



# Victim Services of Waterloo Region

Workplace Violence Fact Sheet no.2

## Preemptive Practices

Pre-emptive measures can include pre-employment screening, identifying problem situations and risk factors, and security preparations.

## Pre-employment Screening

Identifying and screening out potentially violent people is a means of preventing workplace violence. *Remember to adhere to privacy protection and anti-discrimination hiring laws.* Base the depth of the screening on the level of security and trust required for the position. Some red flags can include:

- ❑ A history of drug or alcohol abuse.
- ❑ Past conflicts (especially violent ones) with coworkers.
- ❑ Past convictions for violent crimes.
- ❑ A defensive, hostile attitude.
- ❑ A history of frequent job changes.
- ❑ A tendency to place blame on others.

## Current Employee Risk

There is no test or profile to indicate whether or not an employee will become violent. However, there are some behaviours that should be watched for, and considered potential indicators of an increased potential for violence:

- ❑ Personality conflicts within the workplace.
- ❑ A mishandled termination or disciplinary action.

- ❑ Bringing weapons to the worksite.
- ❑ Drug or alcohol use on the job.
- ❑ A grudge over a real or imagined grievance.
- ❑ Specific behaviours:
  - ❑ Increasing belligerence.
  - ❑ Ominous, specific threats.
  - ❑ Hypersensitivity to criticism.
  - ❑ Recent acquisition/fascination with weapons.
- ❑ Apparent obsession with a supervisor or co-worker or employee grievance.
- ❑ Preoccupation with violent themes.
- ❑ Interest in recently publicized violent events.
- ❑ Outbursts of anger.
- ❑ Extreme disorganization.
- ❑ Noticeable changes in behaviour.
- ❑ Homicidal/suicidal comments or threats.

## Factors that can precipitate problematic behaviours

- ❑ Understaffing that leads to job overload or compulsory overtime.
- ❑ Frustrations arising from poorly defined job tasks and responsibilities.
- ❑ Downsizing or reorganization.
- ❑ Labour disputes and poor labour-management relations.
- ❑ Poor management styles (e.g. over-monitoring employees, reprimands in front of a group).
- ❑ Inadequate security or a poorly trained and motivated security force.
- ❑ A lack of employee counselling.
- ❑ A high injury rate or frequent grievances may be clues to problem situations in a workplace.

Cont'd on reverse...

## Security Surveys and Measures

Surveys are an easy way of determining where there have been or are perceived threats towards safety in the workplace. They gain new perspectives to help determine risks, and can be done cheaply on a regular basis.

Security employees should be trained in conflict resolution, in order to prevent a situation from becoming violent. They should always have access to a list of current employees and their emergency contact information, in order to enable them to contact employees to warn them of a threat or to distribute other information and a list of emergency service providers, including violence assessment specialists, social service and employee assistance professionals.

The physical layout of a workplace should be reviewed and modified to promote employee safety, if necessary. Consider:

- ❑ Visibility.
- ❑ Alarm signals or emergency phones.
- ❑ Controlled access.
- ❑ Arrangement of workspaces to prevent employees being trapped in a small enclosure.
- ❑ Adequate and clearly marked escape routes.

Develop an escape plan and practice it with your employees. Remember to consider those with disabilities when drafting your plan!

## Preemptive Practice Resources

The Ontario Ministry of Labour (Kitchener)  
Information on safe, fair and harmonious workplace practices.  
phone: 519.576.6517 (Service Canada)  
l/d: 1.800.267.8097  
fax: 519.576.6377  
<http://www.gov.on.ca/MBS/>

The Ontario Human Rights Commission  
Information on hiring practices and anti-discrimination legislature.  
l/d: 1.800.387.9080  
<http://www.ohrc.on.ca>

The Workplace Violence Research Institute  
Contains articles (free) and resource materials (purchase).  
l/d: 1.800.230.7302  
fax: 1.888.486.8996  
<http://www.noworkviolence.com/>

The Federal Bureau of Investigation  
Site contains the Workplace Violence Report, which was used to generate these fact sheets.  
[www.fbi.gov](http://www.fbi.gov)

\* Discussions with other companies will also provide you with valuable insights into legal preemptive practices in use.

The next fact sheet in this series will address threat assessment and management.



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