



Victim Services of Waterloo Region

Workplace Violence Fact Sheet no. 3

Threat Assessment

Threats exist in a number of different fashions and are often a predecessor to violence. Recognizing threats and dealing with them is important in the violence prevention process. While most threats will not lead to violence, some will, and all should be dealt with in a serious manner.

What is a Threat?

It is important to define what constitutes as a threat. There can be no confusion or employees will take advantage of the ambiguity. The definition must be workable, and need not be taken directly from the Criminal Code of Canada. For example, "any verbal or physical conduct that threatens property or personal safety or that could reasonably could be interpreted as intent to cause harm".

Threats and behaviour
detect → assess → manage

Detecting Threats

Employees must be encouraged to report threats to management, and must feel safe and comfortable doing so. It is important to promote a climate of trust between employees and management.

Employers must also determine how threats are reported. Some possibilities could be a

designated person, a hotline number or a suggestion box for those who wish to remain anonymous. The chosen method should be highly publicised: placed on posters, bulletin boards, on pay stubs, etc. Some care should also be taken to ensure that cultural assumptions of what is threatening are considered, and the process should be evaluated and updated regularly.

Assessing Threats

Goal:

1. Assess the threat level on a danger hierarchy.
2. Based on that, determine an appropriate intervention.

A good threat assessment will thoroughly analyse:

- The exact nature and context of the threat and/or threatening behaviour.
- The identified target (general or specific).
- The threatener's apparent motivation.
- The threatener's ability to carry out the threat.
- The threatener's background, including work history, criminal record, mental health history, military history and past behaviour on the job.

When conducting a threat assessment it is wise to have it done by a professional psychologist or psychiatrist, for legal and practical reasons. They are well trained and equipped to conduct such assessments.

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Threat Management

Many threats turn out to be harmless blowing off steam and require nothing more than a formal admonition to the employee that their language or conduct was inappropriate and violated company policy. If there is a threat of immediate danger, telephone the police immediately.

Plans should indicate where management can get immediate, emergency assessment assistance, if required. It is wise to run an assessment after an incident, before firing an employee. Preparation and evaluation may lead to a better human resources decision and prevent more violent behaviour from the employee.

Threat Assessment and Incident Response Teams

Plans should designate who will oversee the company's violence prevention program, threat assessment and crisis management. Teams should have the authority, training and support to meet their responsibilities. They must respond to *all* incidents that frighten *any* employee. They must have contingency plans and be prepared to deal with the media in the aftermath of a violent event. Teams should contact outside agencies to conduct assessments for them, and should have those relationships established before an incident occurs. The team should include people from different

backgrounds and disciplines within the company's various departments. Clarify duties and authority to make communication more clear during an emergency. Outside, expert assistance may help. Keep clear records of all interventions, record results and evaluate regularly.

Questions to Ask

- ❑ What prompted the offender to threaten or take action at this time?
- ❑ How does the offender view himself in relation to everyone else?
- ❑ Do they accept responsibility for their actions?
- ❑ How does the offender cope with disappointment, loss or failure?
- ❑ How does the offender interact with coworkers?
- ❑ Do they feel they are being treated unfairly by the company or have problems with management/supervisors?
- ❑ Are they concerned with job practices and responsibilities?
- ❑ Have they received unfavourable performance reviews, or reprimands?
- ❑ Are they experiencing personal or financial problems?
- ❑ Is there evidence of substance abuse, mental illness or depression?
- ❑ Have they shown an interest in violence through movies, games, books or magazines?
- ❑ Are they preoccupied with violent themes, events or with recently acquired weapons?
- ❑ Are they obsessed with others or engaged in any stalking or surveillance activity?
- ❑ Has the offender spoken of homicide or suicide?
- ❑ Do they have a history of violent behaviour?
- ❑ Does the offender have a plan of action? Do they have the means, knowledge and the wherewithal to carry out their plan?

The next fact sheet in this series will address domestic violence and stalking in the workplace.



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