




Homeland  
Security

July 11, 2006

MEMORANDUM FOR: DISTRIBUTION

FROM: Michael Chertoff 

SUBJECT: Department of Homeland Security Workplace Violence  
Prevention Procedures

It is the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) policy to promote a safe environment for its employees. Acts or threats against persons or property will not be tolerated.

This policy applies to all DHS Components. It covers not only acts of physical violence, but threats, harassment, intimidation, and other disruptive behavior. Such behavior can include oral or written statements, gestures, or expressions that communicate a direct or indirect threat of physical harm.

Title 5, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 735, Employee Responsibilities and Conduct and Office of Personnel Management's, "Dealing with Workplace Violence: A Guide for Agency Planners" establish that employees must report any act or threat of workplace violence promptly to their supervisors, managers, or other officials. All reports of incidents will be taken seriously and dealt with appropriately. Individuals who commit such acts may be removed from the premises and may be subject to disciplinary action, criminal penalties, or both. Supervisors shall act immediately on each complaint of workplace violence. Supervisors who are aware of workplace harassment and fail to take immediate, appropriate, and corrective action, or fail to report such behavior may be subject to discipline up to and including removal. Supervisors and all of the offices involved in responding to incidents will be supported by Departmental management in their efforts to deal with violent and potentially violent situations. When the perpetrator of violence in the workplace is identified, management and the Office of Security will immediately consider suspension of physical access and/or suspension of information system access.

For further guidance, see Appendix A "Preventing Workplace Violence;" Appendix B "Types of Workplace Violence;" and Appendix C "Responses to Workplace Violence."

Questions concerning the application of this authority may be directed to:

Office of Security: 202-692-4432  
Federal Protective Service: 202-732-8052  
Employee Assistance Program: 202-357-8400

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## APPENDIX A PREVENTING WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

One of the major components of an effective workplace violence prevention program is its strategy. This section focuses on awareness and preventive measures that can be taken when dealing with threatening, intimidating, and/or potentially violent behavior.

Becoming familiar with the Department's policy and program regarding workplace violence prevention is an important step in preventing workplace violence. It is imperative that all employees, including managers and supervisors, understand this policy and program.

All managers and supervisors are expected to discuss the policy and program with their staffs so that they understand how to handle intimidating, threatening, or violent incidents. It is equally important that they understand the consequences of such behavior (such as disciplinary and/or adverse action up to and including removal and criminal charges).

### Work Environment

The best prevention strategy is to maintain an environment which minimizes negative feelings, such as isolation, resentment, and hostility among employees. Although no workplace can be perceived as perfect by every employee, there are several steps that management can take to help create a professional, healthy, and caring work environment. These include, but are not limited to:

- Promoting sincere, open, and timely communication among managers, employees, and union representatives
- Offering opportunities for professional development
- Fostering a family-friendly work environment
- Maintaining mechanisms for complaints and concerns and allowing them to be expressed in a non-judgmental forum that includes timely feedback to the initiator
- Promoting "quality of life" issues such as pleasant facilities and job satisfaction
- Maintaining impartial and consistent discipline for employees who exhibit improper conduct and poor performance

### Security

Maintaining a secure and physically safe workplace is part of any good strategy for preventing workplace violence. The Department uses a variety of security measures to help ensure safety. The measures used depend on the resources available in the area. These may include:



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- The Federal Protective Service or designated security personnel to respond to requests for assistance
- Employee photo identification badges and coded key cards for access to secure areas
- On-site guard services
- Guard force assistance in registering, badging, and directing visitors in larger facilities
- Other appropriate security measures such as metal detectors

Additional law enforcement assistance is available through local police departments for emergency situations. Employees should notify the appropriate security office or designated police of suspicious or unauthorized individuals on Departmental property.

### Education

Education and communication are also critical components of any prevention strategy. The following types of education and communication are effective in preventing violence and other threatening behavior:

- Communicating awareness among employees, supervisors, and managers regarding all aspects of the Department's Workplace Violence Prevention Program. This includes what it is, what to do when faced with possible problems, employee and management responsibilities, early intervention techniques and who to call for assistance.
- Educating employees and communicating to them techniques designed to effectively deal with conflict resolution and stress reduction.

