employers and managers are directly exposed to these hazards, so their own health and safety and those of their employees must be protected.

#### **Employees**

Employees need to be consulted on the potential workplace violence hazards, and know the measures in place for their protection. They must be properly trained in how to use equipment in place, how to avoid risks, and what to do if a workplace violence hazard occurs.

Think about the needs of employees whose language is not English, and make sure they understand both the risks and the chosen controls.

#### **Contractors, suppliers, customers and visitors**

All people who undertake work for you, or enter your workplace as a visitor, must be provided with essential information about workplace violence arrangements. This should be done through signs, written and/or verbal information. The risk assessment process would determine the level of information provided.

You may have already taken action to eliminate risks. It is important to know whether or not the decisions you made still provide effective safeguards for your employees *before* the health and safety of any person is put at risk.

Build in a periodic review of your procedures involving people in your workplace who have accountabilities for health and safety.

If work practices are modified or new work practices or control measures are introduced, review your preventative measures to ensure that they are effective and safe and that they create no new hazards.

If new information is obtained about a previously unidentified hazard, review your preventative measures. If an accident, injury, incident or 'near miss' involving workplace violence occurs, review the procedures you had in place, and make changes to prevent a recurrence.

## Further information



### **References and further information**

NSW Anti-discrimination Board, Level 17, 201 Elizabeth Street Sydney  
Ph (02) 92685544 [www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/adb](http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/adb)

Comcare Australia *Guidelines for the prevention and management of client aggression*  
[www.comcare.gov.au](http://www.comcare.gov.au)

WorkCover NSW and the NSW Department of Community Services (1996) *Preventing violence in the accommodation services of the social and community services industry* [www.workcover.nsw.gov.au](http://www.workcover.nsw.gov.au)

WorkCover NSW and Baptist Community Services (1998) *Managing resident aggression in aged-care facilities*. [www.workcover.nsw.gov.au](http://www.workcover.nsw.gov.au)

WorkCover NSW *Armed hold-ups and cash handling* [www.workcover.nsw.gov.au](http://www.workcover.nsw.gov.au)

WorkSafe Western Australia *Guidance note - working alone*. [www.safetyline.wa.gov.au](http://www.safetyline.wa.gov.au)

WorkCover NSW *Occupational and Health and Safety Regulation 2001*, WorkCover NSW.

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WorkCover NSW (2001), *Workplace Violence in the Finance Sector: Guidelines, Checklists and Forms for Small to Medium Workplaces*, Business Services Industry Reference Group.

NSW Department of Health (1996) *Security and Safety: Minimum Standards for Health Care Facilities*, NSW Health Publication.

Australian Standard (1999) *Risk Management AS-NZ 4360:1999*, Standards Australia.

Mayhew, C. (2000) *Preventing violence within organisations: a practical handbook* Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra.

For further information contact WorkCover Information Centre Phone 13 10 50.

### **Acknowledgements**

Business Services Industry Reference Group



## Appendix 1: A range of workplace risk controls



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### *Risk Control Options*

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Policy on harassment.  
Clear procedures for management of harassment.  
Discipline of bullies and support of bullied employees.  
Re-organise work.  
Team building.  
Improve client information.

Improve client assessment.  
Client behaviour to be monitored, recorded and preventative action taken.  
Supervisor and staff training including the recognition and defusing of escalating behaviour.  
Safe work environment design.  
Two or more staff available.  
Duress alarms and duress response.  
Post incident support and follow-up procedures.

Policy on client aggression.  
Clear procedures for management of aggression.  
Earlier referral to supervisor.  
Complaints to be in writing.  
Management review of complaints.

No payments accepted by sales staff.  
Mobile phone, personal alarms.  
Regular "location to base" checks for isolated personnel.  
Training in violence management.  
Secure workplace, limited access, well-lit etc.

