



WORKPLACE VIOLENCE HANDBOOK

A GUIDE FOR RESPONDING TO VIOLENCE OR THREATS IN THE USGS

November 1999

GENERAL INFORMATION

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) is committed to ensuring adequate safety for the security of its employees. While the USGS is proud of its safe workplaces, we are concerned about the reality of violence in society and its potential occurrence in our workplaces. In recent years, we have all become more aware of violence and threatening behavior in American workplaces. Violence in the workplace can have devastating effects on the productivity of organizations and on the quality of life of employees.

We must take all reasonable steps to protect ourselves and others in the workplace from violent incidents that may result in injury or harm and also to protect Government and personal property. By working together, we can ensure that the USGS establishes and maintains a work environment that is safe and healthy for all.

This handbook provides you with guidance for responding appropriately to violence, threats, reports of threats, or questions that arise in these situations. At the end of the handbook are appendices that provide guidance on dealing with violent situations, a list of resources for additional information, and a sample emergency contact information sheet.

POLICY

All employees are responsible for maintaining a safe work environment. Acts of violence or threats of violence, either explicit or veiled, verbal or written, are unacceptable and will not be tolerated in the workplace. This includes harassment, intimidation, and other disruptive behavior. All reports of incidents will be taken seriously and will be dealt with appropriately. Further, possession of firearms, ammunition, and dangerous or deadly weapons in USGS controlled or occupied space is prohibited by law, except for those individuals who are authorized to carry firearms.

DEFINITIONS

Threatening Behavior is an individual's threat, either overt or implied, to commit an act of physical aggression or harm at the workplace. Examples include, but are not limited to:

Threats to cause bodily harm or death to another person (including stalking, bullying, or other abusive or aggressive behavior);

Threats to commit sabotage or destroy, damage, or deface government or personal property located at the workplace;

Making harassing or threatening phone calls; and

Unusual, bizarre, or menacing behavior or statements that a reasonable person would interpret as carrying the potential for violent acts.

Workplace violence is any act or attempted act of physical aggression or harm by an individual that occurs at the workplace. Examples include, but are not limited to:

Causing or attempting to cause bodily harm or death to another person;

Acting or attempting to sabotage, destroy, damage, or deface government or personal property in the workplace; and

Possession of unlawful and unauthorized weapons in the workplace.

RESPONSIBILITIES

We all have a responsibility to ensure that USGS remains a safe place to work. Specific responsibilities are spelled out below.

Assessment and Response Team (ART) is a team responsible for evaluating our current ability to handle incidents, assessing the seriousness of a threat or violence problem, and developing response options. The ART will vary in size and composition based on the size and location of each office and the circumstances of any incident. Ideally, membership of the team will include an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) counselor, security personnel (where available), and a staff member from the Office of Personnel. Depending on the circumstances, a staff member from the external affairs office, the headquarters or regional safety managers, supervisors, division human resources personnel, and bargaining unit representatives may participate in the ART. In larger offices, an ART should be established within 90 days of the publication of this handbook and should meet to evaluate the ability to respond to incidents; after the initial meeting, the ART will meet annually and in response to any violent or threatening behavior. In offices where there are no security or EAP personnel, management should evaluate the current ability to handle incidents, consulting with the Federal Protective Service or local law enforcement, within 90 days of the issuance of this handbook. Should violence or threatening behavior occur in those offices, the Federal Protective Service or local law enforcement should be contacted for an immediate response, and the Office of Personnel consulted as to appropriate follow up actions.

Bargaining Unit representatives are responsible for reporting threats, suspicious activities, or acts of violence to management. Where bargaining unit employees are involved in threatening or violent activities, either as a participant in violence or as a victim or witness, bargaining unit representatives will serve as members of the Assessment and Response Team.

Employees are responsible for reporting threats, suspicious activities, or acts of violence to their supervisor, regardless of the relationship between the individual who initiated the threat or threatening behavior and the person who was threatened or was the focus of the violent behavior. It does not matter when or where the threats occurred. Employees reporting threats shall not be subject to interference, coercion, discrimination, penalty, censure, or reprisal as a result of these

reports. Employees are encouraged to provide their supervisors with updated emergency contact information; a sample form that may be used for that purpose is shown in Appendix 3.

Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is responsible for consulting with management and the personnel office on an appropriate response plan, and for providing short-term counseling and referral services to employees. EAP counselors will serve on the Assessment and Response Team and assist in determining the severity of any threat and the appropriate response to the threat. If the EAP counselor learns that an employee is at imminent risk for violence, he/she will notify the appropriate authorities for action.