### Performance/Conduct Indicators

Being aware of performance and/or conduct problems which may be warning signs of potential trouble are good prevention strategies. These signs may show up in perpetrators of violence, those who are victims, and those involved in domestic violence. Although it is possible that only one of these indicators will occur, it is more likely that a pattern will occur or that they will represent a change from normal behavior. The presence of any of these characteristics does not necessarily mean a violent act will occur. They may be indicators of another type of problem such as being ill, depressed or bereaved. Some examples of performance and/or conduct indicators are:

- Attendance problems such as excessive sick leave, excessive tardiness, leaving work early, and/or improbable excuses for absences
- Adverse impact on supervisor's time such as supervisor spends an inordinate amount of time coaching and/or counseling employee about

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personal problems, re-doing the employee's work and/or dealing with co-worker concerns

- Decreased productivity such as making excessive mistakes, using poor judgment, missing deadlines and wasting work time and materials
- Inconsistent work patterns such as alternating periods of high and low productivity and quality of work, exhibiting inappropriate reactions, overreacting to criticism and mood swings
- Concentration problems such as becoming easily distracted or difficulty recalling instructions, project details, and deadline requirements
- Safety issues such as disregarding personal safety as well as equipment and machinery safety and taking needless risks
- Poor health and hygiene which includes marked changes in personal grooming habits
- Unusual/changed behavior such as inappropriate comments, threats or throwing objects
- Evidence of possible drug or alcohol use/abuse
- Evidence of serious stress in the employee's personal life exhibited by crying, excessive personal phone calls or recent change in family/relationship status
- Continual excuses and blaming such as inability to accept responsibility for even the most inconsequential errors
- Unshakable depression as exhibited by low energy, little enthusiasm and/or despair

### Employee Support Services

A variety of Departmental resources are available to assist employees to deal effectively with problems that originate or are brought to the workplace. Employees should begin by contacting their supervisors, specialists from their servicing Human Capital Office or the Employee Assistance Program.

### Early Intervention

Intervening early in a threatening or potentially violent situation is vital to preventing its escalation. There are many intervention options, and they vary greatly depending upon the situation. Early intervention may defuse the initial situation and give the supervisor an opportunity to thoroughly review options for resolution. Intervention sets the tone for how the situation will be resolved so it must be handled deftly.

### Take Appropriate Action

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Supervisors and managers must be willing to take action when necessary. All employees must know that violence in the workplace will not be tolerated and that appropriate action will be taken if threats of violence or violence occur.



## APPENDIX B TYPES OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

One of the most common types of workplace violence is that among co-workers. In addition, a high percentage of violent incidents are perpetrated by individuals from outside the workplace. This includes situations such as domestic violence, bomb threats, and violence by customers.

While they are often preventable, it is still difficult to determine whether or not any particular workplace situation is potentially violent. This is an emotional and complex topic, and decisions about what to do in certain situations are not always straightforward or made in a clearheaded state of mind. In many cases, employees ignore warning signs because they believe they are not important or that it is none of their business. In other situations, employees react based on fear and what they believe is the profile of a potentially violent person, not necessarily based on observed behavior. Another major hindrance is being unaware of how to access assistance in making determinations regarding real and potential risks.

Actual threats should always be taken seriously and responded to immediately. When there is not an actual threat, judgment and senses should be trusted. The "gut feeling" that one gets when talking to people should be respected. If one feels that someone is dangerous, take the proper precautions.

### Forms of Violence Among Co-workers

There are many forms of workplace violence among co-workers. Unfortunately, the one form that receives the most attention is workplace homicide. Examples of the most frequently encountered situations among co-workers are:

- Concealing or using a weapon
- Physical assault upon oneself or another person
- Actions which damage, destroy, or sabotage property
- Intimidating or frightening others
- Harassing, stalking, or showing undue focus on another person
- Physically aggressive acts, such as shaking fists at another person, kicking, pounding on desks, punching a wall, angrily jumping up and down, screaming at others
- Verbal abuse including offensive, profane and vulgar language
- Threats (direct or indirect), whether made in person or through letters, phone calls, or electronic mail

### Other Forms of Workplace Violence

Violent incidents in the workplace may include acts of domestic violence. If the victim has sought shelter or a restraining order, the workplace is frequently the place the employee can be found. It is not uncommon for the perpetrator to show

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up at the work site to carry out acts of violence against the partner or anyone trying to protect that person.

