

Assessing the Risk of Workplace Violence



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In Nova Scotia, employers have an obligation to make sure all workers have a safe working environment. Keeping people safe at work includes measuring and reducing the risk of workplace violence. One way to address that risk is to ensure employees are aware and prepared for any violence that they might encounter at work.

A violence risk assessment can be a valuable tool to uncover these kinds of risks. An important part of reducing violence at work is to reject violence as “just part of the job.” Employers and employees working together to identify and reduce the risk of violence can make our workplaces safer for everyone.

It is in the best interest of all employers to conduct an assessment and use best practises to avoid the impacts of violence. Some workplaces are obligated by law to carry out a workplace violence risk assessment and create a prevention plan. They include, but are not limited to: Healthcare and related workplaces, educational settings, places where correctional or security services are in use, service sector businesses where money is exchanged or liquor is sold or consumed, and other situations where employees interact with the public. To learn more about which workplaces are affected by new regulation introduced April 2007, please use the contact information provided in this booklet.

What is a Violence Risk Assessment?

A violence risk assessment can be an integral part of a good occupational health and safety management plan that improves the health, safety, and awareness of workers. A workplace violence risk assessment:

- creates awareness of and identifies possible violence hazards and risks,
- identifies who may be at risk and what that risk might be,
- determines whether existing control measures to avoid violence are adequate or if more should be done,
- prioritizes the risks and control measures according to need,
- prevents injuries or other consequences of violent behaviour (when the assessment is done at the design or planning stage), and;
- provides a record of review of the risk.

A workplace violence risk assessment looks at each part of the workplace's operating procedure under standard conditions. It pinpoints the situations where the risk of violence is highest. Evaluating the risk of violence in one workplace can also establish criteria to compare one operation to others who share similar activities and risks. This allows companies to compare their experiences to others in the industry sector.

The assessment should be reviewed regularly—at least every five years—or when new circumstances might introduce new or changing risks, such as serving new clients or new operations.

Getting started

Before getting started, it may be helpful to take 15 minutes to review the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety e-learning course titled “Violence in the Workplace: Awareness”. This free course is available online at http://www.ccohs.ca/products/courses/violence_awareness/.

As of June 2007, Nova Scotia Community College campuses also offer courses about how to conduct an assessment and create a violence prevention plan.

The sample form included with this brochure is just one example of a risk assessment outline. You may decide to use this or an alternative format. Consider making sure that the people most at risk are represented when it is time to evaluate the risks and plan the best ways to reduce them.

To carry out an assessment:

- 1 **Decide who will do the assessment**, remembering that the Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee or Health and Safety Representative, if your workplace has one, should also make recommendations about workplace safety.
- 2 **Enter the employer's name**, assessment date and name of the assessor(s).
- 3 **Describe the workplaces** or tasks covered by this assessment.
 - i For smaller employers, such as corner stores, there may only be one workplace, and so only one assessment needed.
 - ii Larger employers may wish to divide the operations into workplaces or tasks that have similar predictors of violence. For example, a debt collection operation may divide its staff into those who deal with customers personally and those who perform administrative support functions with no customer contact. In this way, the employer can focus its violence prevention efforts on those areas where it is needed most.

- 4 Check the boxes as accurately as possible, being sure to put a mark opposite each question. If there is doubt about whether one of the points apply, the answer to that question should be “Yes.”
- 5 **Prioritize the risks.** Ranking or prioritizing them is one way to help determine which are the most serious safety hazards so they can be addressed first. Priority risks are usually identified by taking into account how much or how often an employee is exposed to the situation or conditions, and the potential for harm. Assigning a priority to the risks creates an action list.

The following factors play an important role:

- percentage of workforce exposed to the hazard,
- frequency of exposure,
- degree of harm likely to result from the exposure,
- probability of occurrence.

There is no one simple or single way to determine the level of risk. Ranking hazards requires the knowledge of the workplace activities, urgency of situations and, most importantly, objective judgment.

