Security Guidelines for Managers

Deakin University is generally a safe place to work with very little risk of being subject to threats or violence. However there have been occasions where staff have subject to threats or have felt threatened. In these situations it is important to know what to do – at its simplest this means contacting Security on 222.

Managers must ensure that all of their staff are aware of how to contact Security. Staff should be also periodically reminded that all VOIP phones have a speed dial setting for Security.

Preventing Workplace Violence

Managers that have staff who deal directly with students or the public should discuss and develop with staff protocols to address "difficult" or "aggressive" clients. If there is a real risk of workplace violence then managers must under the OHS Act look at prevention measures. The first prevention measure that must considered is whether it is possible to eliminate the risk completely. In practice this means discussing with staff situations or factors that can lead to threats or violence and how they can be avoided by changing work practices or means of communication. For example, eliminating the risk of armed robbery by not handling or storing cash.

If elimination is not practical, then reduction of the risk by engineering measures must be considered. This includes factors such as workplace design and elimination of higher risk work practices. Under the OHS Act designers are now required to take into account OHS issues in the design of workplaces and equipment. However managers still need to clearly communicate to the designers the risks that have been identified. Design considerations may be as simple as having locked doors or counters that cannot be jumped or easily reached across. Work practice considerations include working alone or seeing clients in an isolated location where assistance is not readily available.

Mitigating Workplace Violence

If engineering controls are not sufficient to reduce the risk to an acceptable level, then threat reduction measures such as alarms, panic buttons and training must be considered.

Unfortunately there is no easy to learn standard response when presented with a threatening situation or even an assault. However there are techniques that can be used to diffuse a threatening situation. These techniques are not a guarantee of safety but they do reduce the chances of escalation and harm. These responses centre on body language, choice of words and listening technique.

Much of the advice about managing a confrontation with the violent or threatening person is often described as common sense. This can include:

- Acting to defuse the situation. Avoiding provocative language. Never arguing, accusing or telling the person to calm down. Acting assertively but not aggressively whilst ignoring verbal abuse.
- Acknowledging the person's feelings without necessarily agreeing with them. Avoiding being judgmental or defensive.
- Maintaining physical space between you and the aggressor. Avoiding entering their "personal space"-- keeping a safe distance of 1 to 2 metres if possible.
- Remaining calm and using a quiet voice and neutral body language.
- Maintaining eye contact.
- Letting them vent a while and listening sympathetically (lean forward, give eye contact, nod in recognition that you have heard what has been said). It might be appropriate to write down what is said.
- Looking for common ground or points of agreement. Express any concerns using 'I' messages. Acknowledge the validity of concerns and clarify the feelings of the person "I can see you're really upset by ….." Offer to talk now or later. If the aggressor is yelling, tell them it's easier to hear when they speak quietly. The key is to help the aggressor stay open to negotiation, counselling or positive resolution of the issue.
- Exhausting the list of complaints, then reading the list back, asking if it is complete. Help the aggressor devise possible solutions if realistic.

- Apologizing, if appropriate. Provide helpful verbal responses or short term options, if possible. Do not make promises that you can't fulfil.
- When following up after a fight or confrontation, always allow cooling off time first before any mediation or follow up.

In reality it can be difficult when in a very stressful situation to apply these "common sense" rules. This diffusing approach is more likely to be effective if the staff member has been trained. The Division of Student Life can provide training in these techniques which are most effectively learned through experiential training. After a risk assessment carried out by the budget centre, the training would be provided to groups identified as medium to high risk.

Recovering from Workplace Violence

Even in the best controlled workplace there is still a risk of workplace violence. If it does occur managers must take steps to ensure that all affected parties (staff, students and themselves) have good support and any counselling necessary. If an event does occur, even a "minor" one, it must be investigated and appropriate lessons drawn.

A summary of various measures that can be used to eliminate or reduce the risk of workplace violence is attached.

Further information can be obtained from the OHS Unit in Human Resources Services Division (Geelong 72869, Melbourne 68175).

