



Make It Our Business

Guidelines for Setting up Security Measures to Stop Domestic Violence in the Workplace

As of June 15, 2010, all employers in Ontario are responsible for protecting workers when domestic violence follows them into the workplace. Ontario's Occupational Health and Safety Act states, in section 32.0.4:

“If an employer becomes aware, or ought reasonably to be aware, that domestic violence that would likely expose a worker to physical injury may occur in the workplace, the employer shall take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances for the protection of the worker.”

Employers, and others responsible for workplace safety, need to know how to keep everyone safe. In this guide we suggest ways to prevent and respond to issues. You decide which of these measures work best for your workplace.

These guidelines talk about:

- Why we need workplace domestic violence security measures
- When security measures are needed
- Having dedicated security staff and alternatives
- What security staff do
- Preventing violence through security
- Security responses to violence
- Protection order assistance

Threat assessment, risk management and safety planning are discussed in the Make It Our Business Suggested Guidelines for Threat Assessment and Risk Management in the Workplace.

Before you start

As you decide how to adapt this information, ask yourself:

- “What did our risk assessment tell us about the potential for violence in this workplace?”
- “What are the objectives of our security measures?”
- “What resources can help us meet those objectives?”
- “Who would we ask for advice and help?”
- “What would we do if an employee identified a need for safety and security?”
- “What security-related activities could we offer?”

Why we have security measures

Security measures help keep everyone in the workplace safe from violence and harm.

Domestic violence can lead to incidents that cause serious injury or death. Sometimes, the level of violence can grow quickly. Putting the right security in place can help you reduce the risk of domestic violence in your workplace. It can also help you reduce the force of a difficult or dangerous situation.

You need to design workplace security measures that:

- reduce the risk of domestic violence occurring in the workplace
- protect employees who are victims of domestic violence
- ensure staff respond quickly and effectively to cases of domestic violence in the workplace

How you define your security needs depends on:

- the physical structure, location and accessibility of your workplace
- the type of job and nature of the work performed
- hazards your workers experience
- any risks your employees face

How you help victims of domestic violence depends on their needs and preferences. Plan your security measures to be flexible enough to respond on a case-by-case basis.

Why we have security measures

It is always better to stop an issue before it starts. This means you always need to have security measures in place. Start with measures that can put a stop to any violent attacks or threats. An employee who is facing domestic violence is vulnerable at work. The abuser usually knows where she works. Work is often one of the stable factors in her life. Even if the victim moves her home and changes her phone number, her abuser can find her at work.

If the victim and the abuser work in the same place it is even harder for her to escape the unwanted attention of her abuser. You will need to be cautious and avoid giving the abuser access to the victim in the workplace.

Anyone who is thinking about separating from her abuser, is in the process of separating or has separated recently needs extra security.

When you have immediate concerns about safety, call the police.

Dedicated security staff and alternatives

The Bill 168 (subsection 70 (2), paragraph 50) amends the Occupational Health and Safety Act by: “requiring an employer to designate a person in a workplace to act as a workplace co-ordinator with respect to workplace violence and workplace harassment, and prescribing the functions and duties of the co-ordinator.” [emphasis added]

You need to make someone in your organization the key contact or coordinator for your security measures. This person has the responsibility and training needed to ensure you have effective security measures.

If you work in a larger organization, you may have a dedicated security team. However, a small or medium-size business, non-profit organization or government office may not have security staff. In these environments, you may want to assign managers, human resources representatives, members of health and safety committees or reception staff as security contacts. You may decide to ask the workplace co-ordinator to do this job.

Everyone one who does this job needs training in basic security measures and protocols to handle issues of domestic violence and security.

Some employers may ask an external security company for help.

Violent incidents can still happen, even if your workplace is prepared. As an employer, learn to see the signs of domestic abuse. Know how to act quickly to reduce the risk for everyone. And, make sure the abuse victim knows about any help available to her.

You also need to know what technical and specialized resources and services are available. For example, you may need to hire someone who can complete a complex risk assessment, specialized threat assessments, and specialized safety plans. Outside agencies can also:

- provide intervention strategies,
- create enhanced security procedures,
- show you how to deal with protective orders,
- help you handle traumatic events,
- provide legal, medical or psychological assistance to victims, and
- conduct threat management response reviews.

Whether or not you have dedicated security staff, coordinate your needs and response with local police and community resources. Learn the range of community expertise available to you from the Make It Our Business Guidelines for Finding Community Resources for Workplace Domestic Violence.

Your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provider may be able to give you other security suggestions. They may also be able to put you in touch with a local women’s shelter or work directly with your employees to help keep them safe.

