# Violence and Aggression to Employees

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Recognising the risk of violence and aggression to employees and implementing control measures.

AVIVA

# Violence and Aggression to Employees

## Introduction

Violent attacks can have a profound impact on the physical and mental wellbeing of the workforce. When dealing directly with the public, employees may face aggressive or violent behaviour, including verbal abuse, threats, and physical attacks. However, there are plenty of cost-effective measures organisations can put in place to reduce the potential for violent attacks.

## The Scale and Cost of Violence to Employees

Work-related violence is defined by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) as 'any incident, in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work'.

Findings from the 2015-16 Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) 2015-2016 Crime Survey show that 350,000 adults of working age in employment experienced work-related violence including threats and physical assault.

- The estimated 698,000 incidents of violence at work, comprised 329,000 assaults and 369,000 threats
- During the year prior to their interview, 1.3% of women and 1.5% of men were victims of violence at work on one or more occasions
- It is estimated that 56% of victims reported one incident of work-related violence whilst 18% experienced two incidents of work-related violence, and 26% experienced three or more incidents
- 4,697 injuries to employees, where the 'kind of accident' was 'physical assault/act of violence' in Great Britain (England, Wales and Scotland). This represents 6.5% of all reported workplace injuries. Of this figure, there was one death (Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR))

It must be assumed that the high percentage of repeat victims is more likely a result of the working environment, that they suffer violence as a direct result of where they work and what they do rather than because of anything attributable to the employee. Those who are most at risk are:

- Providing a service
- Undertaking cash transactions
- Delivering or collecting goods
- Representing authority
- Working alone or unaccompanied

Such activities can be found in many occupations, e.g. the retail sector, petrol stations, parcel delivery, estate agencies, health and welfare sector, private security services, healthcare professions and provision of youth or community services. Employees most at risk are those working in the protective services, e.g. police, prison officers, and in the health sector and associated business.

Working in an atmosphere of threat is profoundly damaging to the confidence and morale of employees. For employers, there are costs in terms of:

- Reduced efficiency
- Sickness absence
- Bad `image', which may result in high employee turnover and/or inhibit recruitment

## LOSS PREVENTION STANDARDS

## Reducing and Eliminating Violence to Employees

The expense of effective preventive measures is likely to be very small. Changes in the workplace should have a significant effect on reducing the incidence of violence, especially as there is a high percentage of repeat victims. Workplace changes can deliver even greater benefits when coupled with anger management/conflict resolution or avoidance training.

The key steps to managing the risk of violence to employees:

1. Determine if you have a problem
2. Assess the size and nature of the risks (the risk of violence should be included in the risk assessments for relevant tasks/duties)
3. Decide what action to take
4. Act on your decisions
5. Review the effectiveness of the actions taken

Guidelines can only be general since the extent and nature of the risk of violence vary considerably. The main aspects that should be assessed include:

- The working environment
- Information systems
- Home visits/work away from office or base
- Training
- Need to plan to cope with violence
- The aftermath of incidents

The working environment:

The physical environment of buildings, waiting rooms and reception areas may significantly affect the likelihood of outbursts of aggression and violence. Factors to consider include:

- Ease of access and means of escape
- Ease of contact (sight or sound) with colleagues
- Alarms and panic buttons for use in an emergency

Simple changes in working practice such as not taking cash or prohibiting unaccompanied working can significantly reduce risks.

Information systems:

There should be a system to provide employees with information about the likelihood of aggression or violent assault, which must be updated regularly in the light of new information or events.

A system for reporting incidents of aggression and violence should be established. Employees should be encouraged to report any incident of violence and there should be appropriate, robust procedures in place, which address any issues resulting from such reports.

## LOSS PREVENTION STANDARDS

## Unaccompanied Working/Working away from the Office

Employees visiting customers or service users may be at a higher risk from violence. In these cases, the main method for the prevention of violence is the ability of the employee to both recognise potential signs of aggression and prevent situations from escalating or withdraw from 'at risk' situations.

Support measures for employees include:

- Avoiding unaccompanied working
- **Keeping a detailed plan of employee's whereabouts**
- Regular, e.g. hourly, reports to base
- Procedures for assessing potential risk
- Providing information and training on situations likely to carry a risk of violence
- Adopting suitable procedures for work away from the premises and/or unaccompanied working, e.g. two-way radio links, personal alarm systems

However, lone working is encountered in other sectors and at fixed locations and premises, e.g. late night work at petrol stations.

## Training

Training in prevention and management of violence should be available to all employees having contact with the public. Suitable topics for inclusion in a short course are:

- Causes of violence
- Recognition of warning signs
- Relevant interpersonal skills
- Details of arrangements devised by management
- Methods of defusing aggression

## Planning to Cope with Violence

There should be a clear plan for dealing with violent incidents when they occur. A plan should include:

- What action individual employees are expected to take - for example, in the event of robbery to not offer resistance
- Plan for control through a named person or team with specific responsibilities to defuse and handle acts of violence
- Comprehensive rules that are easy to understand and recall quickly
- Clear guidance on reporting procedures, both physical recording of event details and notification to others
- Making employees aware that such a plan exists and their own role within it

## LOSS PREVENTION STANDARDS

## Aftermath of Violence

Each workplace should have a proper system for recording and investigating accidents and ill health. This should include any violent event whether or not it has led to damage or injury. The recording system should aim to collect sufficient material for a thorough analysis of the event, and should include:

- What happened
- Why it happened
- How it happened
- What could be done to prevent a recurrence

The analysis should make recommendations on how to prevent a recurrence and should also facilitate monitoring of violent events by providing a statistical database on cause, effect, nature of event, location, time of day, etc.