Federal Protective Service (FPS) or local Security personnel, where available, are responsible for taking necessary actions to ensure the safety of the workplace. This includes, but is not limited to, providing first response to violent acts, contacting local law enforcement offices for immediate response as needed in individual circumstances, denying access to USGS facilities to individuals who pose a clear threat, and obtaining information as needed to make an assessment of an individual's potential for violent behavior. Local security personnel will serve on the Assessment and Response Team and provide advice and guidance to managers and employees on precautionary actions they should take in cases of threats or violence. Where FPS and security personnel are not available, their role may be fulfilled by local law enforcement as appropriate.

Servicing personnel offices are responsible for consulting with employees, supervisors, and managers when threats or violence have occurred and will assist managers in taking appropriate corrective action. They will convene a meeting of the Assessment and Response Team in response to any reported threat or violent act. In addition, servicing personnel offices will provide periodic training to managers and supervisors on appropriate responses to threatening and violent behavior.

Supervisors and managers are responsible for evaluating, investigating, and taking immediate appropriate action, consistent with this handbook, when threats or violence have occurred in the workplace. They should ensure that employees understand their responsibility to report threatening remarks or behavior. Management should refer employees who are experiencing personal problems that may be impacting their performance or conduct to the EAP; however, employee participation is entirely voluntary. Supervisors and managers will serve as needed on the Assessment and Response Team.

THREATS AND VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE

WARNING SIGNS

No one can always predict when a human being will become violent. There is no absolute specific profile of a potentially dangerous individual; however, indicators of increased risk of violent behavior are available. Some of these indicators may include, but are not limited to:

Direct or veiled threats of harm;

Intimidating, belligerent, harassing, bullying, or other inappropriate and aggressive behavior;

Numerous conflicts with supervisors and other employees;

Bringing a weapon to the workplace, brandishing a weapon in the workplace, making inappropriate references to guns, or a fascination with weapons;

Statements showing a fascination with incidents of workplace violence, statements indicating approval of the use of violence to resolve a problem, or statements indicating identification with perpetrators of workplace violence;

Statements indicating desperation (over family, financial or other personal problems) to the point of committing suicide;

Drug/alcohol abuse; and

Extreme changes in behavior.

Each of these behaviors indicates the potential for escalation of violent behavior. None should be ignored. By identifying the problem and dealing with it appropriately, we may be able to prevent violence from happening. Employees who recognize these behaviors in themselves are encouraged to seek assistance from the Employee Assistance Program or their family physician. Any employees who notice the above indicators in coworkers should notify their supervisors. Supervisors who have seen the above indicators in an employee, or have received a report from one employee regarding another, should immediately contact their servicing personnel office for advice and assistance in determining the appropriate course of action.

THREATS AND THREATENING BEHAVIOR

The following types of behavior are unacceptable, will not be tolerated and require appropriate actions by managers and supervisors. Employees who exhibit this type of behavior will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action, which could include removal from the Federal Service. Employees may also be placed on administrative leave or detailed to another position or office. The employee will also be referred to the Employee Assistance Program (EAP); although such participation is voluntary, an employee's participation in EAP counseling may mitigate the severity of any penalty arising out of the behavior. Supervisors must contact their servicing personnel office for advice and guidance on the appropriate action.

Threats may be direct statements such as “I am going to kill you,” or veiled statements such as “Something bad will happen to someone,” “I’m afraid I may hurt someone,” or “I think about killing myself.” Some of the ways employees may receive threats include:

Remarks made directly to the target of the threat orally, either in person or through telephone calls;

Remarks made to one person about another; or

Remarks made in letters, notes, or electronic messages.

When you are aware of such threatening remarks, do not ignore the information, even if you do not personally believe the threat is serious. Employees who receive or witness threatening remarks must report them to their supervisors; supervisors must immediately contact their servicing personnel office, which will convene the Assessment and Response Team. The Assessment and Response Team will evaluate the situation, determine the seriousness of the threat and determine the appropriate action.

Intimidating or harassing remarks may not actually contain a threat. However, these type of remarks can create a hostile work environment and must be addressed. Employees should report such remarks to their immediate supervisors or higher level management, who should contact their servicing personnel office for advice and guidance on the appropriate action.

