

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND RESPONSE

1. PURPOSE

This Directive transmits the Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration's (GIPSA) policy and procedures for preventing workplace violence and responding to incidents of workplace violence.

2. REPLACEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

This Directive replaces GIPSA Directive 4790.2, dated 06/06/00.

3. POLICY

Harassing, threatening, or violent behavior at GIPSA is unacceptable.

GIPSA is concerned about and committed to our employees' safety and health. Violence or the threat of violence, by or against any GIPSA employee, is unacceptable. GIPSA will make every effort to prevent violent incidents from occurring. Preventing workplace violence is a responsibility shared by all employees.

In order to prevent workplace violence from occurring, GIPSA will **not** tolerate:

- a. Violence, intimidation, or other threatening behavior.
- b. Written or oral threats of violence.
- c. Gestures or other actions which communicate a direct or implied threat of physical harm.
- d. Possession, use, or threat of use of a firearm or other deadly weapon.

Each act of violence, threat, intimidation, or other threatening behavior is taken seriously. Such actions may result in removal from the workplace, disciplinary action, or criminal action, depending on the situation. Any employee who observes these actions must immediately report this information to a supervisor or manager for remedial action.

4. BACKGROUND

- a. Workplace violence can be any act of physical violence, threats of physical violence, harassment, intimidation, or other threatening disruptive behavior that occurs at the work site. Workplace violence can affect or involve employees, visitors, contractors, and other non-Federal employees.
- b. A number of different actions in the work environment can trigger or cause workplace violence. It may even be the result of non-work-related situations such as domestic violence or “road rage.” Workplace violence can be inflicted by an abusive employee, a manager, supervisor, co-worker, customer, family member, or even a stranger. Whatever the cause or whoever the perpetrator, workplace violence is not accepted or tolerated.
- c. However, there is no sure way to predict human behavior and, while there may be warning signs, there is no specific profile of a potentially dangerous individual. The best prevention comes from identifying any problems early and dealing with them. The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) serves as an excellent, confidential resource available to all employees to help them identify and deal with problems.
- d. While it is everyone’s responsibility to be alert for and to report potential workplace violence problems, supervisors and managers have added responsibilities for prevention, assessment, reporting, and response.
- e. It is GIPSA’s policy that every customer and employee be treated fairly and equitably with dignity and respect. This policy applies not only to how you as an employee should act, but also how you deserve to be treated by others.

5. RESPONSIBILITIES

It is up to each employee to help make our workplace safe. It is management's responsibility to provide a safe working environment by having preventive measures in place and, if necessary, by dealing immediately with threatening or potentially violent situations that may occur. Supervisors and managers must respond to inappropriate behavior by their employees and customers. They must also provide information and training to employees on workplace violence and implement effective security measures.

- a. The Administrator/Deputy Administrators will:
 - (1) Ensure a workplace violence prevention and response program is in place.
 - (2) Ensure workplace violence prevention and response information is available to all employees.

- (3) Ensure adequate resources are available for employee training.
- b. Safety and Occupational Health Managers will:
- (1) Serve as coordinator for the workplace violence prevention and response program.
 - (2) Receive reports of workplace violence and coordinate the assessment of the incident and the response to the incident.
 - (3) Maintain records regarding workplace violence incidents and response to those incidents.
 - (4) Provide informational resources and training regarding workplace violence.
 - (5) Notify the National Council President of workplace violence incidents.
- c. Managers and Supervisors will:
- (1) Inform employees of workplace violence policies and procedures.
 - (2) Respond to potential threats and escalating situations by utilizing proper resources and following the GIPSA assessment and response procedures.
 - (3) Secure their safety and the safety of their employees.
 - (4) Check prospective employees' backgrounds prior to hiring.
 - (5) Periodically assess the potential for workplace violence and take remedial action to reduce the risk of violence.
 - (6) Inform employees of EAP services and benefits of Office of Workers' Compensation Programs (OWCP).
 - (7) Grant administrative time for attending EAP counseling sessions.
 - (8) Grant reasonable amount of administrative time to employees in reaction to incidents of violence.
- d. Employees must:
- (1) Know and understand the GIPSA policy regarding workplace violence.

