



# UNIT 17

## Developing a Policy and Program for Workplace Violence

### Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

## Unit 17

### Developing a Policy and Program for workplace Violence

#### The Policy

##### The Purpose

A properly implemented violence policy and program is crucial to preventing workplace violence. The purpose of the policy is:

- To focus on preventing workplace violence
- To consider the work environment and organization in developing these guidelines, to create a policy unique to the organization
- To involve all levels of staff, including union representatives
- To develop a series of ever-evolving guidelines that will be reviewed at a particular interval

##### The Elements

The policy should contain:

- A statement that the organization has a zero-tolerance approach to violence
- Resources (time, authority, materials, people) to manage and prevent violence
- Requirement for staff to be involved in development and implementation of policy and programs
- Commitment to apply policy consistently and fairly
- Commitment to report incidents promptly and accurately
- Commitment to have the appropriate agency (such as the police or occupational health and safety board) investigate incidents
- Recognition that workplace violence is recognized in most areas as an occupational safety hazard, meaning the organization is responsible for preventing and managing it

Staff responsibilities in the policy should include:

- Participate in violence education, including training on defusing violent situations and self-defense
- Do not put yourself or others at risk for violence
- Report incidents on time and accurately

Note that the workplace can extend beyond the physical office. It should include parking lots, field offices, and any other places that employees do business.

### The Programs

There are many types of programs that can be included in a workplace violence program. Here are some ideas:

- Buddy system for field work
- Safety system for excursions outside the building at night (for example, to the parking lot or closest bus stop)
- Visitor identification cards
- Warning system for violent clients or patients
- Emergency backup systems

### What other ideas do you have?

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## Risk Assessment

### The Five Stages

Before the policy is finalized, it is essential that a risk assessment is performed at the workplace. Norman Keith has identified five stages of this assessment process. Note that this process should be performed every one to two years to ensure the ongoing applicability and accuracy of the assessment.

#### Stage One: The Risk Assessment Team

In order for the risk assessment process to be successful in identifying all possible hazards, the risk assessment team must have defined responsibilities. These can include:

- Defining and refining the assessment process
- Identifying areas that workers may need training in
- Planning and implementing emergency response plans
- Communicating their progress and recommendations

The team should include representatives from all levels of the company, including:

- Senior management
- Operations managers
- Safety committee
- Security personnel
- Finance personnel
- Legal counsel (internal or external)
- Human resources manager

### **Stage Two: The Workplace Assessment**

The assessment of the workplace generally has two stages. First, the team will identify scenarios that could result in violence, including:

- Exchanging money with the public
- Working alone or in small numbers
- Working late at night or in early morning
- Working in high crime areas
- Guarding property, possessions, or money
- Working in the community, away from the actual office

The second stage is an analysis of previous incidents of violence, including threats that were not carried out. This may help the assessment team identify additional scenarios, patterns, and risks that need to be addressed.

### **Stage Three, Part One: Victim Assessment**

This part of the assessment is the flip side of the workplace assessment: who is at risk for becoming a victim of violence?

Norman Keith suggests that there are three categories that must be considered.

#### **Occupational Factors**

What factors related to a person's job responsibilities could put them at risk? Think about:

- People who handle money
- People who work outside the physical office
- People who work alone and/or at late hours
- Caregivers
- People who handle complaints
- People who enact public laws

### Environmental Factors

What factors related to a person's work environment could put them at risk? Think about:

- How the workplace is laid out (crowded, loud, etc.)
- How jobs are managed (unfair workloads, angry employees, long lineups for customers)
- Management styles
- External environments (i.e., working in a dangerous neighborhood)

### Personal Factors

What unique factors can put a person at risk? Think about:

- Their personality
- Attitude of workers (such as loyalty)
- Level of training and knowledge
- Ability to handle dangerous situations

### Stage Three, Part Two: Perpetrator Assessment

This part of the risk assessment process attempts to identify those who may commit violence. This is not intended to be a hit list, but rather to generate ideas and identify scenarios where staff may be in danger.

To start, we must be aware that there are typically four types of violence that we see in the workplace.

- Committed by clients
- Committed by strangers
- Between co-workers
- Domestic violence

Dr. Graham Glancy has noted some characteristics that can elevate the risk of that person committing a violent act.

