

# Workplace Violence and Harassment Awareness

UNIVERSITY OF  
**WATERLOO**

[uwaterloo.ca](http://uwaterloo.ca)

Safety Office 2010

# Introduction

In June 2010, the Occupational Health & Safety Act was amended to include legislation protecting workers from workplace violence and harassment.

This course is designed to give you an awareness of the legislation, what you need to know as an employee of UW, and the resources available to you with respect to prevention and response to incidents of violence or harassment.

# Introduction

Workplace Violence can affect people in any business or occupation. Legislation requires employers to protect employees from hazards in the workplace, including violence.

While the University is committed to maintaining a workplace that is violence free, whenever people interact there is a potential for violence, especially in confrontational situations.

Awareness, effective communication and knowing what to do in the event of an escalating or violent situation will help to reduce the risk of violence.

# Course Objectives

In this course you will learn:

1. How Workplace Violence is defined according to Ontario legislation
2. About the University of Waterloo's Workplace Violence Prevention Program
3. How to recognize types and sources of workplace violence
4. What employment groups may be at risk
5. About preventive measures that can reduce the risk of violence
6. An awareness of basic crisis prevention, personal safety and de-escalation techniques
7. What to do if you experience or observe violent behaviours in your workplace and resources available to you
8. How Workplace Harassment is defined according to legislation and the University's policy statement regarding harassment.

# Introduction to Workplace Violence

## What is Workplace Violence?

Workplace violence is defined under the Ontario Occupational Health & Safety Act as:

- (a) the exercise of physical force by a person against a worker, in a workplace, that causes or could cause physical injury to the worker,
- (b) an attempt to exercise physical force against a worker, in a workplace, that could cause physical injury to the worker,
- (c) a statement or behaviour that a worker could reasonably interpret as a threat to exercise physical force against the worker, in a workplace, that could cause physical injury to the worker.

# Workplace Violence: Policy and Requirements

## Policy # 34 - Health, Safety & Environment

Policy # 34 has been amended by the University to include the definitions and requirements of Workplace Violence legislation, and applies to the entire campus community.



# Workplace Violence: Policy and Requirements

Policy #34 states the following with respect to Workplace Violence:

- The University is committed to maintaining a workplace that is violence free. Any act of workplace violence is unacceptable conduct that will not be tolerated,
- The University strives to minimize the risk of violence, and to ensure that reasonable safeguards are in place to protect members of its community from incidents of violence in the workplace,
- Applies to activities that occur while on University premises and to work-related activities or social events occurring off-campus,

# Workplace Violence: Policy and Requirements

- All members of the campus community have a responsibility in maintaining a violence free working and learning environment by not engaging in acts of violence and are encouraged to report incidents promptly as outlined in the University's Workplace Violence Program, and
- Anyone engaging in activities or behaviour found to be of a violent or threatening nature will be subject to disciplinary and other sanctions (up to and including termination of employment, expulsion and ban from University premises). Criminal or civil proceedings may also be initiated.

# Workplace Violence: Policy and Requirements

## Domestic Violence

- Workplace Violence legislation also helps to protect workers if there is a risk of domestic violence entering the workplace.
- Employers who are aware, or ought reasonably to be aware, that domestic violence may occur in the workplace must take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances to protect a worker at risk of physical injury.

# Workplace Violence: Policy and Requirements

## Communication

Under the new legislation, employers and supervisors must also provide information to a worker about a risk of workplace violence from a person with a history of violent behaviour if:

- the worker can expect to encounter that person in the course of work, and
- if the worker may be at risk of physical injury.

In these rare cases, personal information may be disclosed, but only what is reasonably necessary to protect the worker from physical injury.