Intimidating, harassing, or confrontational behavior can include such things as physically crowding, stalking, or directing menacing looks or gestures at an individual to create fear. Such actions are inappropriate and will not be tolerated. When ignored, they can escalate to more serious problems. Employees should report intimidating or harassing behavior to their supervisors. Supervisors should contact their servicing personnel office for advice and guidance on the appropriate action.

Irrational or inappropriate behavior often bothers others and can be extremely disruptive. These behaviors may be a warning sign of violence or may be indicative of other problems. Examples of irrational or inappropriate behaviors may include unwelcome name calling, use of obscene language, throwing objects and the like. Employees should notify their supervisors when they witness or are the object of irrational or inappropriate behavior; supervisors should contact their servicing personnel office for advice on the actions needed to respond to such behavior.

VIOLENCE

Violence in the Workplace

Any violent act in the workplace must be immediately addressed. In an emergency situation, secure your own safety and then call security personnel or the local police. If you can safely do

so, keep the involved parties calm and separated until help arrives. Medical attention should be obtained for any injured individuals. The servicing personnel office should be immediately notified of the incident and will convene the Assessment and Response Team.

The Federal Protective Service (FPS), security personnel, or local law enforcement must immediately be contacted if it is reported that an employee or visitor has a firearm or other dangerous weapon at the worksite. Do not attempt to disarm the individual yourself.

If the violent individual is an employee, he/she must immediately be removed from the workplace and placed on administrative leave pending a determination of the appropriate response to the violent act. The employee's identification and any access keys should be confiscated to ensure that the person can not enter the workplace again without agency permission; where possible, this should be done by the FPS, security personnel or local law enforcement.. The violent individual will be subject to discipline, up to and including removal from the Federal service. He/she may also be subject to criminal penalties; in such cases the employee may be indefinitely suspended without pay pending resolution of the criminal charges.

If the violent individual is a visitor, he/she will be removed from USGS premises by the FPS, security personnel or local law enforcement and will be subject to criminal penalties.

Individuals who witness a violent act in the workplace should make as many observations as they can about the incident. These observations and any actions taken in response to the act should be documented when safely possible; this documentation should be in writing and dated. Copies of these notes should be given to security personnel and the servicing personnel office. These notes may provide valuable information and will be useful when proposing or taking corrective or precautionary measures.

The EAP will be available for critical incident counseling for employees who witness or are the subject of the violent behavior. Such counseling may consist of group meetings or individual employee sessions. Employees will be allowed administrative leave to attend such sessions.

Off-Duty Violence/Threats

If an employee commits a violent act or engages in threatening behavior while off-duty, the response to such off-duty conduct will depend on the type and severity of the violence, and its nexus, or connection, to the employee's USGS position. Each case of off-duty violence or threats will need to be individually evaluated. If the behavior is clearly related to the workplace, it will be treated as it occurred on duty. A supervisor who learns of an employee's off-duty violence must immediately contact the servicing personnel office. The servicing personnel office will provide advice on the appropriate action.

Domestic Violence

The effects of domestic violence can show up at work in the form of reduced productivity, absenteeism, and increased risk of violence in the workplace. Any employee who has obtained an order or protection or restraining order against an individual should notify the Federal Protective Service or security personnel and, where possible, provide them with a picture of that individual. In cases where there is a clear threat to workplace safety the Assessment and Response Team will be convened as needed. Employees who are victims of domestic violence can contact the EAP counselor or their supervisor for assistance. Supervisors, team leaders, and co-workers who suspect an employee is being abused at home can contact their supervisor or the EAP for assistance. Further, information is available in the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Guidebook: *Responding to Domestic Violence: Where Federal Employees Can Find Help*; copies can be obtained from your servicing personnel office or on line from OPM at the address shown in Appendix 2.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS

Following any threat or violence incidence, the Assessment and Response Team will review the response(s) to the situation to assess the appropriateness of the response and determine what could have been done better. They will also determine what preventive measures should be implemented to prevent or lessen the impact of a similar incident. Management will be advised of the results of this review.