- Those who are mentally ill and not properly supervised
- Gang members
- Drug or alcohol users
- People who have had a troubled childhood
- History of violence (as perpetrator or victim)

- Criminal record
- Males commit violence more often than females
- Young people commit violence more often than elderly people
- Obsession with violent symbols or literature
- Obsessive tendencies in general

In particular, disgruntled or obsessed customers or employees (or their relatives) should raise a red flag.

#### **Stage Four: Workplace Survey**

A survey can give employees the chance to talk about things that they are unwilling to bring forward. It's also a great tool to use in a large organization, where interviewing each employee would be difficult. Its purpose should be to help identify the potential for violence and the need for improved security measures. The risk assessment team should work with the human resources department to develop a survey appropriate for the organization.

#### **Stage Five: Developing a Hazard Checklist**

After the three-part assessment has taken place, the risk assessment team should develop a checklist to analyze, organize, and record the information accrued from the first four steps. The checklist helps to ensure that all areas of the workplace are inspected consistently and that standards are applied uniformly. It also highlights specific areas of concern that should be rectified immediately.

Some possible items on such a checklist can include:

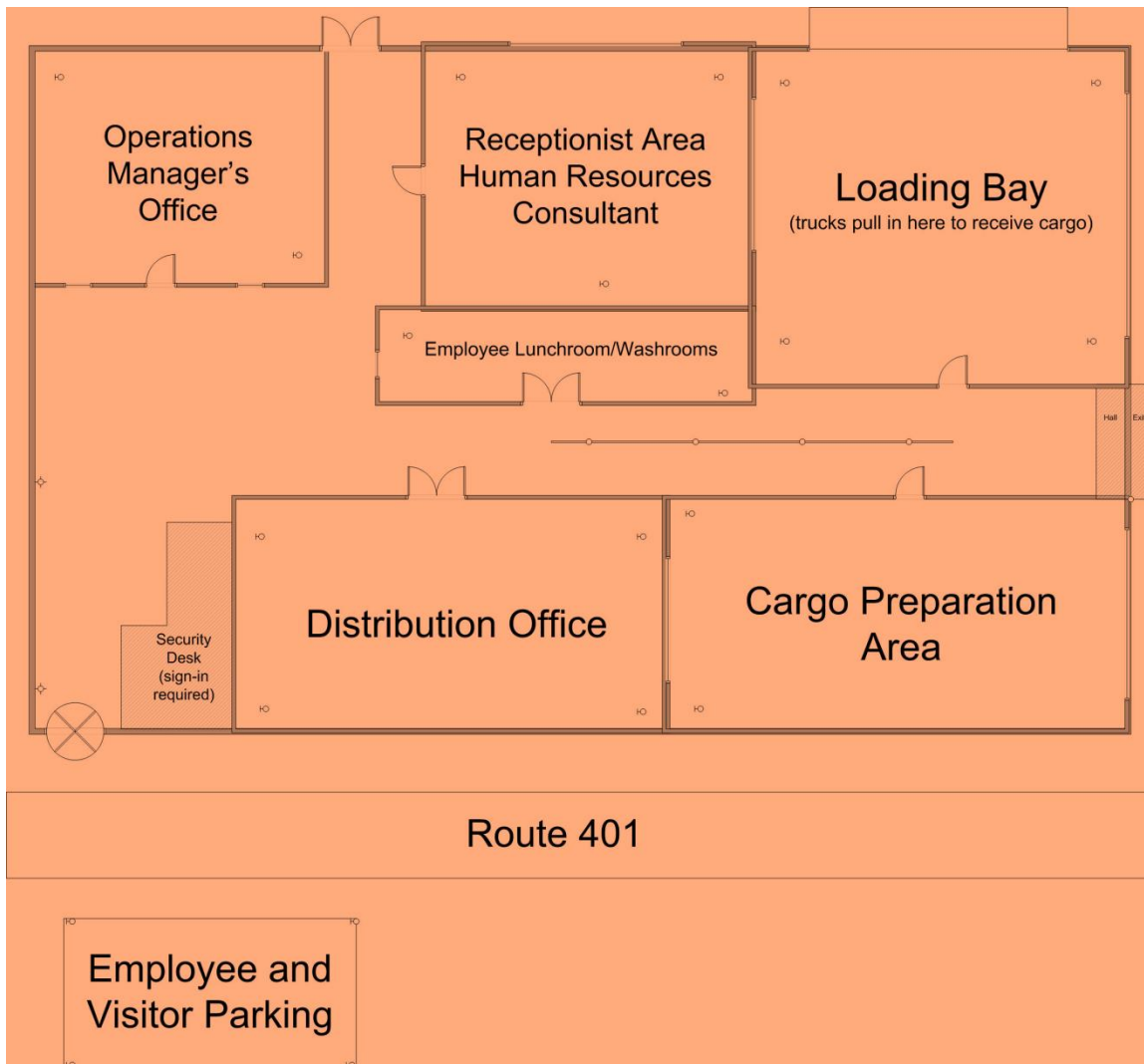
- Hidden doors, closets, hallways, alleys, and driveways
- Isolated work areas
- Late hours of operation
- Lighting
- Unrestricted areas (which may enable non-employees to access the workplace)
- Proper, working locks on doors and windows
- Working security and fire systems (including surveillance systems)
- Adequate, clearly identified escape routes
- Enforcement of security protocols and access systems (such as ID badges)
- Metal detectors
- Armed guards or guard dogs
- Bullet-proof glass partitions
- Buddy system in case of emergency

