



**Department of Human Services
Online Directives Information System**

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SUBJECT: Workplace Violence - External Threats Policy

POLICY

The Department of Human Services (DHS) must protect its employees, contractors, and clients from harm while conducting official business on behalf of the Department or with the Department in a DHS Work Site. Therefore, the Department has created this policy to set forth the management of threats or acts of workplace violence by external sources, such as an employee spouse or acquaintance, a client(s), or contractor(s) providing services to the Department.

SCOPE

This policy shall apply when threats or acts of violence toward a DHS employee occur from an external source such as, but not limited to, a DHS customer, Employee of another agency, contractor, or the spouse or acquaintance of a DHS employee. The threat is made through verbal or written communication or the act of violence is carried out while conducting official business with DHS at a DHS worksite.

Note: This policy is separate and distinct from DHS Office of Human Resources Policy 110 and all attachments.

Definitions

Assault. To attack someone physically or verbally, causing bodily or emotional injury, pain, and/or distress. This might involve the use of a weapon, and includes actions such as hitting, punching, pushing, poking, or kicking.

Dangerous Weapon. A device, instrument, or substance that is used for, or is readily capable of, causing death or serious bodily injury. These include guns, knives, clubs, chemicals, and explosive devices.

Department of Human Services (DHS) Work Site: A building, residence, facility, or part thereof, where its employees or contractors are present to perform their official duties.

Domestic Violence. A reference to acts of physical and psychological violence, including harassing or intimidating behavior that occurs as part of personal relationships. Included in the concept of domestic violence are spousal abuse, abuse among intimates, as well as sexual and physical abuse of children, the elderly, or the infirm.

Employee Assistance Program (EAP). A professional assessment, referral, and short-term counseling service is available to all DHS employees and, in some situations, to their family members to help with personal problems such as substance abuse, financial pressures, job stress, and family dysfunction which may be affecting work performance. EAP services are voluntary, confidential, and provided at no cost to the employee.

Intimidating or Harassing Behavior. Threats or other conduct that in any way creates a hostile environment, impairs agency operations; or frightens, alarms, or inhibits others. Psychological intimidation or harassment includes making statements that are false, malicious, disparaging, derogatory, rude, disrespectful, abusive, obnoxious, insubordinate, or which have the intent to hurt others' reputations. Physical intimidation or harassment may include holding, impeding, or blocking movement, following, stalking, touching, or any other inappropriate physical contact or advances.

Local Authorities. Municipal, county, state, and federal law enforcement (having local responsibilities); or public safety personnel, such as police, firefighters, arson investigators, bomb/threat investigators, etc., of the civil jurisdictions where Department facilities are located or acts of violence occur.

Sabotage. An act to destroy, damage, incapacitate, or contaminate property, equipment, supplies, or data (e.g., hard copy files and records, computerized information, etc.); to cause injury, illness, or death to humans; or to interfere with, disrupt, cripple, disable, or hinder the normal operations or missions of the Department of Human Services.

Stalking. A malicious course of conduct that includes approaching or pursuing another person with the intent to place that person in reasonable fear of serious bodily injury or death to him/herself or a third party.

Threat. Any oral or written expression or gesture that could be interpreted by a reasonable person as conveying an intent to cause physical harm to persons or property. Statements such as, "I'll get him", "She won't get away with this" or "That's why people blow things up" could be examples of threatening expressions depending on the facts and circumstances involved.

Workplace Violence. An action (verbal, written, or physical aggression) which is intended to control or cause, or can cause, death or serious bodily injury to oneself or others, or property damage. Workplace violence includes abusive behavior toward authority, intimidating or harassing behavior, and threats.

A. References

O.C.G.A. § 50-18-72(25)

B. General Provisions

1. Employees, Clients, and Vendors have a right to expect to conduct business either with or on behalf of the Department in a safe, professional, and business-like manner.
2. DHS will not tolerate any threats or acts of violence being carried out by any person conducting business with the department or any other interactions with department personnel during the course of their work assignments, this includes but is not limited to customers, vendors, or associates (spouse, friend, significant other, etc.) of anyone who is employed by the Department.
3. Examples of prohibited behavior that shall be reported include but are not limited to:
 - a. Threatening, abusive, or intimidating language or written material.
 - b. Fighting or acts of violence directed toward the Department's employees.
 - c. Stalking.
 - d. Possession of weapons on DHS property unless specifically authorized.
4. All employees should remain alert and be familiar with their surroundings to recognize potentially serious situations. Most acts of workplace violence are preceded by direct and/or indirect threats. Employees at all levels must, therefore, take all threats seriously and report them as soon as possible.