Reduce trading hours.  
Time delay locks on safe.  
Reduce cash on premises.  
Remove most valuable goods from premises.  
Good perimeter security.  
Adequate internal and external lighting.  
Surveillance camera and signage.  
Static security eg security guards.  
Safe haven for staff ie. enclosed work station.

Security plus external surveillance and duress alarm.  
Replace some valuable items with display models.  
Keep minimum stocks of high value goods.

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## **Appendix 2: Workplace violence staff training program (sample)**



Here are some key things that could be included in a training program for staff on understanding, avoiding and managing workplace violence. The actual content will depend on the particular needs of your business and its staff:

- Outline of violence and aggression - types of violence, possible aggressors, causes.
- Overview of violence and aggression issues affecting your workplace.
- Information on the legal rights of staff and clients - discrimination, harassment, assault, self-defence and protection of others.
- The organisation's policies on customer/client service, OHS and harassment, aggression and violence and the strategies that it has employed to control the violence risks, and how to implement these strategies, such as the systems of work, operation of safety devices.
- Dealing with difficult clients and members of staff. Recognising the signs of escalating behaviour, warning signs/situations that may lead to assaults and strategies on how to de-escalate the aggressive behaviour.
- What to do during a violent incident: standard response action plan for violent situations including availability of assistance; response to alarms; and communication procedures (use role-plays to practice this as it is more realistic and enables workers to practice the physical actions that may be needed in extreme situations).
- What to do after a violent incident, including first aid, other impact management, reporting, debriefing, counselling, compensation or legal assistance.
- If your business has an unavoidably higher than usual risk of aggression (usually from clients eg: health and community service organisations) you might provide training in self-defence. It is always preferable to withdraw from a violence situation. Self-defence should be used only when a person under attack believes it is life threatening. The self-defence response should only be of sufficient force to enable the victim to escape further harm.
- Supervisors and managers should be trained in their specific duties as above. They should have a thorough understanding of the violence risk management approach in your business.

## Appendix 3: Violent incident management

### *All incidents*



### *Abusive, threatening or harassing telephone calls at work*

#### ***What to do during a violent incident***

Despite preventative measures, incidents of workplace violence can and do occur. An essential part of your plan is to be prepared. All workers likely to be exposed to violence and aggression must be aware of and trained in (ie: practice) the violence prevention controls in place, and the types of situations that may happen in their workplace. Here are some general guidelines to follow:

Violent situations involving staff and clients do not usually “just happen”. They often follow a pattern of escalating aggression:

- annoyance;
  - raised voice;
  - verbal threats, physical gestures;
  - actual physical violence.
- 
- Avoid physical violence by recognising these signs and try to de-escalate the aggressive behaviour.
  - Violence from external aggressors (robbers, distressed people) may be immediate and unpreventable. Be prepared to take escape action as soon as possible.
  - Where the aggressor threatens violence but has not yet become physically violent, do not do anything to aggravate them.
  - If a duress alarm is in place, and the situation is serious enough to warrant it, activate the alarm for duress response.
  - Summon help and call police (if appropriate). If there are no other alternatives, self-defence may be the only option.
  - Record details after the incident, notify or report the incident to your supervisor. Supervisor should ensure post incident support is provided as required (including first aid, other impact management, reporting, debriefing, counselling, compensation or legal assistance).
- 
- Try to calm the person by acknowledging the feeling of frustration and get them to explain their needs in a civil manner to enable you to provide help and guidance.
  - If the behaviour continues, advise the caller that you cannot help them unless they are civil.
  - If this does not work, warn the caller that you will hang up unless they are civil.
  - If the behaviour continues, hang up. Immediately notify your supervisor of the incident and complete any reporting forms or write down the details.
  - For each call received, keep a personal log record of the time, details of the conversation and duration of the call, the gender of the caller, approximate age, and any other details such as accent, background noise etc. The Police will require this information to be reported.
  - Report the incident and any further calls to the Police Service for advice. Police have the power to trace the calls if warranted and take further action as required.