## Key Action Steps

1. Assess the extent of the problem by encouraging employees to openly discuss experiences of violence
2. Consider the environment in which customers are waiting. Is there sufficient information about likely waiting times to reduce anxiety? Is the environment welcoming, with activities to reduce boredom such as **magazines and children's toys?**
3. Could employees quickly alert their colleagues in the event of an assault? If not, consider the provision of panic buttons or personal attack alarms
4. Devise systems to protect employees working away from the premises and/or unaccompanied. This could include regular contact with base, personal communication equipment and information on any situations that they are entering. Special arrangements should be **made for 'high risk' visits**
5. Provide training to all employees on how to recognise and deal with violent situations
6. Devise a policy and arrangements on the issue of violence to employees and ensure that all employees are aware of any duties they have under such a policy
7. Ensure any acts of violence resulting in major injuries are reported to the appropriate authority as outlined within RIDDOR

## LOSS PREVENTION STANDARDS

## Checklist

A generic Violence to Employees Checklist is presented in Appendix 1 which can be tailored to your own organisation.

## Specialist Partner Solutions

Aviva Risk Management Solutions can offer access to a wide range of risk management products and services at preferential rates via our network of Specialist Partners.

For more information please visit:

Aviva Risk Management Solutions – Specialist Partners

## Sources and Useful Links

- Work-related violence - HSE
- Violence at Work: A Guide for Employers INDG69 – HSE
- Protecting Lone Workers: How to Manage the Risks of Working Alone INDG73 – HSE
- Preventing Violence to Retail Staff HSG133 – HSE
- Work-related Violence Case Studies: Managing the Risk in Smaller Businesses HSG229 - HSE

To find out more, please visit Aviva Risk Management Solutions or speak to one of our advisors.

## Email us at riskadvice@aviva.com or call 0345 366 6666.*

*Calls may be recorded and/or monitored for our joint protection.

# LOSS PREVENTION STANDARDS

# Appendix 1 – Violence and Aggression to Employees Checklist

| Location | |
|---|---|
| Date | |
| Completed by (name and signature) | |

| | Violence and Aggression to Employees | Y/N | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Have you assessed the size and nature of the risks (the risk of violence should be included in the risk assessments for relevant tasks/duties)? <br><br> Have you encouraged employees to openly discuss experiences of violence? | | |
| 2. | Have you considered what action to take within the working environment, for example: <br><br> • Provision of sufficient information about likely waiting times to reduce anxiety? <br><br> • Ensure the environment is welcoming with activities to **reduce boredom such as magazines and children's toys?** <br><br> • Could employees quickly alert their colleagues in the event of an assault? If not consider the provision of panic buttons or personal attack alarms <br><br> • Is there ease of access and means of escape? <br><br> • Is there ease of contact (sight or sound) with colleagues? | | |
| 3. | Are information systems in place providing employees with information about the likelihood of aggression or violent assault? <br><br> Are these systems updated regularly? | | |

## LOSS PREVENTION STANDARDS

| | Violence and Aggression to Employees Contd. | Y/N | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|
| 4. | Is there any unaccompanied work/work away?<br><br>• Can this be avoided?<br>• **Are you keeping a detailed plan of employee's whereabouts?**<br>• Are you implementing regular, e.g. hourly, reports to base?<br>• Have you implemented procedures for assessing potential risk?<br>• Are you providing information and training on situations likely to carry a risk of violence?<br>• Are you adopting suitable procedures for work away from the premises and/or unaccompanied working, e.g. two-way radio links, personal alarm systems? | | |
| 5. | Do you provide training to your employees in the prevention and management of violence that covers:<br><br>• Causes of violence?<br>• Recognition of warning signs?<br>• Relevant interpersonal skills?<br>• Details of arrangements devised by management?<br>• Methods of defusing aggression? | | |
| 6. | Do you have management arrangements in place for dealing with violent incidents that include:<br><br>• What action individual employees are expected to take - for example, in the event of robbery to not offer resistance?<br>• Plan for control through a named person or team with specific responsibilities to defuse and handle acts of violence?<br>• Comprehensive rules that are easy to understand and recall quickly?<br>• Clear guidance on reporting procedures, both physical recording of event details and notification to others?<br>• Making employees aware that such a plan exists and their own role within it? | | |

# LOSS PREVENTION STANDARDS

| | Violence and Aggression to Employees Contd. | Y/N | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|
| 7. | Do you have a system for recording and investigating accidents and ill health? Does this include any violent event whether or not it has led to damage or injury? Does your recording system collect sufficient material for a thorough analysis of the event, that includes: <br><br> • What happened? <br> • Why it happened? <br> • How it happened? <br> • What could be done to prevent a recurrence? <br><br> Do you ensure any acts of violence resulting in major injuries are reported to the appropriate authority as outlined within RIDDOR? Does your analysis make recommendations on how to prevent a recurrence? Does your analysis make recommendations to facilitate monitoring of violent events by providing a statistical database on cause, effect, nature of event, location, time of day, etc? | | |
| 8. | Additional comments: | | |

LOSS PREVENTION STANDARDS

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