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WORKPLACE VIOLENCE PREVENTION

PURPOSE


1. The Government recognizes the importance of providing a safe and healthy work environment for its employees. Employees must take all reasonable precautions to make sure that they and their fellow employees are working in safe conditions.
2. The Government is committed to working with its employees to maintain a work environment free from violence, threats of violence, harassment, intimidation, and other disruptive behaviour.
3. Risks of violence to employees will be identified and programs will be established to minimize risk.

APPLICATION

4. These guidelines and procedures apply to all employees.

DEFINITIONS

3. **Safety and Health Provisions** are in the Collective Agreements, the Safety Act and any other relevant jurisdictional policies and procedures.
4. **Violence in the Workplace** is the attempted or actual exercise by a person of any physical force so as to cause injury to an individual and includes any threatening statement or behavior giving an individual reasonable cause to believe that he/she is at risk of injury.
7. **Health & Safety Committee** is a joint employer and union worksite committee established under Section 7 of the *Safety Act*.
8. **Safety Officer** is an individual appointed pursuant to Section 19 of the *Safety Act*.

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PROVISIONS

Violence from Clients/Public or Co-Workers

9. The following procedures outline the approach to be used to prevent, reduce and respond to violence directed toward employees, clients/public or a co-worker:

Risk Assessment

1. At the workplace, ensure that a regular risk assessment is undertaken to prevent violence from occurring.
2. Workplace risk assessments must be documented and records maintained by the Deputy Head and or his/her designate. Guidelines for conducting a workplace risk assessment are available from the Manager of Workplace, Health, Safety and Wellness, Department of Human Resources, Employee Relations Division.

Workplace Violence Prevention Plan


3. A Violence Prevention Plan will be consistent with the requirements of the Safety Act and WCB regulations.

Employee and Supervisors Training

4. Training is available to assess methods of violence prevention, determining a correct response, responding to workplace emergencies, and incident reporting procedures.

Incident Reporting, Investigation and Follow-up

5. Employees are required to report any violent incident or threat that they have been subjected to on the job consistent with departmental procedures. (Reference procedures document or procedures established by a specific department, i.e.; Health Centers, Hospitals, Correctional Centers, etc.) All reported incidents of violence shall be investigated immediately by management.

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RESPONSIBILITIES

10. Employees will:


- provide input into risk assessments;
- attend training sessions when required;
- provide input into the Workplace Violence Prevention Plan;
- follow procedures established for the prevention of violence;
- report incidents of violence to immediate Manager;
- provide input into incident investigations; and
- consider accessing counseling services when offered by the employer.

11. Supervisors will:

- comply with reporting, investigating and documenting procedures;
- facilitate ongoing discussions with staff on violence issues;
- provide input into risk assessments;
- assist with the development and up dating of the workplace Violence Prevention Plan;
- instruct staff on procedures for prevention of workplace violence;
- promote and encourage reporting of violent incidents; and
- advise impacted staff of counseling services available through the Employee Assistance Program as well as services available in the community.

12. Headquarters and Regional Management will:


- comply with procedures for reporting, investigating and document incidents of violence in accordance with the Safety Act/WCB regulations and reporting procedures;
- prepare and update Workplace Violence Plans;
- conduct and update risk assessments;
- evaluate work site layouts;
- determine training requirements;
- inform staff and supervisors of the nature and extent of the risk of violence;
- take corrective action, monitor its effectiveness; and provide input into a regular evaluation of the Workplace Violence Prevention Program.

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13. Senior Management Committees will:
- ensure a relevant Workplace Violence Program is in place for the Department;
 - review and apply the Departments Workplace violence Prevention Program;
 - ensure that Workplace Violence Risk Assessments are conducted and documented; and
 - ensure that requested incidents are sent to the Department of Human Resources, Employee Relations division.
14. Workplace Health Safety and Wellness staff will:
- assist in conducting a regular evaluation of the workplace Violence Prevention Program;
 - compile statistics on reported incidents of violence or “near misses”;
 - provide input and assist with risk assessments where required;
 - provide guidance in the establishment of workplace Violence Prevention Plans; and
 - co-ordinate the delivery of training.
15. Occupational Health and Safety Committees will:
- provide input risk assessments;
 - provide input into Workplace Violence Prevention Plans;
 - provide input into incident investigations if required.
 - Provide feedback for the Workplace Violence Prevention Program

Guidelines for Developing a Workplace Violence Prevention Program

16. The purpose of a Violence Prevention Program is to address both the risks of violence that are identified in each workplace, consistent with the Government of Nunavut’s policy, the Safety Act and WCB regulations. It is essential that managers seek input from staff and Occupational Health and Safety Committees, to address the following.
1. Violence Prevention
 2. Response to Violent Incidents
 3. Response after a Violent Incident
 4. Communication
 5. Employee and supervisor Training


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Violence Prevention

17. Adopt the attitude that everyone should be safe and secure in the workplace; no staff member should be put at risk when dealing with clients, contracted employees or other government employees. Supervisors should not tolerate violence towards staff and must be supportive of staff concerns regarding safety. All staff must take an active role in prevention and security procedures to make them effective.

Physical Environment and Security

18. Reception areas are often the focal point for violent office behaviour. Consideration must be given to safeguarding employees while reducing the burden of security on the receptionist using some of the following methods:
- Use of physical barriers (locked doors. Locked low gates);
 - Use of psychological barriers (low gates, “Staff Only” or “Report to Receptionist”) signs;
 - Close exit doors; and
 - Discourage public use of washrooms and lobbies (“Staff and Client Use Only” signs).
19. Some considerations when designing or modifying a reception area:
- Chain down all tables, lamps, chairs etc.;
 - Remove heavy books and any equipment that could be used as projectiles from the lobby or reception area;
 - Remove scissors, letter-openers and other items which could be used as weapons from the reception desk;
 - Ensure that the receptionist is out of arms reach though the use of transparent dividers or wide counters; and
 - Try not to have the receptionist isolated from the rest of the office and provide an escape route.
20. In every workplace a visual inspection must be conducted with the aim of ensuring that the premises are well lit, that the worksite has a cared-for appearance and that the layout and positioning of furniture and equipment is conducive in prevention of violence.