# Types and Sources

**What types of behaviours would you consider workplace violence or harassment?**

Violence includes, but is not limited to:

- 1. Threatening** - behaviour whose purpose is to intimidate or threaten someone. For example:
  - physical intimidation - shaking fists, yelling in face
  - throwing objects
  - destruction of property
  - verbal, written or electronically transmitted threats to cause physical harm or damage to property

# Types and Sources

**2. Physical Attack** - is the actual exercise of physical force or otherwise physically assaulting someone. This would include:

- hitting
- pushing
- kicking
- punching
- use of a weapon

Although violent acts as defined by the Occupational Health & Safety Act involve a physical assault, it is important that behaviours associated with violence are identified and addressed to prevent them from escalating into physical assault. Such behaviours might include those described in the previous slide (throwing objects, physical intimidation, destruction of property, etc.)

# Types and Sources

## Potential Sources of Violent Behaviour

Workplace violence can arise from several sources with respect to a person's relationship to the University. These include:

1. A person **inside** the University, such as a co-worker or manager.
2. A person **related to** the function of the University such as a student, customer or contractor.
3. A person with an **indirect relationship** with the University, such as an estranged spouse or a former employee.
4. A person who is **unrelated** to the University, such as a member of the public.

# Risk Groups

People who work in particular job functions and environments could be at increased risk of violence. These groups include people whose job function is to:

- Work with the general public
- Handle money or valuables
- Carry out inspection or enforcement duties
- Provide counselling services or work with people in distress
- Work with people under the influence of drugs or alcohol



# Risk Groups

Other people who may be at increased risk are those who:

- Work alone or in small numbers
- Work offsite in locations or at functions where risk is increased
- Travel for work purposes
- Work after regular business hours, particularly in the late hours of the night or early hours of the morning, when there are fewer people around
- Work in environments where there may be periods of increased stress.

# Risk Groups

As part of UW's Workplace Violence Prevention Program, University departments complete a Workplace Violence Risk Assessment, following a review of work functions, relationships and environments within the department or area, and informed by input from employees.

Risk Assessment results are reported to the Joint Health & Safety Committee for each campus.

The Risk Assessment is used to determine the level of training and preventive measures that are required in each work area. A Risk Assessment should be repeated if an incident occurs or there is a change in the type or conditions of work.

# Preventive Measures

Preventive Measures are deterrents to reduce the likelihood of someone engaging in violent behaviour. You and your department can use preventive measures to reduce the risk of violence in your work environment.

Preventive measures fall into 3 categories:

- 1) workplace design
- 2) administrative practices
- 3) work practices

These will be discussed in further detail in the upcoming slides.

# Preventive Measures

**Workplace Design** - considers physical factors such as lay-out and building security to reduce the opportunity for theft and violence.

Examples of these may include:

- positioning reception areas in view of other employees
- positioning office furniture so that you are closer to the door than a client, and cannot be cornered
- minimizing the number of entrances and using controlled access entry in certain areas
- ensuring that there is adequate exterior lighting
- installing "panic buttons" or security cameras in higher risk areas



# Preventive Measures

**Administrative Practices** - are procedures that reduce the risks involved in handling cash or valuables. For example:

- keeping cash funds to a minimum
- varying the time of day that cash is transferred to a locked safe
- using electronic payment systems to reduce the amount of cash in use
- arranging for regular cash collection by a licensed security firm
- ensuring adequate staffing when cash is being handled or transferred
- ensuring alarms and cameras are regularly tested and their purpose is understood by all employees

# Preventive Measures

**Work Practices** - are individual and group practices that protect your personal safety on a day-to-day basis. These may include:

- ensuring that potentially confrontational interactions are done with additional staff or UW Police present
- developing "working alone" procedures for off-campus or after-hours work
- using a "buddy system", especially if you feel your personal safety may be threatened
- LEAVING or NOT ENTERING into any situation where you feel threatened or unsafe
- taking precautions when working at night or in early morning hours.
- contacting UW Police with any personal safety concerns

# Crisis Prevention

Employees in higher-risk jobs receive additional training in job-specific prevention and intervention measures, through UW Police or external training agencies.

However, an awareness of basic crisis prevention and communication techniques will help you to recognize and respond to potential situations.