What security staff do

The following is a list of possible duties for security staff. Your staff may:

- Develop and put in place workplace safety plans. In some organizations, external specialists (police, experts at women's shelters, the Assaulted Women's Helpline, web-based sources) develop the safety plans. If you have someone outside your business create the plans, you will need some of your staff help you put these plans into practice.
- Be a key member of a Workplace Violence Team (or Incident Response Team/ First Responder Team). This team can help develop and apply workplace safety plans.
- Work independently and with the workplace violence co-ordinator, management, Human Resources, EAP service providers, union representatives, health and safety committees, and legal counsel. This team should have six people in it, at most.
- Develop security measures and protocols for your workplace. This includes defining different security needs for different jobs or work locations. You may need security based on your experiences with violence in your workplace.
- Be one of the key contacts for victims of violence.
- Help develop security measures that meet the needs of the victim and the situation.
- Liaise with local police, community services, and threat assessment professionals.
- Be trained to see the signs of Domestic Violence and communicate well [[hyperlink to Guidelines on How to Communicate with Employees at Risk of Domestic Violence](#)] with victims of violence. They will also need training to make EAP referrals and refer any victim to the right resources.
- Be trained to know the pressures and behavioural patterns of domestic violence as they relate to security and issues of workplace violence.
- Act as a resource for internal information, education, training, advice and help on domestic violence. People like the workplace co-ordinator, first-line supervisors, human resources, union representatives, and victims will all need your help.
- Receive from and provide to management, employees and others information, including personal information, related to a risk of workplace violence from a person with a history of violent behaviour [Section 32.0.5(3) of the amendments to the Occupational Health and Safety Act] (legislated Duty to Warn);
- Be non-judgemental and respectful of the choices a victim makes and balance the security needs of the workplace with the choices and preferences of the victim.
- Be aware of what it means when a person makes threats, stalks, or refuses to respect protective orders.
- Need to conduct an initial threat and risk assessment screening. You may need to work with or refer the victim to specialists who can conduct such assessments.
- Follow-up. Find out how the employee is and what is happening with this issue. Follow-up with the workplace co-ordinator, the employee's supervisor, union representative, co-workers or Human Resources. Document your follow-up activities.

Security measures – preventing abuse

To prevent violence, your workplace needs to:

- have well lit in parking areas, walkways and building entrances
- have emergency call boxes or buttons in parking areas
- separate employees from visitors or clients
- have monitoring or surveillance tools (such as video/CCTV monitoring and recording, security patrols)
- have building access control (such as electronic access control, requiring badge access, visitor check-in, restricted access and limiting access to employees only or escorted visitors, security locks)

Your employees also need clear policies about responding to workplace domestic violence. They need training on these policies and procedures and training on recognizing warning signs of domestic violence. Help all employees to learn the warning signs of domestic violence. They need to know the warning signs that the victim may be at risk of being killed.

Security measures – preventing abuse

These are some of security responses you may need when an issue comes up. Which ones you need depend on the situation you and your employee are facing.

Assess the risk

Conduct a threat assessment yourself or have a specialist help you (see Suggested Guidelines for Threat Assessment and Risk Management in the Workplace). [[hyperlink to guideline](#)]

Get a copy of any protection orders and review the terms. Find out if the workplace is named or included in the protection order's no contact provisions (which may specify staying a certain distance apart).

Provide support

Support the victim by finding experts who can help her and her children stay safe at home, at work, in the community and at school or daycare. Find safety planning resources for her. One resource that you can offer is the Neighbours, Friends and Families brochure, Safety Planning for Women Who Are Abused [[hyperlink to brochure](#)].

One way to keep someone safe at home is to install a home security system. You can help by finding someone who can do this job or by helping pay for the system. You can also help the employee get a protective order that includes the workplace. Show her how to document violations occurring at work, at home, or in the community.

You can find out if your employee needs more help by keeping contact with her regularly. Finally, make sure your EAP offers good domestic violence counselling and referrals, including support for safety planning.

Encourage clear communication at work

People can find it hard to talk about threats and incidents of violence. Try to have employees talk to someone in security (or supervisor, workplace co-ordinator, or Human Resources) about any issues they face.

To keep people safe, they need information. Talk to staff about your workplace safety plan. The more people who know, the more who can help protect a victim.

When a person has a protection order, some staff may need to know about it. Make sure these people know how to support and enforce its provisions.

If several departments or people are involved in responding to domestic violence in the workplace, make sure that they talk to each other often.