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Interpersonal Communication


21. A large part of prevention is the nature of the interaction between the client and the employee and between employees. Some considerations in dealing with clients/other employees, especially in potentially violent situations are:

- Don't schedule known difficult clients at the end of the day or the end of the week;
- If possible, have two staff members deal with a known difficult client/person;
- Keep your office or meeting room door open during the meeting;
- Keep a solid object (desk or counter) between you and the client;
- Keep at least an arm's length away;
- Don't corner the client;
- Keep eye contact but avoid a locked stare, which can be perceived as a challenge;
- Have an escape route;
- Ensure that all employees are aware of difficult clients and the procedures to be used in dealing with them;
- In all cases where an employee is threatened by words, gestures or other actions, consider calling the police. The criminal offences of Threatening, Causing a Disturbance or Assault may have been contravened even without physical contact;
- It is appropriate to enroll front-line staff in training opportunities designed to assist them to better deal with hostile clients/other employees.

Working Alone and Working Away From the Office

22. In offices where staff are required, or choose to work alone or away from the office, plans must be in place to provide staff with as safe an environment as possible. These plans should include a secure work site, check-in procedures and the provision of a list of who to call if threatened.

Plan For the Worst Case

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23. Plans should be developed to respond to “worst case” situations such as bomb threats, armed robbery, or other incidents for which there may not be a history at the work site.

Response to Violent Incidents

24. Effective preventative measures will reduce the frequency and the seriousness of violent incidents, Plans should have specific strategies for employees to de-escalate and, if necessary, to respond to violent situations.

Individuals’ Roles and Responsibilities

Involved Employee(s):


- Follow effective defusing techniques and violence prevention techniques;
- Where necessary, explain that the client’s/employee’s behaviour is not acceptable, and that the employee is less able to assist the client in light of the client’s behaviour;
- Call for help when needed (other employees or police, as appropriate).

Other Employees Witnessing the Incident

- Be unobtrusive, and available to the employee without appearing to be congregating, which could be seen as either ganging up or providing an audience;
- Be prepared to assist as requested or as obviously needed;
- Call for help from the supervisor, other co-workers or the police, as appropriate;
- Assist with removing others at risk from the area and stop others from entering.

Supervisor:

- Be prepared to intercede and assist when required;
- As required, take charge of the situation, provide direction to employees and decide what action is required to secure the office and maintain operations.

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As well as the above, there must be an assignment of responsibility for decision-making. For example, who can make the decision to evacuate the building in the event of a bomb threat? Each workplace will designate an employee with the responsibility to make decisions that will prevent placing employees' safety at risk.

R.C.M.P. Involvement

- 25. It is a good idea to invite the R.C.M.P. to come to speak to staff about violence prevention, appropriate responses and reporting requirements in dealing with a critical incident(s). Staff should be aware of posted emergency telephone numbers, and be advised of the type of information, and emergency operations, that will be required when reporting an incident. Staff should consult with their immediate supervisor to call the R.C.M.P. whenever they feel that a situation is threatening to their physical or mental well-being.


Response after a Violent Incident

First Aid/Hazard Reduction

- 26. The first priority after a critical incident is providing first aid and/or medical attention for impacted employees. Secondly, hazard reduction and clean up of the work site to allow for the continuation of business should be provided.

Critical Incident Stress Debriefing /Employee Support

- 27. The workplace Manager in conjunction with Workplace, Health, Safety and Wellness section staff (or other designated person), will assess the need for and encourage follow-up counseling and debriefing of impacted employees. This may include legal assistance, alternate work arrangements, alternate short-term accommodation, time off with pay etc.


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Reporting /Investigation

28. Employees are encouraged to report any violent behaviour that they may have been subjected to on the job. A Violent Incident Report form has been developed to facilitate the reporting of incidents and is available from the Department of Human Resources. (Workplace, Health, Safety and Wellness section) Completion of the Violent Incident Report form does not eliminate the need to complete WCB or R.C.M.P reports, as required. In cases where an employee has experienced a traumatic incident, discretion should be used in requiring the employee to fill out the form. In such cases supervisors can use copies of R.C.M.P. or WCB reports to provide information required by the Government of Nunavut.
29. All incidents of violence are to be reported to the Deputy Head and his or her designate, along with an appropriate investigation completed to disclose the following:
- Review actions taken in response to the incident to evaluate their effectiveness; and
 - Investigate the need for follow-up counseling and debriefing of impacted employees.
 - Corrective action to be taken in the event that the worksite procedures or employee's adherence to them is found to be lacking.

Communication

30. All staff are to be made aware of the violence reassurance procedures on initial hire and provided with the opportunity to access information pertaining to the Workplace Violence Prevention Program.

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AUTHORITIES AND REFERENCES

31. Education Act
32. Safety Act
Article 40, Safety and Health
33. Collective Agreement with the NTA
Article 22, Responsibilities for Safe Working Environment
34. Collective Agreement with the Nunavut Employees Union
Article 46, Harassment
Article 48, Violence in the Workplace

CONTACTS

35. For clarification or further information, please contact:

 Director, Employee Relations
 Department of Human Resources
 Iqaluit, Nunavut
 975-6211