Because of the nature of the services provided by Departmental programs, there are also incidents of workplace violence perpetrated by our clients/customers, particularly in enforcement and investigative settings. Finally, bomb threats make up an increasing percentage of workplace violence incidents. Many threats made in the Federal Government are made against individuals. Others allege that bombs have been planted in Federal facilities. Most threats are made by telephone.



## APPENDIX C RESPONSES TO WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

Potential or actual violent situations among employees usually escalate if not defused. Violence and the warning signs that typically occur can usually be identified at three levels. It should be noted that any one or combination of warning signs at the three levels may be indicative of a potentially violent situation. The following is an attempt to delineate warning signs and the appropriate response. There is no fail-safe way of presenting this information to employees. Employees will have to make a judgment call as to the appropriate action to take by discerning and evaluating the given situation.

### Level One (Early Warning Signs)

The person exhibits intimidating behaviors which are:

- Discourteous/disrespectful
- Uncooperative
- Verbally abusive

Response when Early Warning Signs occur at Level One

- Observe the behavior in question
- Report concerns to your supervisor to seek help in assessing and responding to the situation:
  - If the offending employee is the reporting employee's immediate supervisor, the employee should notify the next level of supervision
  - If the offending person is not an employee, the supervisor of the employee reporting the incident is still the appropriate individual to receive and provide initial response.
- Document the observed behavior in question
- Supervisor should meet with the offending employee to discuss concerns

### Level Two (Escalation of the Situation)

The person:

- Argues with customers, vendors, co-workers, and management
- Refuses to obey agency policies and procedures
- Sabotages equipment and steals property for revenge
- Verbalizes wishes to hurt co-workers and/or management
- Sends threatening note(s) to co-worker(s) and/or management
- Views self as victimized by management (me against them)

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Response when the situation has escalated to Level Two

- If warranted, call 911 and other appropriate emergency contacts (such as Federal Protective Service) for that particular facility, particularly if the situation requires immediate medical attention and/or law enforcement personnel
- Immediately contact the supervisor and, if needed, the supervisor will contact other appropriate official(s) such as functional area experts to seek help in assessing/responding to the situation
- If necessary, secure your own safety and the safety of others, including contacting people who are in danger (make sure emergency numbers for employees are kept up-to-date and accessible)
- Document the observed behavior in question
- Supervisor should meet with the employee to discuss concerns and, if appropriate, begin or continue progressive discipline

The supervisor should follow these procedures:

- Call for assistance in assessing/responding, if needed
- Avoid an audience when dealing with the employee
- Remain calm, speaking slowly, softly, and clearly
- Ask the employee to sit down; see if s/he is able to follow directions
- Ask questions relevant to the employee's complaint such as:
  - What can you do to try to regain control of yourself?
  - What can I do to help you regain control?
  - What do you hope to gain by committing violence?
  - Why do you believe you need to be violent to achieve that?
- Try to direct the aggressive tendencies into another kind of behavior so that the employee sees that there are choices about how to react

Level Three (Further Escalation -- Usually Resulting in an Emergency Response)

The person displays intense anger resulting in:

- Suicidal threats
- Physical fights
- Destruction of property
- Display of extreme rage
- Utilization of weapons to harm others

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### Response when situation is a Level Three Emergency

Any individual observing violent or threatening behavior which poses an immediate danger to persons or property is expected to:

- Call 911 and other appropriate emergency contacts (such as Federal Protective Service) for that particular facility, particularly if the situation requires immediate medical attention and/or law enforcement personnel
- Remain calm and contact supervisor
- Secure your personal safety first
- Leave the area if your safety is at risk
- Cooperate with law enforcement personnel when they have responded to the situation

Once law enforcement personnel are on the scene, they will assume control of the situation. Witnesses should be prepared to provide a description of the violent or threatening individual, details of what was observed, and the exact location of the incident.