- 6 If the answer to any of the questions on this form is “Yes,” the assessors and anyone making safety recommendations should determine the level of risk and, if necessary, the possible solutions to reduce it.

Moving Forward

If completing the form highlights opportunities to reduce the risk of violence, then the end result should be a priority list of risks that should be addressed. The next step is to decide on ways to control the risks. Once agreement is reached regarding the most effective steps to address the risks, and how to implement and communicate them, those steps become the foundation of a violence prevention plan.

Risk control methods are often grouped into the following categories:

- **elimination (including substitution):** Can the primary factors that expose workers to violence be changed?
- **engineering controls:** Will changes to the physical environment, equipment, or tools prevent or lessen the potential for violent acts to occur?
- **administrative controls:** Are employees trained to recognize and respond to potential problems? Do they know the procedure(s) to minimize risks?
- **personal protective equipment:** Are there equipment or devices that should be used to reduce the likelihood or impact of violence?

Once a plan to prevent violence is in place, it should be communicated to everyone concerned. Encourage them to take steps to reduce the likelihood and severity of violence in the workplace. Remember to complete the assessment process again regularly or whenever changes to workplace operation might affect the potential hazards or risks.

Communication equals prevention

Workers must be aware of and prepared for any hazards they will face on the job, including violence. New and existing staff should be informed about the violence prevention measures that are in place, and what tools they have to effectively reduce or control those hazards.

These things can be communicated many ways, but the most effective is pre-job safety planning. The work team should identify new violence risks when they arise and the specific procedures and measures that will be used to deal with them.

Accountability and information sharing are important. Which person or team is in charge of the job task at hand? What are the reporting requirements of the team, and its supervisors? What should be reported, and to whom? What is the system to ensure that information needed to work safely is communicated quickly and effectively to everyone at risk?

Everyone has the responsibility to ensure their own safety, and that of their coworkers, on the job.

Workplace violence can affect the safety and security of every employee and business owner. It claims a high personal cost from the emotional trauma and physical injury experienced by the victims, their families, and co-workers. Taking the time to evaluate and address the risk of violence in your workplace can reduce these costs. Everyone has the responsibility to ensure a safe working environment for themselves and others.

For more resources to help you conduct, communicate, and act on a workplace violence risk assessment or other workplace hazards, please contact the

**Occupational Health and Safety division
of Nova Scotia Labour and Workforce Development**

at 1-800-952-2687 or <http://www.gov.ns.ca/lwd/healthandsafety> .

Links to selected resources

- CCOHS - <http://www.ccohs.ca/products/publications/violence.html>
- Canadian Association of University Teachers -
<http://www.caut.ca/en/services/healthandsafety/default.asp>
- The Canadian Initiative on Workplace Violence -
<http://www.workplaceviolence.ca/research/ciwvpapers.html>
- Nova Scotia Labour and Workforce Development - OHS -
<http://www.gov.ns.ca/lwd/healthandsafety/pubs.asp#violence>
- Workers Compensation Board of PEI - <http://www.wcb.pe.ca/>
- Toronto Police Service -
<http://www.torontopolice.on.ca/crimeprevention/taxisafety.php>
- Ontario Safety Association for Community and Healthcare -
<http://www.hchsa.on.ca/new/SaftInfo/WorkVio.html>
- Public Safety Agency -
http://www.bcpublicservice.ca/wphealth/work_enviro/prevent.htm
- WorkSafe BC - http://www.worksafebc.com/publications/health_and_safety/by_topic/general_safety/default.asp
- Retail BC - <http://www.retailbc.org/>
- Worker's Compensation Board of BC -
<http://www2.worksafebc.com/Portals/HealthCare/Violence.asp>
- Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) -
<http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/workplaceviolence/>
- National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) -
<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/homepage.html>
- American Association of Occupational Health Nurses Inc. -
http://www.aaohn.org/press_room/workplace_violence_120103.cfm
- American Nurses Association -
<http://www.nursingworld.org/osh/#brochure>
- Health and Safety Executive -
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/violence/index.htm>

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