In the next few slides, we'll review some recognition and de-escalation techniques for dealing with someone who may be showing signs of potentially violent behaviour.

# Crisis Prevention

## Recognition

An individual in the initial or "triggering" stages of violence may pace, fidget, complain, make verbal or physical threats, become non-compliant, refuse to co-operate, argue or act belligerently.

Violent situations often do not occur suddenly, and someone may demonstrate a progression of agitated behaviour over time, as frustration and anger build.

During this stage, LISTEN - dealing objectively with the issue that has angered the person may calm them.

# Crisis Prevention

## Warning Signs

Workplace Violence may stem from a small incident involving negative remarks or inappropriate behaviour, and may escalate into physical violence if the person is very troubled and/or workplace incidents continue. Warning signs (physical signs and behaviours) should always be taken in context, and multiple warning signs that are getting worse may be a sign that someone may become violent.

Always take particular note if:

- There is a change in behaviour pattern.
- The frequency and intensity of the behaviours become disruptive to the work environment.
- Multiple warning signs become evident.

# Crisis Prevention

Warning behaviours may include:

- Crying or temper tantrums
- Excessive absenteeism
- Disregard for health and safety of others
- Making inappropriate statements
- Inability to focus, distraction
- Declining work quality
- Overreacting to criticism
- Complaints of unfair treatment
- Talking about the same problems repeatedly without resolving them
- Social isolation
- Blaming others for problems or mistakes
- Swearing or emotional language
- Misinterpretation of communication from supervisors or co-workers
- Personal hygiene becoming worse or ignored

Canadian Centre for Occupational Health & Safety, retrieved June 29/10 from [http://www.ccohs.ca/keytopics/wplace\\_violence.html](http://www.ccohs.ca/keytopics/wplace_violence.html).

# Crisis Prevention

Sometimes non-verbal body language or physical signs can alert you to a risk during an interaction with a person who may become violent. These could include:

- Red or white-faced
- Sweating, trembling or shaking
- Pacing, restless, or repetitive movements
- Clenched jaw or fists
- Exaggerated or violent gestures
- Change in voice tone or volume
- Loud talking or chanting, talking to self
- Shallow, rapid breathing
- Scowling, sneering or use of abusive language
- Glaring or avoiding eye contact
- Violating personal space (getting too close)

Canadian Centre for Occupational Health & Safety, retrieved June 29/10 from [http://www.ccohs.ca/keytopics/wplace\\_violence.html](http://www.ccohs.ca/keytopics/wplace_violence.html).

# Crisis Prevention

Often, our "sixth sense" tells us that something is wrong. Some of these triggers include:

- hair standing on end
- upset stomach
- increased heart rate
- shaking in your voice
- hands trembling

Consider whether you should request assistance with the situation, and plan your course of action to deal with the person's behaviour, considering your own safety first.

Next, we'll review some techniques to begin to deal with the situation effectively.

# Crisis Prevention

## De-escalation

The following strategies can help to decrease a person's escalating behaviours:

- Remain Calm!
- Maintain eye contact. Do not turn your back.
- Keep a safe distance and stay in an area where assistance is available.
- Watch for signs of further escalation.
- Offer an apology promptly if it is warranted.
- Avoid being patronizing or using phrases that may provoke a negative response.
- Monitor your own behaviour, body language and the person's response to your actions.

# Crisis Prevention

If workers in your department:

- Deal with the public
- Deal with people who may be troubled or distressed
- Perform duties that may result in a negative or confrontational response

A procedure should be in place within your office to deal with threatening situations, including ensuring that workers know how to summon assistance.

Talk to your manager about workplace-specific violence prevention procedures, concerns you may have, or training that you may need.

# Personal Safety

## Working Late or Working Alone

While our campus is a busy place during daylight hours, it can feel much different in the dark or when you are working alone. In addition to being exposed to a higher risk of violence at night, working alone can pose additional risk in the event that you become ill or injured. Your department should have procedures to follow when people work alone or outside of regular business hours. There are also some measures that you can take as an individual to protect your own personal safety.