Strategies to prevent, contain and recover from occupational violence

PREVENTION STRATEGIES

Strategy	Specific examples
Elimination and Substitution	
Reduce or eliminate the handling of cash where practical	• electronic funds transfer including direct debit
Reduce or eliminate direct contact, where practical, with clients where there is a risk on confrontation	• handling queries / complaints effectively by phone and email • use of intelligent inter-active on-line processes to reduce client frustration and annoyance (with waiting times, and poorly targeted information) • providing relevant and easily understood information on the web
Reduce the risk of workplace violence at source	• identify and support individuals who may be "at risk" of resorting to violent behaviour • provide managers/supervisors with information and training on handling and managing workplace stress factors
Engineering Controls	
(1) target hardening	
isolate high risk areas through security controls	• high risk areas locked off and accessible only by passes • restrict and funnel access through control points
reduce face-to-face contact where there is a risk on confrontation	• use of electronic funds transfer • secure cashiers
reduce access to staff	• wider and higher counters at customer service workstations with raised floor height on staff side • easily accessible and safe refuges for staff in event of emergency • two exit doors in interview rooms
reduce the damage potential	• use of metal detectors • choose fittings that minimise their opportunity to be used as weapons
(2) increased visibility	• client contact occurs in public or highly visible places where possible • meet clients at neutral, public locations • use closed circuit television • high lighting levels • eliminate potential ambush or lurking points by choice and location of vegetation and interior layout
(3) decreased temptation and stressors	• provide comfortable air conditioned waiting areas • provide access to well maintained basic facilities including toilets and drinking water • provide clear signage and queue lines or system • use of time-locked safes • feedback about waiting times • use of clear appointment times where complex or long interactions are involved • streaming customer service depending upon complexity (fast lanes) • strategic presence and use of security personnel
Administrative Controls	
appropriate University systems	• strong management commitment to zero-tolerance regarding workplace violence • effective policies covering workplace security and the management of physical threats and violence in the workplace • clear policies and procedures covering staff grievances, staff conduct and client interaction • provision of support services to staff and students • clear and effective disciplinary procedures
appropriate local systems	• engineering control measures maintained and tested • appropriate staffing levels that considers risk as well as workload • policies covering working alone and working off-site • systematic identification and assessment of "at risk" location and activities
learning cycle	• regular staff meetings in which issues are raised and appropriately actioned • reporting of all incidents • investigation and assessment of all incidents
audits and inspections	• regular workplace inspections • periodic professional audits
emergency planning	• site specific response plans developed • emergency plans routinely tested

Strategy	Specific examples
Administrative Controls	
support training	• training and re-training of staff to ensure their effective use of engineering and administrative controls • thorough induction procedures to eliminate practices such as: • meeting students alone in isolated offices • haphazard approach to security at disciplinary hearings
Personal Protection	
alarms	• strategically placed duress alarms • check-in protocols for off-site personnel
Training	
customer service	• customer service training • clear service standards
"difficult client"	• provide staff with training on how to minimise the risk of workplace violence through appropriate behaviours and work practices

CONTAINMENT STRATEGIES

Many of the prevention strategies listed above will also help to contain and minimise the impact of a violent event. In particular training has a role. Nevertheless it must be emphasised that training is not a substitute for adequate protective measures both in practice and in law.

Strategy	Specific examples
Engineering Controls	
internal communications	• provide adequate arrangements to promptly alert security or other emergency services of an incident
Administrative Controls	
effective response systems	• provide access to trained security staff • establish appropriate protocols and working practices for security staff • provide security staff with appropriate training in dealing with a diverse University community
Training	
"difficult client"	• provide staff with training on how to defuse tense or potentially violent situations • provide staff with training on dealing with threatening or violent situations

RECOVERY STRATEGIES

Strategy	Specific examples
Administrative Controls	
minimise risk of re-occurrence	• clear and effective disciplinary procedures that serve as a deterrence to further inappropriate behaviour and as a warning to others • clear understanding of legal remedies to discourage further inappropriate behaviour
learning cycle	• policies and procedures covering the investigation and reporting on serious security incidents
Victim Support	
support facilities and processes	• clear procedures to assist and support staff / students in their recovery from threatening or violent events • provide staff / students with access to debriefing and counselling resources