



## Prevention management plans for aggression in the workplace

To prevent and control aggression in the workplace, employers should prepare a prevention management plan to identify potential threatening or aggressive incidents at work which may injure or harm the health of employees and others at the workplace. Where appropriate, seek specialist assistance -- for instance, security agents, community police or support services.

Employees and safety and health representatives, if any, should be consulted during the development of the prevention management plan. Where appropriate, refer issues arising to safety and health representatives or the safety and health committee and resolve using the agreed procedure.

### **A prevention management plan should include the following actions:**

- **Identify**  
Identify types and areas of work where employees are likely to be exposed to aggression and violence.
- **Assess**  
Assess the nature and extent of the identified risks.
- **Control**  
Find ways of preventing incidents in the workplace. Specific controls may target changes to the work environment, work tasks and the way work is designed and managed.
- **Evaluate and monitor**  
Monitor potentially threatening or aggressive situations using a system where employees can provide regular feedback, and make more modifications as necessary  
Review and improve the management plan regularly, and after any threatening or violent incident  
Consultation is the key to a successful management plan.

### **Identify**

Identify types and areas of work where employees are likely to be exposed to aggression:

- Review accident report records
- Gather information from people at the workplace on past aggressive incidents, threatening or abusive behaviour
- Provide information to staff to increase awareness of aggression as a hazard, and to help them recognise incidents that should be reported
- Assign a particular person in the organisation to deal with inquiries and reports of aggressive incidents
- Provide a confidential means of reporting aggressive incidents and possible after-effects for those employees who may require it.

## Assess

Assess the nature and extent of the identified problems.

This applies to less threatening and intimidating forms of aggression as well as the obvious high-profile threats and risk of physical attack.

Assessing the problem should involve analysing information gathered on aggressive incidents to understand reasons for and determine:

- Similarity between incidents and patterns of behaviour
- Underlying causes of aggressive behaviour
- Nature of the aggression -- whether physical assault, threatening behaviour, intimidation or verbal abuse
- Who is at risk of injury or harm -- including clients, customers, patients or members of the public
- Frequency of incidents
- Severity and consequences
- Employee perception of their safety or exposure to aggression.

## Control

### Prevention

Find ways of preventing the type of aggressive incidents identified in each work area. The recommended approach to managing aggression at work is firstly to eliminate the opportunity for aggressive or threatening behaviour. If that is not possible, the potential for aggression should be isolated, managed and minimised. Finally, additional personal protection, such as duress alarms and training in handling confrontational behaviour and diffusing aggression, may help minimise the risk of injury or harm to health.

There will often be a number of solutions to a particular problem and some will be easier to apply than others. New ways of managing aggressive and threatening behaviour will be easier to introduce and more effective if employees are actively involved in changes affecting their work. Specific actions may include:

- **Changes to the work environment** -- for example, redesigning waiting areas to provide welcoming, calming surroundings, with access to toilets and water, installing security lighting, protective barriers and remote control door locks, improving surveillance and visibility of offending behaviour, and reducing irritating background noise
- **Changes to systems of work to limit opportunities for aggressive and threatening behaviour** -- improving cash handling procedures, rostering experienced employees, rostering more employees at peak periods to reduce stress, setting realistic deadlines, introducing a system of attending to clients in order, providing clients with required information concerning waiting times, providing chill out areas.
- **Providing security systems**-- such as security staff and video surveillance.

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## Control cont...

### Management

Where it is not practicable to completely eliminate all opportunities for aggressive and threatening behaviour, management plans should include back-up procedures to be followed before, during and following violent or threatening situations.

These may involve:

- Selecting appropriate employees and providing them with clear guidelines
- Induction training for employees new to areas of potential aggression in the workplace
- Training in interpersonal and de-escalation skills to help employees diffuse potential aggression
- A system for alerting co-workers or the police
- Additional personal protection, such as duress alarms and employee only secure areas

Management plans should include controls for reducing the consequences of aggressive incidents. These may involve:

- Procedures for the victim and others following verbal or physical aggression
- Victim support and rehabilitation services for employees involved in verbal or physical aggression to help them manage the impact of crisis situations and develop skills for handling violent incidents in the future.

## Evaluate & monitor

Monitor potentially threatening or aggressive situations using a system where employees can provide regular feedback, and make more modifications as necessary.

Review and improve the management plan regularly, and after any threatening or aggressive incident.

Preventive measures will differ for each problem, and a combination of measures may be needed to reduce the risk. Through consultation, employers and employees may decide on wide ranging strategies that suit their particular workplace. Consultation is the key to a successful management plan.

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