C. Warning Signs

1. Individuals may exhibit certain behaviors that may be warning signs of potentially violent behavior, whether in person or on the phone. Below are some examples of warning signs:

Visual cues when in person

- a. Easily frustrated or angered.
- b. Scowling and sneering.
- c. Pacing, restless, or repetitive movements.
- d. Clinched jaw or fists.
- e. Glaring or avoiding eye contact.
- f. Violating personal space.

Verbal cues when in person or on the phone

- a. Swearing or emotional language.
- b. Change in voice or tone.
- c. Refusing to follow directions or to comply with procedures.
- d. Threatening statements directed toward staff or work sites.

D. Establishing a Plan

1. Divisions should ensure that their assigned offices are responsible for establishing a written plan to prevent workplace violence and manage incidents and/or threats in each location. The plans will be subject to a review by OIG during investigations or other times a review is warranted. Some examples of what must be considered in the plan are as follows:
 - a. Establish facility entrance requirements such as signing in and wearing badges when appropriate.
 - b. Ensuring areas are secured where cash is accepted or handled.
 - c. What to do in the case of a threat or act of violence against the facility or employees.
 - d. List of local law enforcement numbers (911, Non-Emergency Numbers, etc.)

- e. Evacuation routes or safe zones within the facility.
- f. Training for all staff that works in the location.
- g. Designation of who has authority to make emergency decisions regarding office closure or emergency dismissal from the worksite.
- h. Process for obtaining restraining orders for individuals that department believes this action is necessary to protect staff at a DHS worksite.

NOTE: A restraining order may be sought by the Department on behalf of employees under circumstances where employees are threatened or harmed due to the performance of work-related duties.

- i. Designation of long-term return to work plan as needed. The division or office may stipulate that they will follow the procedures as outlined in their Continuation of Operations Plan (COOP).
2. Division/Offices will designate a person (Director, Manager, or Supervisor) and a secondary backup who will be the central point of contact for providing information to their respective areas/offices on the handling of incidents/threats. Examples would be helping to determine the need (if not already decided) to contact law enforcement, a decision to prohibit someone from coming back to the location or other offices, etc.

E. Reporting of Acts or Threatened Acts of Violence (External Source)

1. Employees are responsible for notifying their Supervisors or other authorized officials of all acts or threats of violence. Employees will be expected to follow the workplace violence reporting plan established in their Division/Office location regarding reporting of such acts or threatened acts of violence.
2. Any recurring or continuing acts or threatened acts of violence on or off the work premises should be immediately reported in compliance with your Division/Office's workplace violence reporting plan.
3. All acts or threatened acts of violence are to be taken seriously, including anonymous reports.

4. Employees failing to make such reports will be subject to disciplinary action as stated in DHS Office of Human Resources Policy 110.
5. A Workplace Violence or Threats of Violence-External report (see attachment #1) must be completed within three (3) business days after the incident and submitted to the DHS Office of Inspector General (OIG) for review and filing. OIG will respond that the report has been received and is under review.
6. OIG will respond in writing to the reporting person, that no follow-up is needed or that OIG will open an investigation into the incident.
 - a. If employee misconduct is involved, OIG will notify the Office of Human Resources (OHR) as to the employee's reported actions. Unless there is a criminal element, OHR will investigate the employee's actions and follow its normal procedures to determine if the actions of the involved employee(s) violated any DHS policy and what further action is warranted.
 - b. If there is no employee misconduct then the report will be filed for history, tracking, and information purposes. It is expected that the local law enforcement agency will handle any criminal charges that arise from the incident.

F. Handling of External Customers

1. It is expected that each division or office will follow their current protocols for the management of customers that have been barred from in-person visits to an office or worksite.
2. OIG will not make recommendations or decisions on how customers are to be managed after an incident has occurred.

G. Staff Training Requirements

The following are the training requirements for this policy.

1. A list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) will be posted on the DHS website. These FAQs will provide general answers to questions about Workplace Violence (External Threats) and the reporting process.
2. Training for all employees will be provided through the Learning Management System utilizing the current Workplace Violence Module(s). That module will include general guidelines on how to detect, respond, and report workplace violence threats from an external source.
3. In addition to the general training for all employees, each office must conduct semi-annual training for all employees for procedures outlined in their local workplace violence safety plan and include the same training in any local orientation for new hires. This training shall be documented with the outline of the training, who provided the training, the date of the training, and a sign-in sheet for all attendees. This documentation is subject to review by the Office of Inspector General for investigative purposes or as requested.

H. History

None

I. Evaluation

The Office of Inspector General will evaluate this policy in the below manner:

- Evaluation of incident rates over time.
- Accuracy of offices following procedures outlined in safety plans.
- Radom reviews of training documents in DHS offices.