Anyone exposed to threatening or violent events, at or away from work, needs support from family, co-workers, and management. When they receive this support, they may feel less isolated, distrustful, and withdrawn. Active support tends to promote increased commitment, productivity, and better recovery. Individual or group counseling sessions may be necessary for some individuals. The EAP and servicing personnel office can help supervisors and employees choose appropriate post-violence activities.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE CHECKLIST

COPING WITH THREATS AND VIOLENCE

For an angry or hostile encounter

- Stay calm by taking deep, slow breaths
- Listen attentively
- Maintain eye contact
- Be courteous and patient
- Keep the situation in your control
- Maintain a calm, quiet tone of voice
- Attempt to avoid arguing or making statements that might intensify the individual's angry/hostile demeanor

For a person shouting, swearing, and threatening

- Signal a coworker or supervisor that you need help
- Have someone call security personnel
- Do not make any calls yourself
- Avoid statements and/or behaviors that could escalate the individual's threatening statements/behavior

For someone with a weapon

- Stay calm
- Maintain eye contact
- Stall for time
- Keep talking...but follow instructions of the person with the weapon
- Don't risk harm to yourself and others
- Don't ever try to be a hero
- Never try to grab a weapon
- Watch for a safe chance to escape, then contact security personnel or local police if they have not already been contacted

TELEPHONED SUICIDE OR BOMB THREATS

- Stay calm. Keep talking
- Do not hang up
- Signal a coworker or supervisor to contact security personnel
- Ask the caller to repeat the message; write it down
- For a bomb threat, ask where it is and when it will go off; repeat these questions if necessary
- Listen for background noises; write down what you hear
- Write down whether it is a man or a woman; pitch or tone of voice or accent; anything you notice
- Try to get the caller's name, location, and phone number

EMERGENCY PHONE NUMBERS

Security Office: _____

Health Unit: _____

Police: _____

Ambulance: _____

Personnel: _____

EAP: _____

Federal Protective Service: _____

RESOURCES

GOVERNMENT:

**Office of Personnel Management
Employee Relations and Health Services Center**
1900 E Street, NW
Washington, DC 20415
<http://www.opm.gov/>

Publications:

A Manager's Handbook: Handling Traumatic Events
<http://www.opm.gov/ehs/index.html-ssi>
*Responding to Domestic Violence: Where Federal
Employees Can Find Help*
<http://www.opm.gov/ehs/index.html-ssi>

Department of Health and Human Services
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health
Robert A. Taft Laboratories
4676 Columbia Parkway
Cincinnati, Ohio 45226-1998
<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/homepage.html/>

Publication:

Violence in the Workplace: Risk Factors and Prevention Strategies

Department of Justice
National Institute of Justice
National Criminal Justice Reference Service
Bureau of Justice Assistance Clearinghouse
P.O. Box 6000
Rockville, MD 20849-6000
(800) 851-3420
<http://www.ncjrs.org/>

Publications:

Violence and Theft in the Workplace
The Cycle of Violence

Psychoactive Substances and Violence

Department of Justice
Violence Against Women Office
<http://www.usdoj.gov/vawo/>

Department of Labor
Occupational Safety and Health Administration
200 Constitution Avenue, SW, Room N3107
Washington, DC 20210
General Information: (202) 219-8031
Publications: (202) 219-4667
<http://www.osha.gov>

Department of Labor
Women's Bureau
200 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20210
(202) 219-6665
<http://www.dol.gov/dol/wb>

Publication:

Domestic Violence: A Workplace Issue

NON-GOVERNMENT: **American Psychiatric Association**
Division of Public Affairs
1400 K Street, NW
Washington, DC 20005
<http://www.psych.org/>

Publication:

Violence and Mental Illness

American Psychological Association
1200 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20236
(202) 955-7600
<http://www.apa.org/>

National Center for Victims of Crime
P.O. Box 588

Arlington, VA 22216
(800) FYI-CALL
<http://www.nvc.org/>

National Coalition Against Domestic Violence
<http://www.ncadv.org/>

National Domestic Violence Hotline
(800) 799-SAFE
(800) 787-3224 (TTY)

National Organization for Victim Assistance
1757 Park Road, NW
Washington, DC 20010
(202) TRY-NOVA

Partnerships Against Violence Network
<http://www.pavnet.org/>

EMERGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION SHEET

Use of this information sheet is voluntary. The completed form can be given to your supervisor, who will retain it in his/her files and use the information only in the event of an emergency requiring notification of a relative or significant other. If you elect to provide this information to your supervisor, whether using this sheet or in another fashion, you should update it whenever there are changes.

Employee Name: _____

Home Address: _____

Home Phone Number: _____

Emergency Contact Person: _____
(Name and Phone Numbers) _____

Alternate Contact: _____
(Name and Phone Numbers) _____

Physician Name: _____
Physician Phone Number: _____

Blood Type: _____

Allergies: _____

NOTE TO SUPERVISORS: The information on this sheet is confidential and should be stored in a secure location; access to the information should be limited to those with a need to know during an emergency.