# Personal Safety

- Always let a co-worker/supervisor, family member or UW Police know you are working late and when you expect to leave. Have a check-in procedure or use a buddy system to arrange to leave with someone else who is working late.
- Lock doors to prevent access to your work area after hours.
- If you suspect someone is lurking outside of your work area/building, call UW Police.
- Plan ahead to make sure you are not walking or stranded alone at night.
- Before it is dark outside, move your car to a well-lit area that is close to your building.
- If you have a *UW Staff/Faculty* parking permit, you can park in any ungated lot after 4:30 pm, or get to your car by taking the UW Shuttle, which operates 7 nights a week from 7 pm - 2 am.

# Personal Safety

## Parking Lot Safety

Depending on its location, design and the time of day, parking lots can present a risk of workplace violence.

### What are some tips when using a parking lot?

- Park as near as possible to your building or to a visible and well-lit area.
- Use the main building entrance -- avoid rear or secluded exits.
- Keep your valuables, including purses and laptop bags, out of sight. Always lock them in the trunk if you have to leave them in the car.
- Lock the doors and roll up windows once you are in the vehicle.
- Have a plan ahead of time. Know where you can go for safety and how to call for help.

### What are some tips when walking to and from your car after dark?

- Always try to walk with a friend or co-worker. Give your escort a ride back to a main entrance so they don't have to walk back alone.

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# Personal Safety

## ***If you have to walk alone:***

- Have a co-worker watch you from a window and wave to them on the way to your vehicle. Wave even if no one is watching to give the illusion that someone is watching you.
- Stay on well-lit streets, and in the centre of the sidewalk. Stay away from hiding spots such as bushes, doorways, and parked cars. Cross the road if necessary.
- Be alert to your surroundings. Walk with confidence. Look directly at people but do not stare at them. Trust your instincts if you feel something is not right.

## ***Do not:***

- Do not dig in your purse or bag.
- Do not wear headphones or be distracted by a cell phone conversation.
- Do not carry heavy briefcases or bags that may slow you down or be appealing to criminals as items to steal.
- Do not carry any type of weapon, including pepper spray. Weapons can just as easily be used against you and are illegal in some jurisdictions.

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# Personal Safety

Be prepared when you leave your building, or when you leave the car for work.

## *Have ready:*

- Your keys to unlock the vehicle.
- Your keys or cardkey to unlock building doors.
- A whistle or other personal alarm.
- Have the keys ready to unlock the door as you get near the vehicle or door. As you approach your car, look around, inside, and even glance underneath for people who may be present. If you are suspicious, walk away. Go to a safe place and call for help.

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# Responding to Workplace Violence

Incidents of aggression or escalating violence must be reported to your supervisor.

In the event of an act of physical violence, follow the reporting procedure detailed in the UW Workplace Violence Prevention Program:



1. a) Immediately notify UW Police at ext. 22222 or 519-888-4911.  
b) Report the incident to your supervisor or an alternate from department management.
2. Receive first aid or medical attention if needed.
3. Complete an Injury/Incident Report.

# Responding to Workplace Violence

Following an incident of workplace violence, an Incident Investigation will be undertaken involving the appropriate personnel, and will be initiated by UW Police.



Disciplinary action or criminal charges may be taken against an offending party.

Violence prevention procedures in the affected area will be reviewed by UW Police, Safety Office and the department involved.

# Responding to Workplace Violence

Counseling is available to employees who have been subjected to or have observed violence.

Any employee affected by workplace violence is encouraged to seek assistance through UW's Employee Assistance Plan or Counseling Services.

# Responding to Workplace Violence

## Refusing Unsafe Work

Under the Occupational Health & Safety Act, a worker has the right to refuse unsafe work if he/she has reason to believe that equipment he/she is using or the physical condition of the workplace is likely to endanger or is in contravention of the Act.

