

LA TROBE UNIVERSITY

PREVENTION OF OCCUPATIONAL VIOLENCE PROCEDURE

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this procedure is to prevent the risk of reasonably foreseeable occupational violence, or threats of violence towards University employees by the application of a risk management approach involving the identification, evaluation and control of the potential of occupational violence occurring. These procedures will also apply to contractors and visitors to the University and to students.

2. DEFINITIONS

Violence includes a wide range of behaviour and motivations that lead to either physical attack or injury to persons.

Threats of violence can include statements or behaviour that causes a person to believe they are in danger of being physically attacked or of being injured as a result of a violent act.

However, no single definition can adequately cover all situations and in determining whether violence or a threat of violence has occurred, the nature and context of the behaviour and motivations needs to be considered.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES

3.1 The Head of School, College or Divisional Manager is responsible for:

- Ensuring that situations in which occupational violence may occur have been identified and assessed and that suitable controls have been applied.
- Ensuring that appropriate control measures are implemented in workplaces where a significant risk has been identified. The control measures should be documented in a Safety Plan.

3.2 The Security Office (Facilities and Services Division) is responsible for the provision of expert advice to Heads of Schools or Divisional Managers on the potential for occupational violence to occur and on suitable controls that can be applied.

3.3 Employees are responsible for promptly reporting any incidents involving threats or physical attack to the Security Office

4. RISK IDENTIFICATION

4.1 It is important to assess each workplace to identify any potential sources of occupational violence and to be able to assess the risks accordingly. Hazard identification can be achieved by the following methods:

- Conduct an audit of the workplace.
- Review incident and injury reports
- Consult with health and safety representatives
- Obtain information from industry and professional groups

4.2 The following situations are considered to have significant potential for occupational violence:

- Work involving handling cash
- Client based services or home visits
- Sensitive or dispute situations (e.g. employment or study issues)
- Contact with people who are disturbed, in distress or who may have a pre-disposition to violence
- Contact with people likely to be intoxicated or affected by drugs
- Working alone, in isolation or at night
- Working where drugs are kept and handled
- Situations likely to cause frustration

5. RISK ASSESSMENT

The *Violence Risk Assessment Checklist* can be used for to conduct an initial audit of the workplace and is considered essential for the above situations. The checklist should be completed by the supervisor of the area in consultation with the health and safety representative. For some situations, for example those listed above for which there may be a significant potential for violence to occur, it may be appropriate to request a security review and report be provided by the Security Office.

A further risk assessment must be conducted whenever there is a change to the workplace or the work practices being undertaken which may change the risk profile.

6. RISK CONTROL MEASURES

Where a significant risk of occupational violence has been identified, it is recommended that a written Safety Plan be prepared to document the steps to be taken to control the risk. In general, a Safety Plan should include:

- The physical layout to be provided, for example the provision of secure work areas, separate interview rooms and duress alarms as well as emergency escape routes. Deterrence measures such as video surveillance should also be considered
- Procedural controls, for example work schedules and tasks or number of staff present during particular situations

- Information and training, for example:
 - Cash handling procedures
 - Dealing with aggressive or difficult people
 - Managing patients in a clinical setting
 - Emergency procedures

Training courses for staff in dealing with aggressive or difficult people are regularly provided by the Counselling Service at the Bundoora Campus. For further details (including enquiries from regional campuses), contact the Bundoora Counselling Service.

The publications listed under Section 10 (References) provide further guidance on prevention of occupational violence.

7. REPORTING OCCUPATIONAL VIOLENCE

- 7.1 The Security Office is the primary point of contact for all matters regarding threats or physical attacks, or situations which may indicate the potential for violence to occur. All incidents involving threats or physical attack must be reported as soon as practicable to Security and an Incident Report should be completed as soon as possible thereafter.
- 7.2 Incidents which require an immediate response should be reported to Security on the emergency number 9479 2222 or the Police on 000. Security will contact the Police in situations in which criminal acts of violence have occurred.
- 7.3 Situations in which there is no immediate threat of violence but nevertheless may indicate the potential for violence, should be reported to Security for further assessment. Examples of situations which may be considered as potentially threatening include:
- Aggressive, unusual, bizarre, erratic or inappropriate behaviour
 - Persons acting suspiciously or loitering
 - Persons who appear to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol
 - Acts, words or gestures which cause concern

8. INVESTIGATION AND ASSESSMENT OF PHYSICAL ATTACKS AND THREATS

- 8.1 All incidents and threats of occupational violence will be investigated by Security and the University Secretary will be informed of the details and preventative actions taken or recommended. Employees and students found to have committed violence in the workplace may be subject to the University's disciplinary procedures.
- 8.2 The University has established a University Threat Assessment Team (UTAT), comprising selected individuals, whose responsibility is to advise the University Secretary on risks which may affect the University and ways to control those risks. The UTAT's role also includes advising the University Secretary in dealing with situations where there may be a potential for violence to occur.
- 8.3 In an emergency situation the emergency response plan for the relevant campus shall be followed. In situations (all campuses) where the risk is not immediate, the matter should be reported to the Bundoora Security Office, who will then arrange for appropriate action to be taken.

9. CONSULTATION

The Occupational Health and Safety Act 1985 requires employers to consult with the health and safety representative of a appropriate designated work group on all proposed changes to the workplace, including the conduct of work that may affect the health and safety of any member of the designated work group.

It is recommended that the health and safety representative be consulted as early as possible when identifying and evaluating the risks and thereafter when risk control measures are introduced into the workplace.

10. REFERENCES

WorkSafe Victoria: Guidance note – Prevention of bullying and violence at work (2003)

Australian Institute of Criminology: Preventing Violence within Organisations: A Practical Handbook (2000)

Australian Institute of Criminology: Preventing Client Initiated Violence: A Practical Handbook (2000)

Australian Institute of Criminology: Violence in the Workplace- Preventing Armed Robbery: A Practical Handbook

La Trobe University Code of Conduct

11. DOCUMENTATION

Risk Assessment Checklist
Incident Report Form

The Executive Occupational Health and Safety Committee approved this procedure at its meeting on 6 December 2004.