- Document the observed behavior in question
- Where needed, the supervisor will contact functional area experts and will follow the procedures described in the Level Two section

### Suspending Access

*Physical Access* When access to a DHS facility is suspended, authorized Office of Security personnel will consider the following actions:

- Retrieve all keys, badges, cards, and other access devices that afford the individual access to DHS facilities
- Suspend access through all electronic means (e.g. access control lists, badge swipes, etc.)
- Change combinations to all safes and locks to which the individual has access

*Information Systems Access* When access to DHS sensitive systems is suspended, authorized systems security personnel will consider the following actions:

- Suspend all access authorizations



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- Retrieve all devices that afford access to DHS sensitive systems
- Retrieve all government-owned equipment

All accesses and equipment will be held until a final resolution is reached, and the individual is again authorized access to DHS sensitive systems.

### Domestic Violence

Except when those involved in domestic violence are co-workers, most incidents are perpetrated by individuals outside the agency. It is, therefore, unlikely that the levels of violence described above will be evident. There will, however, be early warning signs that this type of violence is escalating outside the workplace. The victim may show symptoms such as increased fear, emotional episodes, and/or signs of physical injury. Victims, as well as perpetrators, also show signs of work performance deterioration. By intervening when the early warning signs occur, even though violence may not yet have been committed at work, a serious incident may be prevented.

### Response Involving Domestic Violence

In the event the perpetrator shows up at work with the intent of harming the employee and any others who happen to be in the way or involved, follow the procedures described in Level Three in responding to the immediate crisis.

If it is known that an employee is being affected by domestic violence, regardless of whether or not the perpetrator has shown up at work, it is important to provide support and assistance. Not only is the person at risk for more and usually escalated violence, but it can have an impact on the safety and productivity of the entire work force. Below are some tips for supervisors when helping an employee affected by domestic violence.

- Talk with the employee about your concern of the possibility of the violence extending into the workplace and recommend that the employee contact the Employee Assistance Program for assistance in dealing with the problem
- Contact the Employee Assistance Program for more information and/or assistance
- Recommend that a workplace safety plan be developed in case an incident occurs at the workplace:
  - Think about the safety of the individual as well as everyone around her/him
  - Don't be a hero if the perpetrator shows up at work
  - Follow the safety plan and go for help

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When a violent event happens on GSA-controlled, public, or privately controlled property and the event involves strangers/clients/customers:

- Notify the supervisor
- Report the incident to the Security Guard/local law enforcement

When an event involves co-workers/supervisors:

- Notify the supervisor (higher level if the immediate supervisor is involved)
- Report the incident to the Security Guard/local law enforcement.

### Suspicious Letter/Package

When an event involves suspicious letter/package, a bomb, a personal threat or medical emergency:

- Do not handle or open suspicious item
- Evacuate the area if safety is at risk
- Notify the supervisor
- Immediately report the item to the Security Guard/local law enforcement

### Threat (including bomb threat)

Whenever possible, if a threat is received by telephone, note the following:

- Telephone number where the call was received
- Exact time call was received
- Exact words of the caller
- Caller's sex, name, telephone number, and location
- Details regarding caller's voice (calm, excited, disguised, accent, etc.)
- Caller's estimated age (as determined by voice)
- Background noise, if any and if the call involves a bomb threat, also ask the following:
  - When will the bomb explode?
  - Where is the bomb?
  - What does it look like?

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- What kind of bomb is it?
- Why did you place the bomb?

- Notify the supervisor
- Immediately report the incident to the Security Guard/local law enforcement
- Evacuate the area if safety is at risk

Most importantly, if you reasonably believe that you have an imminently dangerous situation, call 911 or a local emergency response facility immediately!

In the event of a Medical Emergency:

Contact the following, applicable to the event:

- Health Unit
- Rescue Squad
- Fire Department
- Stay with and comfort the injured/ill person
- If you are trained and willing, administer first aid