Under the new workplace violence legislation, work refusal rights now also extend to a situation where you have reason to believe that workplace violence is likely to endanger you.

If you believe that you are in danger, report your concern to your supervisor. The University has a Work Refusal Procedure to deal with concerns that can not be resolved by your immediate supervisor.

# Responding to Workplace Violence

## Refusing Unsafe Work

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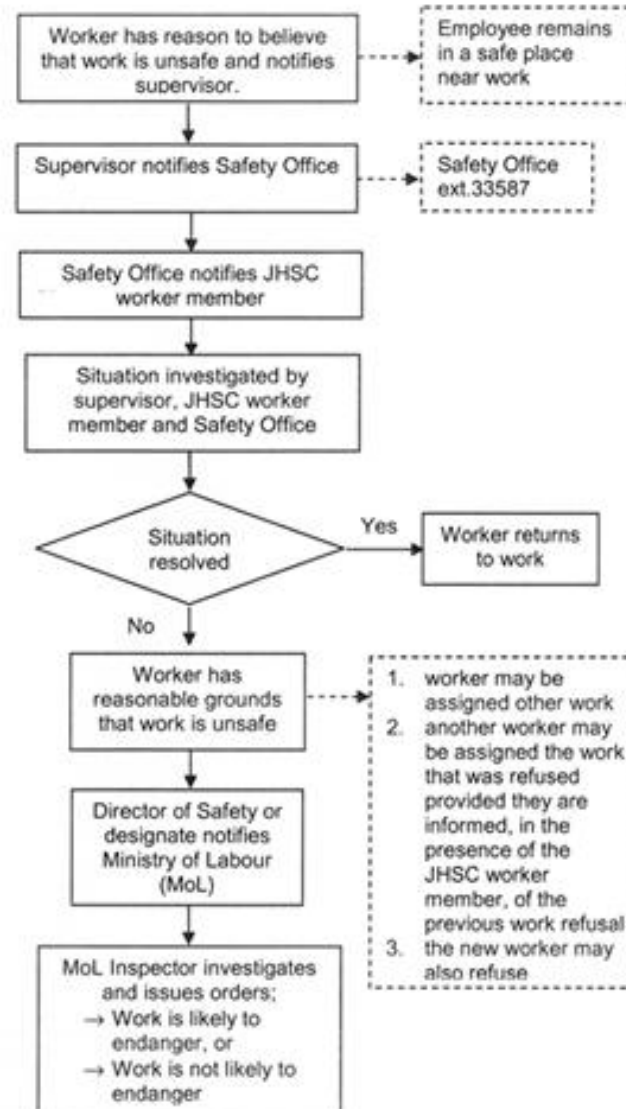
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If you believe that you are in danger, report your concern to your supervisor. The University has a Work Refusal Procedure to deal with concerns that can not be resolved by your immediate supervisor.

The Work Refusal flowchart here demonstrates the steps taken when a worker has a reason to believe that his/her work is likely to endanger.

Once reported, the first responsibility is for the supervisor to try to resolve the issue at the department level. If the issue cannot be resolved, then the Safety Office is notified to continue the process.

### Work Refusal Process



# Responding to Workplace Violence

## Emergency Response

In any case of emergency, immediately call 911, followed by UW Police at x22222 or 519-888-4911.

Provide location and details of the incident.

Inform your supervisor and others in the immediate area.

UW Policy #60 – Emergency Response procedures apply in major emergencies.

# Responding to Workplace Violence

## UW Emergency Lockdown Procedure

### What is a lockdown?

A lockdown is a procedure implemented when it is unsafe to evacuate a room or building immediately because you may encounter danger.