### Risk Assessment for the Acme Widgets Company

#### Part One: Case Study

The Acme Widget Company manufactures and distributes widgets. It occupies the main floor of a warehouse in a waterfront neighborhood that has experienced gang violence. Employees use public parking across the street.

The floor plan looks like this:



The staff and their hours are outlined below.

Staff Member	Responsibility	# of Staff	Hours Worked
Security guards	Patrol building and grounds every half hour	2	7 am to 7 pm (Sun-Wed)
		2	7 am to 7 pm (Thu-Sat)
	Monitor security desk and cameras	2	7 pm to 7 am (Sun-Wed)
		2	7 pm to 7 am (Thu-Sat)
		1	Backup; varies
Operations manager	Oversee all staff	1	8 am to 4 pm
Distribution clerks	Check invoices and prepare cargo	2	7 am to 7 pm (Sun-Wed)
		1	7 am to 7 pm (Thu-Sat)
	Transport cargo to loading bay	2	7 pm to 7 am (Sun-Wed)
		1	7 pm to 7 am (Thu-Sat)
		1	Backup; varies
HR consultant	Manage all human resource issues, including personal counseling, hiring, firing	1	8 am to 4 pm, although can be called in off-hours
Receptionist	Respond to incoming phone calls, e-mails, faxes	17	8 am to 4 pm
		2	4 pm to midnight
	Prepare invoices and send to distribution clerks	1	Midnight to 6 a.m.
Warehouse workers	Let trucks into loading bay, place cargo onto trucks, and ensure paperwork is signed and cash received	4	8 am to 4 pm
		4	4 pm to midnight
		4	Midnight to 6 a.m.





*Perpetrator Assessment*

**What kind of violence could be committed by strangers?**

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**What kind of violence could be committed by clients (including truck drivers)?**

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**What kind of violence could be committed between co-workers?**

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## Hiring Practices

### Getting it Right

A key part of preventing workplace violence is hiring the right people. There are two reasons for this. The most obvious is that hiring people who can manage stress and anger properly reduces the chance of those people committing violence in the workplace.

The less obvious reason is that most workplace violence stems from frustration, which builds to anger. If you hire people who are suitable for the job, and if you ensure you have adequate, competent staff, you reduce workplace stress, thereby reducing the anger in your workplace and reducing the chance for violence. Also, this group creates a supportive, caring community that is better able to deal with outside threats that can come from external sources.

### Key Strategies

Some ways to screen employees can include the following.

#### Criminal Records Check

These types of checks usually must be done with the permission of the employee.

#### Personality Testing

You normally cannot restrict hiring based on this kind of test, but you can use it as a way to get to know the people that you hire. It can also help you understand if they will be a good fit with a particular team.

#### Behavior Descriptive Interview Questions

These interview questions help you see how an individual would react in a stressful situation, based on how they have acted in the past.