- (2) Report any verbal, written, or physical threats, acts of violence, or any disruptive behavior to their supervisor.
- (3) Not confront individuals who are a threat.
- (4) Secure their safety and the safety of coworkers.
- (5) Be aware of Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services and benefits of the Office of Workers' Compensation Programs (OWCP).

6. REPORTING, ASSESSING, AND RESPONDING TO WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

a. Reporting Incidents of Workplace Violence.

- (1) All employees must report each act of violence, threats, intimidation, or other threatening disruptive behavior to their supervisor. Consider all threats as real. Also, refer to FGIS Directive 9070.6, Reporting Violations of the U.S. Grain Standards Act and the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1946, regarding reports of assaults.

When reporting the incident, include the following information in the report:

- (a) Name of the perpetrator/instigator, if known.
- (b) Names of witnesses who observed the incident.
- (c) Name of the target of the threat or violent act.
- (d) A description of what happened.

When reporting an incident, provide specific and detailed information. Include the date and time the incident occurred. If known, include the events that led up to the incident.

If imminent danger exists, immediately secure your own safety and the safety of the target if you can do so without endangering yourself or others.

- (2) Supervisors receiving the report of an incident must document the incident when the report is received and immediately forward this information to their supervisor and to the Safety and Occupational Health Manager.

- b. Assessing Incidents of Workplace Violence. The Safety and Occupational Health Manager coordinates the threat assessment process when the report is received.

Determining the seriousness of a violent or potentially violent situation and how to best intervene is the basis of a threat assessment. A threat assessment team will provide guidance to local supervisors regarding how to respond to the situation to protect employees.

Members of a threat assessment team will vary depending on the situation. Possible members of the team include:

- (1) Management.
- (2) Employee Relations Specialist.
- (3) Safety and Occupational Health Manager.
- (4) EEO/Civil Rights Staff.
- (5) Union Representative (when bargaining unit employees are affected or, potentially affected).
- (6) Employee Assistance Program (EAP) Counselor.
- (7) Law Enforcement Officials.
 - (a) Federal Protective Service (FPS).
 - (b) Office of Inspector General (OIG).
 - (c) Local Police.
 - (d) Office of the General Counsel (OGC).

Effective protection to employees at risk requires immediate assessment of the situation. Threat assessment teams will evaluate the risk of the threat. The approach and timing for these evaluations will depend on the circumstances of the situation.

The threat assessment team will provide administrative guidance to the affected management for responding to the reported situation.

- c. Responding to Incidents of Workplace Violence. Local management is responsible for implementing the suggested administrative guidance received from the threat assessment team. Questions regarding implementation are directed to the threat assessment team.

The Safety and Occupational Health Manager is responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of the threat assessment and the administrative response. Monitoring activities include weekly or monthly checks with management at the affected office to determine if the violence or threat of violence has diminished. The Safety and Occupational Health Manager will determine when an incident is resolved and monitoring is no longer required.

7. RECOVERING FROM A WORKPLACE VIOLENCE EMERGENCY

- a. The GIPSA workplace violence prevention program is a proactive program for detecting and preventing violent incidents in the workplace. However, violent incidents may occur even with this program in place. For this reason, we must also be prepared to recover from an incident if it does occur. This section provides information for understanding and responding to the emotional, physical, organizational, and other needs that are present after a violent event.
- b. The surviving victims of workplace violence, the eyewitnesses to the event, the people related to the victims, witnesses or suspects, and GIPSA as an entity are disrupted when a violent incident occurs. Recovering after an incident depends on what kind of care is delivered by those who respond to the need for help.
- c. When violent incidents occur, it is essential to provide crisis intervention and counseling assistance within the first 24 to 72 hours in order to respond quickly and appropriately to the medical and psychological needs of employees. Use of the EAP is recommended.
 - (1) How Traumas Affect Employees. Following a violent incident, employees experience three stages of crisis reactions to varying degrees:

- (a) **Stage One.** In this stage, the employee experiences emotional reactions characterized by shock, disbelief, denial, or numbness. Physically, the employee experiences shock or a fight-or-flight survival reaction in which the heart rate increases, perceptual senses become heightened or distorted, and adrenaline levels increase to meet a real or perceived threat.

