



a quarterly newsletter
on risk management

Workplace Violence

What does it mean and does it happen here?

By Tim Delaney, OH&S administrator

In an average year, we receive over 50 incident reports. They cover the range of slips, trips and falls to relatively minor cuts, soft tissue and ergonomic injuries to the odd chemical exposure. It's uncommon for us to receive one with the "workplace violence" box ticked. Over the past few months, we have had 5 or 6 incidents where our staff have been verbally abused or had objects thrown at them. Fortunately, I haven't heard of anyone suffering a physical injury – yet.

It's also interesting that many of these cases aren't reported through our incident report form – I usually hear about them anecdotally. I'll comment more on that later.

What is workplace violence?

The Department of Labour and Workforce Development is the regulatory body that covers workplace health and safety. This includes the Occupational Health and Safety Act and a variety of regulations, including Violence in the Workplace Regulations (O.I.C.

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Workplace Violence – What does it mean and does it happen here?

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2007-200). Long story short: the employer is required to give all employees a healthy and safe workplace – and that includes one that is free of violence.

Here's the definition pasted from the regulation:

(f) “violence” means any of the following:

(i) threats, including a threatening

statement or threatening behaviour **that gives an employee reasonable cause to believe that the employee is at risk of physical injury,**

(ii) conduct or attempted conduct of a person that endangers the physical health or physical safety of an employee.

I bolded a phrase to emphasize that this is from the employee's perspective. The reporting process would be the same as the right to refuse: tell your supervisor. If you aren't satisfied with the outcome, report it to JOHSC and they will investigate. If you still aren't satisfied with the outcome, report it to Labour (1 800-9-LABOUR).

An incident report must be completed for a couple of reasons, in addition to it being a requirement of our program and under *the Act*. First, we want all staff to have a healthy, safe and respectful workplace. If we aren't aware of a problem, we may not be able to address it. Second, it's a record and records can become evidence if charges are warranted*. If there are no records,

authorities may wonder, “Was there really a problem? They weren't concerned enough to fill out a report.”

Incident reports are sent to my office, typically by paper, but email works too. With a regular incident – slip on some ice, for example – the co-chairs of your JOHSC would get a copy to review at the JOHSC meeting to see if the supervisor's investigation and remedial actions were adequate or if a JOHSC investigation would be warranted. The same would go for an incident of violence, if it affected several people or if it was an obvious threat to others and was not something personal in nature. If it was a case of one employee threatening another in a personal dispute or if it was a sexual assault, JOHSC would be given a generic advisory, but would not see the report or be given intimate details.

*Uttering threats is a violation of Section 264.1 of the Criminal Code of Canada and would be investigated by police.

What is Management doing to protect us from Workplace Violence? physical, environmental and personal security.

By Tim Delaney, OH&S administrator

As I said in the Fall '08 newsletter, there are physical, environmental and personal aspects to security.

Some physical aspects are already in place: locks on exterior doors of your office, lighting on the exterior of the buildings and in the parking lots, cell phones, TMR radios, SPOT locating devices, panic buzzers, and so on.

While we have been conducting security threat risk assessments (TRAs) on our facilities, a common issue with our larger offices is the general lack of access control to the buildings. The exceptions are in Halifax office and the Kentville Research Station.

Physical security is thought of in layers or zones: the **public zone** where anyone can visit (parking lot, sidewalk, etc.); the **reception zone** where visitors can gather; and the business or **private zone**, where we work. Only those who are cleared

are allowed into our private zone – they may be signed in, wear a visitor's badge or be escorted by staff. We are working on balancing the need for physical security against the risk and the extra effort required by all to make it work.

Environmental security includes manipulating the landscape, so we can see and be seen – get rid of hiding spots for bad characters. We are considering it, but it's a bit further down the list.

Finally, personal security. We touched on it in the fall newsletter. It's heavily balanced toward recognizing and avoiding a potential problem, but also covers escaping an actual confrontation. While “Prepare” training is available through the PSC, we are collaborating with DNR on an in-house program that will be modified slightly to meet the needs of our staff. We're hoping to have this program available in the fall of 2009.

What do I do now?

Steps to take if you encounter workplace violence.

By Tim Delaney, OH&S administrator

Could this situation get out of control? Keep safe or get into a safe situation!

If yes, get to a safe location and **call 911** – don't waste time calling your supervisor, myself or NSAC Security (on NSAC Campus only). Call the people best equipped to handle a crisis. If you or someone else has been injured, first aid would be indicated, otherwise, follow the next steps.

If you feel you can control the situation, use verbal de-escalation skills, then contact **any** supervisor, my office or NSAC Security. This gets the reporting/investigating ball rolling.

We'll help you complete an incident report and any other necessary forms.

If you or your co-workers feel upset by the event, we will offer a critical incident stress management (CISM) session (stress de-briefing) for the group. If you would like further assistance through E.A.P. , your supervisor will make the necessary arrangements. The E.A.P. service is strictly confidential.

Following several incidents, I've heard the comment that people involved were wondering whether they should call my office, NSAC Safety and Security (on NSAC Campus), 911 or a supervisor. Unfortunately, we sometimes seem shackled by rules.

Your safety is foremost! Don't worry about rules if you are in danger. Your good judgment is what's important at this time. Keep yourself safe and keep others safe, if possible.