#### Performance Testing

These tests will show you if they can do the job competently.

#### Aptitude Testing

These tests will determine whether they have the ability to learn the skills needed for your workplace.

## Alcohol and Drug Testing

These types of checks usually must be done with the permission of the employee. Restrictions vary by region, so make sure you know the rules in your area.

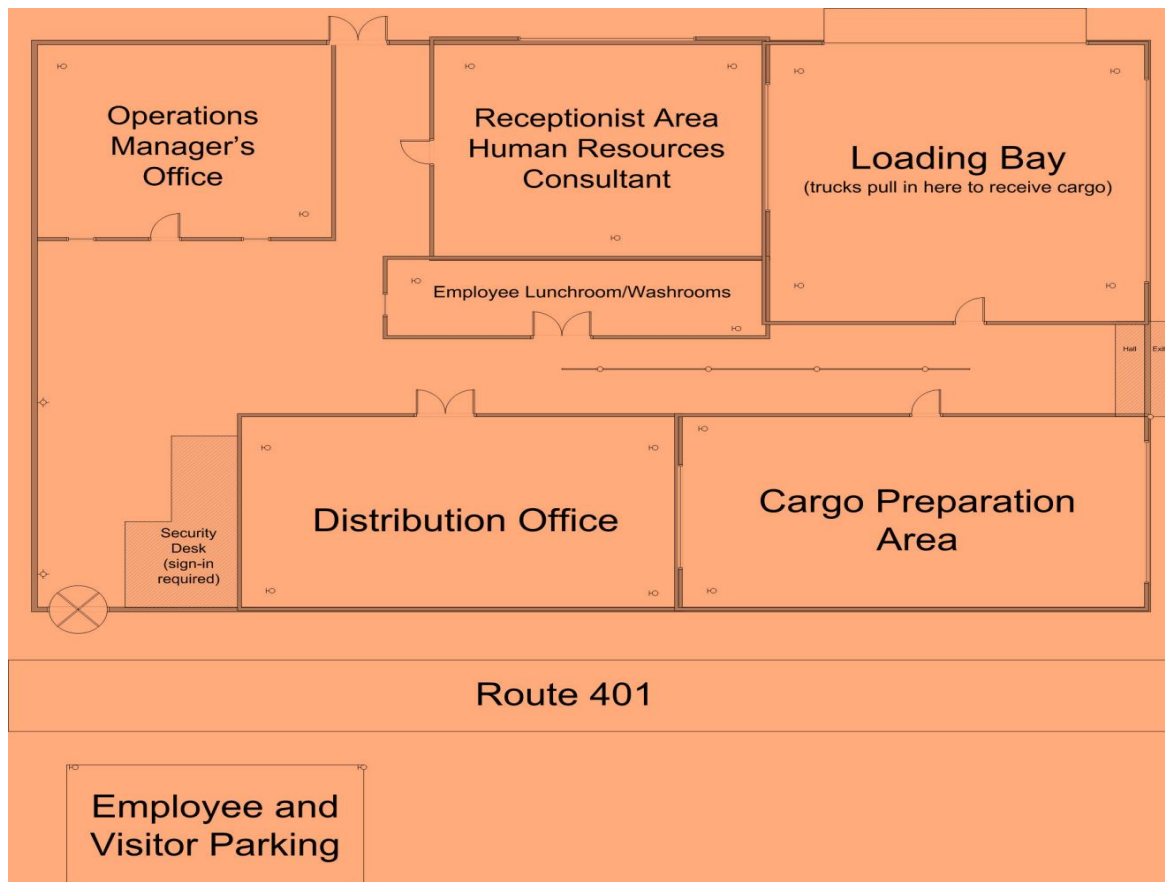
## Checking Tests Out

The legality of these tests varies by jurisdiction. The human resources department must work with senior management to determine what tests are appropriate for which positions, and which tests are legal in their area.

## Workplace Design

### Layout Issues with the Acme Widgets Company: Case Study

The physical environment of the workplace can contribute to, or help prevent, workplace violence.





## Workplace Practices and Procedures

### Workplace Policies

### Training

Training on violence prevention, communication strategies, stress awareness, anger management, and self-defense can all contribute to preventing workplace violence. Training should be ongoing and should be subject to periodic reviews. It should also reflect workplace and worker needs.