- (b) **Stage Two.** This is the impact stage where the employee may feel a variety of intense emotions, including anger, fear, grief, confusion, helplessness, guilt, depression, or withdrawal. This stage may last a few days, a few weeks, or a few months.

- (c) **Stage Three.** This is the reconciliation stage in which the employee tries to make sense out of the event, understand its impact, and, through trial and error, reach closure of the event so it does not interfere with his/her ability to function and grow.
- (2) While it is difficult to predict how an incident will affect a given individual, several factors influence the subjective intensity of trauma. These factors include:
- (a) The duration of the event.
 - (b) The amount of terror or horror the victim experienced.
 - (c) The sense of personal control (or lack thereof) the employee had during the incident.
 - (d) The amount of injury or loss the victim experienced (i.e., loss of property, self-esteem, physical well-being, etc.).
- Other variables include:
- (e) The person's previous victimization experiences,
 - (f) Recent losses such as the death of a family member, and
 - (g) Other intense stresses.
- (3) After a violent or traumatic event has occurred, there are immediate procedures that must be put into place to address certain questions and needs.
- (a) Determine the immediate safety of the workplace.
 - 1 Secure work areas.
 - 2 Evacuate employees
 - (b) When appropriate, notify local authorities [medical, fire, and police].
 - (c) Notify the chain of command.

- (d) Determine if there are people to be notified who are external to the organization such as family members.
 - (e) Locate any equipment that needs to be utilized to handle the crisis such as computers to access employee records, cellular phones, first aid, etc.
 - (f) Gather information on the incident:
 - 1 Who are the witnesses?
 - 2 Were pictures taken?
 - 3 What are the local authorities investigating?
 - (g) Determine if there are public relations concerns.
 - (h) Contact Public Affairs to control information and reporters.
 - (i) Show employees and customers that the Agency cares about them.
- d. Management Responsibilities. Supervisors and managers play a critical role in responding to the immediate and long-term needs of employees. The following suggestions are provided for supervisory staff in handling employees after a violent event:
- (1) Be sensitive to invisible or emotional injuries.
 - (2) Observe the ripple effect of the event because the range of those affected typically grows.
 - (3) Ensure the employee is not always isolated.
 - (4) Control media access to employees.
 - (5) Do not joke about the event.
 - (6) Do not trivialize the event because it could have been worse.
 - (7) Seek help through the EAP.

- (e) Employee Responsibilities. There are a number of things employees can do to help themselves get through a traumatic event, particularly if they are victims. In addition to availing themselves of any assistance offered through GIPSA programs, these ideas may help with the management of physical and emotional effects.
- (1) Diet and exercise.
 - (a) Eat balanced meals.
 - (b) Keep stimulants to a minimum.
 - (c) Do not use alcohol and drugs to cope.
 - (d) Exercise regularly after the first 24 hours following the incident.
 - (2) Sleep.
 - (a) Maintain a normal schedule.
 - (b) Use relaxation techniques to help fall asleep.
 - (3) Talk.
 - (a) Use social support systems.
 - (b) Talk about the incident.
 - (4) Life-style.
 - (a) Set realistic expectations.
 - (b) Maintain a normal schedule.
 - (d) Avoid boredom.
 - (e) Don't fight flashbacks.
 - (f) Take time to do enjoyable things.
 - (5) Get outside help when needed.
 - (a) Seek medical assistance.

- (b) Plan for your safety.
- (c) Obtain counseling for trauma/stress.
- (d) Obtain referrals to community facilities.

8. INQUIRIES

This Directive is available on the Internet at
<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/library/gipsa/GIPSA.shtml>

/s/

James E. Link
Administrator

Attachments