If you are confident you can calm down an upset client, student or co-worker – great – do it. Many of us calm down or console clients, students or co-workers routinely. The key factor is your judgment – and no one can second guess your judgment in these matters. Many of us will never face life or death situations. Sanford Strong's comments and what follows are for those who may find themselves in a life-threatening predicament.

If you are in real danger – just like a fire, **GET OUT**. Your complete concentration should be on getting to safety, whether it's an enraged client or gunfire heard in the building. Once you're safe, you can call for help.

If you can't get out, **HIDE OUT** in a safe location – barring doors, turning off lights and cell phone ringers.

If you can't get out or hide out, your only option (for survival) is to **TAKE OUT** the assailant. Throw objects, group tackle the person or hit the person as much and as quickly as you can – turning the predator into prey.

This article is about developing a "survival mindset". Just like a home escape plan, you will do whatever you've trained to do. It's too late to learn new skills when the stuff hits the fan.

Ask any cop – they'll tell you the same thing – police agencies train for worst case scenario so they don't get overwhelmed. Driver education courses say you should always have an escape plan, in case the other driver crosses into your lane. Please take a moment to consider what you would do if someone was to attack you. How would you escape? Through a door or a window? If you had to defend yourself, what objects can you use as improvised defensive weapons – a chair, a phone, a rolled-up newspaper, a pen, a key, a shoe or jacket?

The point isn't to upset you or make you worried – just mentally prepared.

Don't Get Hit!

In spite of the fights and attacks you see on a TV show, we aren't as tough and resilient as they'd have us believe. While our group demonstrates the range of body sizes, shapes and levels of physical fitness – we all have vulnerabilities.

Whether you're an active, athletic person or on the sedentary side of things, a kick to the shins, instep, knees, groin, a punch in the nose or a poke in the eye will certainly hurt and may briefly incapacitate.

What's more serious are strikes to vital parts of your body, especially in the head and neck area. If you were struck in the windpipe or beaten about the head – at best you'd be incapacitated – it could easily be life-threatening.

If you find yourself in an encounter where you feel it's likely you might be hit, consider getting out, hiding out or if need be, taking out the assailant. If you're struck first, you may not get a second chance.

A good self-defence course is the best way to learn how to fight back. If you didn't have a formal course, improvised weapons and striking at vulnerable areas with the heel of your hands, elbows, knees and fingers to the eye may save your life.

Retired San Diego Police Sergeant Sanford Strong makes several key points in his book *Strong on Defense**

First, you must **totally focus on escape** (forget about getting even – just get away).

Second, if you must attack your assailant to escape, it has to be **immediate, direct and explosive** in nature – in other words, it must be a vicious or primal attack.

Third, **expect to get hurt** – being hit, shot or stabbed during your escape is better than staying there and being killed.

Your immediate action in a life or death crisis will dramatically put the odds of survival in your favour.

*Strong on Defense is out of print, but available from the author at www.sgtstrong.com

The Bottom Line

Putting the whole picture together.

By Tim Delaney, OH&S administrator

Like the *Occupational Health and Safety Act's* "Internal Responsibility System" preaches: we all have a role to play in our safety and security.

Senior management will ensure we have programs and reporting mechanisms in place so the probability of violent acts is greatly reduced. If there is a problem, they are made aware of it so it can be remedied.

Supervisory management is committed to providing a healthy and safe workplace by enforcing rules and listening to staff concerns so they are handled appropriately. The same applies to our joint occupational health and safety committee members.

Most of the "management" and JOHSC efforts are focused on providing the physical and environmental elements of a security system. They are also involved to make sure training opportunities are available for staff.

Every one of us has a role to play in making the system work. Be aware of the behaviour of others around you, make sure you keep locked doors locked, make sure you report incidents or suspicious behaviour to a supervisor, my office or NSAC Safety & Security (if on NSAC Campus). These all work to ensure the security of everyone.

In a nutshell:

Stay "switched on" – pay attention to those around you. If someone looks suspicious, devise an escape plan. If a confrontation seems imminent, be prepared to use your escape plan (see Fall 08 newsletter for details).

Use the security features at your disposal. Keep locked doors locked, challenge strangers in the workplace for their ID (we're all supposed to have ID!).

Report suspicious circumstances or behaviour to a supervisor, Tim's office (424-0319) or NSAC Security (893-4190).

If you feel you are in danger (any situation you can't control), call 911.

Park your car and walk in well lit, well travelled areas.

Don't engage in verbal sparring with a belligerent person on the street – just walk away.

If you are forced to defend yourself, remember your keys, cell phone, umbrella and other belongings that can act as improvised defensive weapons. Nearest weapon, nearest target, vulnerable areas – immediate, direct & explosive.

Don't be worried – be aware.

General reminder

Formal Workplace Inspections – I'll be calling the folks in the regional offices about our annual inspection over the coming weeks. It's management's responsibility to conduct these, but I'm happy to help, if requested – supervisors stay tuned! A general inspection form is available on the website at: www.gov.ns.ca/agri/ohs Feel free to modify it to fit your needs.

Business Continuity – With the threat of swine flu, we're going to take a look at business continuity in our summer edition. While it will be targeted at our workplace, there are tips you can use at home!

Have a great summer!

If you have any comments, suggestions for future articles or would like to submit an article, please contact Tim Delaney at 424-0319 or by email at delanets@gov.ns.ca