### Human Resources

Some human resources actions that can support workplace violence prevention include:

- Implementing and enforcing code of conduct for staff (including unacceptable behavior)
- Proper hiring and screening practices
- Implementation and fair application of policies and procedures
- Consistent, firm, fair, and prompt disciplinary measures
- Implementing and enforcing reporting procedures for violence (including threats)
- Adequate staff resources (internal and external) for issues such as domestic violence, stress management, conflict resolution, and crisis management
- Commit to resolving issues with staff as quickly as possible
- Take legal recourse when necessary
- Handle terminations (layoffs, firing, restructuring) as humanely as possible to reduce anger

### Staff Management

As we mentioned earlier, violence often stems from frustration and anger that has not been addressed. Therefore, managing staff properly to prevent frustration can help prevent violence. Some measures that managers can take include:

- Ensuring staff are supervised and have adequate resources
- Ensuring staff are properly scheduled
- Ensuring job duties are distributed fairly
- Maintaining open channels of communication with staff (such as staff and one-on-one meetings)
- Monitoring potentially dangerous workers
- Addressing staff issues (such as negligent or incompetent staff)
- Commit to resolving issues with staff as quickly as possible

## Security Measures

There are also some measures that the security department can take.

- Have action plan for warning staff of violent persons on the premises
- Monitor potentially dangerous workers after disciplinary action, suspension, or termination
- Develop relationship with local police
- Take legal recourse when necessary
- Ensure staff concerns are investigated and addressed

## Workplace Procedures

**Rate the following procedures on a scale of one to ten, with one being very ineffective and ten being very effective.** Your rating should be based on how effective you think the procedure would be in preventing violence.

Procedure	Rating
ID cards for staff	
Sign in policy for visitors	
Intercom system in building, with panic button	
Buddy system where security guards escort staff to parking garage	
Banning all weapons in facility	
Information pamphlets on domestic violence	
Self-defense training	
Bulletproof glass protecting workers from clients (for example, at a front desk or cash register)	
Cell phones that workers can use when away from office	
Security system with surveillance cameras	
Written violence policy	

## Security Systems and Personnel

### Systems Criteria

Part six of Norman Keith's violence prevention plan is having a good security system in place.

### Security Systems

Typically when we think of a security system, we think of an electronic system with motion sensors and a panel that tells us when a sensor detects motion. This can be one part of the system; however, there can be many other parts, including:

- Metal detectors
- Access restrictions (locks, access cards, buzzer entry systems)
- Panic buttons
- Intercoms
- Cell phones and pagers
- Bulletproof glass
- Partitions
- Proper escape routes
- Surveillance cameras
- Patrol by guards and/or guard dogs

The general point of the security system is to keep employees on the inside of the workplace safe and protected from internal and external threats. The development of a security system should not be limited to operations managers; human resources and the risk assessment team must also be involved. The components of a security system will depend on a workplace's risks and needs, and therefore will differ from workplace to workplace.

Like the risk assessment process we discussed earlier, the security system must be reviewed every one to two years, or after major building renovations or staff changes. All security equipment should also be inspected and maintained according to the manufacturer's requirements; there's not much good in a security system that doesn't work properly.

### Security Personnel

Operations managers, the risk assessment team, and human resources will also want to develop a security team. This team will be in charge of the physical protection of the work site, as well as reporting

and recording violent incidents (including threats). They should be trained in negotiation, defusing violent situations, communication, leadership, and self-defense measures.

Security personnel should always be in groups of two to three, never alone. They should also have some responsibility for employee safety. For example, if a security guard sees a staff member working alone at night or engaging in some other unsafe behavior, they should advise the staff member that their behavior is breaching the company policy. The security guard should also inform the appropriate supervisor.

**A System for the Acme Widgets Company**

**Case Study**

**Staffing Schedule**

Staff Member	Responsibility	# of Staff	Hours Worked
Security guards	Patrol building and grounds every half hour	2	7 am to 7 pm (Sun-Wed)
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	Monitor security desk and cameras	2	7 pm to 7 am (Sun-Wed)
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	counseling, hiring, firing		
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**Floor Plan**