### When will a lockdown occur?

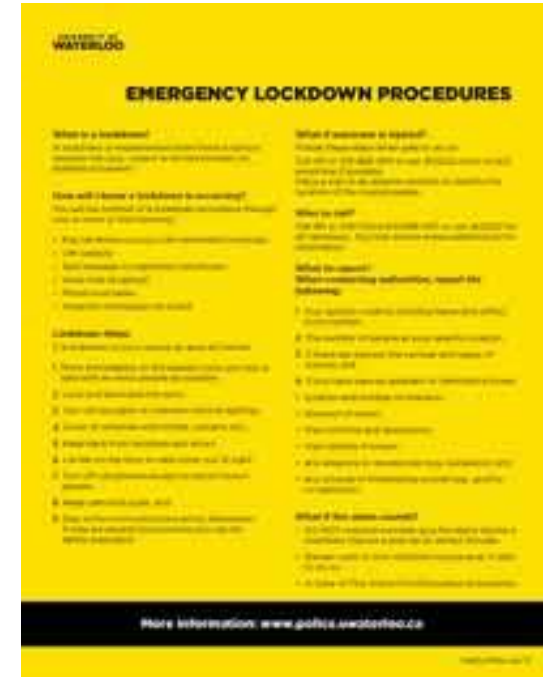
A serious safety or security risk such as an armed or violent intruder, chemical spill or major incident may initiate a lockdown.

# Responding to Workplace Violence

## How will I know a lockdown is occurring?

You will be notified of a lockdown through one of the University's emergency communication systems:

- Pop-up notice on your UW networked computer
- UW website
- Text message to registered cell phone
- Voice mail broadcast
- In person notification by police



**Know what to do during a lockdown. Review the Emergency Lockdown Procedures posted in your department regularly.**

# Introduction to Workplace Harassment

Now that we have finished reviewing Workplace Violence, we will take a brief look at Workplace Harassment, which is also included in the Occupational Health & Safety Act.

This module will begin to explain what harassment is and how the University addresses behaviour within its community with respect to harassment.

# Introduction to Workplace Harassment

## What is Workplace Harassment?

Workplace Harassment means:

- engaging in a course of vexatious comment or conduct against a worker in a workplace that is known or ought reasonably to be known to be unwelcome.

Harassment may include behaviours, often verbal that are aimed at demeaning, embarrassing or humiliating someone. For example:

- bullying
- intimidating or offensive jokes or innuendos
- displaying or circulating offensive pictures or materials
- offensive or intimidating phone calls, or
- criminal harassment (stalking)

# Introduction to Workplace Harassment

At UW, **Policy # 33 - Ethical Behaviour** addresses behaviour within the University community with respect to harassment and discrimination.

Under this policy:

The University has a responsibility to provide an environment free from harassment and discrimination, and accordingly must deal effectively, quickly and fairly with any situation involving claims of harassment or discrimination that come to its attention, and

Each member of the University has a responsibility to behave accordingly, treating others equally and with respect for individual differences.

# Introduction to Workplace Harassment

Policy 33 also provides guidance on how complaints involving harassment are dealt with. It states that *members of the University community have the right to lodge complaints and to participate in proceedings* without reprisal or threat of reprisal for so doing.

Those with supervisory authority (academic or employment) are expected to deal with alleged violations of the policy.



# Introduction to Workplace Harassment

There are numerous resources available if you have concerns respecting workplace harassment.

However, the ***Conflict Management & Human Rights Office*** and ***Police Services*** are the primary campus resources available for information or advice on responding to concerns with harassment.

Counselling Services

Your Supervisor

Safety Office

Office for Persons  
with Disabilities

EAP

Your HR Advisor

Health Services

Staff/Faculty  
Advocate

CUPE Union Steward

For more information about:

**Workplace Violence Prevention**, contact  
Safety Office at ext. 33587, [safety@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:safety@uwaterloo.ca) or  
visit [www.safetyoffice.uwaterloo.ca](http://www.safetyoffice.uwaterloo.ca)

**Workplace Harassment**, contact  
Conflict Management & Human Rights at ext. 33765, or  
visit [www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infocmahro/index.html](http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infocmahro/index.html)