*Verbal assault and threats*

- Withdraw from the situation immediately. Do not put yourself at risk or make the situation worse.
- Inform your supervisor immediately.
- Complete any reporting forms or write down the details.
- Supervisor to ensure that the threatened worker is not left alone at work or placed in situations at work where he or she could be at risk of repeated aggression.
- Supervisor should ensure that the worker is accompanied home or taken home by taxi if applicable, to reduce the risk of continued aggression away from the workplace. Such protection should be provided as long as there is reasonable fear of repeated aggression.
- The incident should be reported to the Police (where appropriate).

*Physical and armed assault*

- If a duress alarm is in place, activate it.
- Withdraw from the situation immediately if possible. Do not put yourself or others at risk or make the situation worse.
- Take refuge in a safe place.
- Summon help if possible.
- If you cannot withdraw you are entitled to use reasonable force to protect yourself.
- As soon as you can, withdraw to a safe place.
- If you are injured, seek medical assistance immediately.
- Contact the Police and notify your supervisor.

*Armed hold-up*

- Stand still and keep your hands where they can be seen.
- Do not make any sudden movements.
- Obey the offender's instructions exactly.
- Remain calm and quiet.
- Speak only when spoken to.
- Do not shout or provoke the offender.
- Be submissive and do not draw attention to yourself.
- Do not stare at the offender or make direct eye contact.
- Mentally note, if you can do so safely, the offenders details - height, build, hair colour, race, age, any scars or tattoos, their speech (accent, any names or phrases they use).
- Allow the offender to leave.
- Do not chase the offender - summon help, activate duress alarm, contact your supervisor and/or call Police.
- Ask any witnesses to remain.
- Immediately seal off the area, including locking doors to prevent the offender re-entering.

*Bomb threats*

- Take the threat seriously.
- Remain calm - try to record the exact wording of the caller and any distinctive background noises which might be used to identify the source of the call.
- Ask questions to find out:
  - where the bomb is;
  - what it looks like or what it is in;
  - what time it will detonate.
- Report the incident immediately to your supervisor.
- Assist as instructed to report the incident to the police and evacuate the area.

## What to do after a violence incident

This will depend on the nature and severity of the incident. Be aware that even seemingly minor incidents can cause emotional and psychological trauma, which may not be immediately evident.

Here are some practical things you can do to assist workers, and your business to recover from a violent incident:

- Provide first aid treatment for injured people and/or arrange for medical treatment for any serious injuries.
- Record details of the incident.
- Report the incident to the business owner or senior manager and the Police if necessary. Complete any reporting forms required. Notify all crimes to the Police. Management cannot override this, nor should it interfere with any victim's wish to report less serious acts of aggression to the Police.
- Support employees and others involved:
  - provide a debriefing to affected workers;
  - allow workers time to recover - this may range from a few hours off work to much longer periods. Do not force workers to "get over it" and continue work. Doing so may place them at risk of further trauma and even other injury because they cannot concentrate on their tasks;
  - offer professional counselling.
- Acknowledge the incident and take steps to prevent a repeat occurrence. This includes investigating the causes of the incident and looking to see why your prevention measures, if any, did not work.
- Remember, in some cases, violence and aggression issues are not "one-offs". There may be underlying causes that need to be addressed. Identify and overcome these.

## Reporting violence incidents to WorkCover

In certain situations, employers must report cases of workplace violence to WorkCover NSW. Minor cases of aggression, threats or disputes, for example, need not be reported. More serious violent incidents, however, must be reported. These are where:

- a person has been killed;
- either the employer or any employee involved considers that the incident was, or had genuine potential to be, life threatening;
- as a result of the incident (supported by a medical certificate), an employee becomes unfit, for a continuous period of at least 7 days, to attend the employee's usual place of work or to perform his or her usual duties at that place of work.





**WorkCover NSW**

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