If community experts are involved in the couple's case, find out what information can be shared. Ask them to let you know about anything that would change the level of danger to the victim. Remember, risk of violence can improve or get worse depending on how a situation develops.

Getting to and from work safely

To make sure an employee is safe, you may need to walk her to and from her car (or bus, subway) and place of work. You may need to walk her to a safer entrance, one at the front or back of the building. If you are walking someone to her car, check that the car is safe, that no one is in it, or has tampered with it. You can also help this person get to work. This may include car pooling or free taxi service.

You can also offer this person priority parking or an assigned parking space in secure areas, such as near the building that is well lit. You can hide the victim's car in locations that an abuser cannot see or access.

Staying safe at work

There are many ways you can help keep someone safe at work. Get a photo or description of the abuser and give it to reception and security staff. Let them know what to do if they see the abuser at the workplace. You can also get the make, description and license plate of the abuser's vehicles. This gives security and parking staff another way to watch for an abuser on site.

Have security and parking staff watch the parking areas and building entrances. They can also patrol the victim's work location more often. In the office or work area, you can install panic buttons that let someone get help quickly, in an emergency. Make sure staff know when to call 9-1-1.

While we must always respect privacy, sometimes the best or the only way an employer can prevent domestic violence from occurring in the workplace is to share information about the situation with others. This can include personal information that relates to a risk of workplace violence from a person with a history of violent behaviour.

Staying safe by being less visible

To make it harder for an abuser to find an employee you can remove the employee's name from office door and remove her name, phone number, work location from published directories. Remove her name from any web-based resources that the public can see. You can also make sure that this person does not have to work in an area that can be seen from outside the building. You may also be able to move the employee to a different work site or let her work from home. Change the employee's phone number and keep the new number private. Let co-workers know not to give out this new number. Have staff screen and re-direct her calls. You can also give her a phone that has caller ID. Have another employee record her voice mail message. This way her voice is not on the phone.

Changing a schedule

Changing an employee's schedule can also make it harder for an abuser to find her. This means coming to work and leaving work at different times or changing her work schedule or shift hours. The employee may also want to work less hours for a period of time (paid or unpaid), or take a leave of absence.

Keeping an abuser away from the workplace

Keeping an employee safe may also mean keeping her abuser away from the workplace. If the employee has a protective order, document and report any violations that occur at work. In cases where the employee does not have a protective order, let the abuser know that any more calls or visits will be reported as harassment. You can also ban the abusing partner from the workplace. This includes sending the abuser a no trespass letter that tells them they are not allowed at your workplace.

Create an abusive caller mail box. Rather than speaking with an abuser, employees (including the victim) can send the call to this mail box. The message should tell the caller not to call again and lists the consequences for doing so. Train employees on when and how to use abusive caller mail box.

What you can do if both the victim and abuser work for you

There are cases where both the victim and abuser work for you. If this happens, make sure that the abuser does not have access to the victim at work. This means keeping the victim's schedule, work hours and location private. Do not schedule both employees to work at the same time. If possible, have them work at different sites. Limit their workplace access to scheduled work hours. You may also need to move the abuser (or victim if she desires) to another physical location.

Talk to the abuser's supervisor, the workplace co-ordinator and Human Resources (union representative, work group, etc., as appropriate) about your safety plan. Let them know how they can help keep everyone safe.

Hold the abuser accountable for any unacceptable behaviour in the workplace. Use disciplinary procedures to deal with abuse. If the abuser engages in violence or other criminal activity such as stalking or unauthorized electronic monitoring in the workplace, call the police.

Working with the police

When an employee has a protective order you may want to talk to the police. They can help you understand its terms and when to call them. They can show you how to enforce this order at your workplace.

In situations where the risk of violence harm is high, you may need 24-hour security or off-duty police officers at your workplace.

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What you need to do in an emergency

The employee at risk should have a cell phone pre-programmed with 9-1-1 for emergencies. This person also needs to know where the possible routes of escape are and where there are rooms safe to go to, at their workplace.

Let other employees know that they should not physically try stop violence. Tell them to quickly leave a potentially violent incident or location and call the police.

When you have immediate concerns about safety, call the police.

These Guidelines are part of a campaign of the Centre for Research & Education on Violence against Women & Children in the Faculty of Education at the University of Western Ontario.

Sources

The Corporate Alliance to End Partner Violence (www.caepv.org) – a national organization founded in 1995 by business leaders and progressive companies to exchange information and collaborate on projects to prevent partner violence.

Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Violence Prevention, Atlanta, Georgia. Inventory of Workplace Interventions Designed to Prevent Intimate Partner Violence. (2006)

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