

FDOT's Zero Tolerance for Violence Employee Training.

Zero Tolerance

Violence won't happen in my office. Right?

A U.S. Bureau of Justice Report estimated that approximately 1.7 million incidents of workplace violence occurred each year between 1993 and 1999. Although a few high-profile incidents led to increased public awareness, these sensational episodes represent a very small number of workplace violence incidents. The majority of incidents are cases of assaults, domestic violence, stalking, threats, harassment and physical or emotional abuse.

Let's take a look at the Department's Cultural Norms:

- No Level of Threatening or Violent Behavior is Acceptable
- No Violent Incident will be Ignored
- Action Will be Taken on All Reported Violence – Without Exception
- Penalties – Up to and Including Dismissal

According to the experts, one key step to promoting a violence-free workplace is creating and enforcing a clear and well-written policy.

What is the Department's policy regarding workplace violence?

It is the Department's intent that no person shall harass or harm employees, members of the general public, officials, contractors, vendors or customers of the Department in State offices, facilities, work sites, vehicles, or while conducting State business by exhibiting verbally, physically abusive or harassing behavior.

Let's take a look at these behaviors.

Verbal Abuse: Threats toward persons or property; the use of vulgar or profane language toward others; disparaging, derogatory comments or slurs; intimidation, or name-calling.

Physical Abuse: Any physical action such as hitting, pushing, kicking, holding, impeding or forcibly blocking the movement of another person.

Harassment: **No tolerance for any inappropriate or offensive visual,** audio or computer generated materials, stalking, or any abusive behavior, including threats, harassment or abuse originating from a domestic violence situation, intended or reasonably expected to offend, threaten or intimidate other person(s).

It is the Department's intent to maintain a violence-free workplace by creating a business environment with a zero tolerance of behavior which leads to harassment and violence. This includes domestic violence as defined in Section 741.28, Florida Statutes.

This policy is established to provide for a productive work environment and the individual welfare and security for all Florida Department of Transportation employees, customers, vendors, contractors and other person(s) present on official FDOT business.

With the exception of duly authorized persons performing official FDOT duties and sworn law enforcement officers, under no circumstances are firearms or weapons permitted at facilities, work sites and work areas owned, leased, or rented by the State of Florida or the Department.

Pursuant to Section 790.251 (4)(a)(d), Florida Statutes, legally owned firearms or weapons may be kept locked inside or locked to private motor vehicles in state-owned or leased parking lots but are not permitted to be removed and/or otherwise exhibited on state-owned or leased property for any reason other than lawful defense. Firearms include ammunition. Self-defense chemical sprays and non-lethal electric devices designed solely for defensive purposes are not considered weapons. If defensive items are used in a threatening manner, they will be treated as prohibited weapons and employees may be disciplined.

Any violation of this policy by FDOT employees will be grounds for disciplinary action in accordance with disciplinary standards and disciplinary action provisions contained in Department Procedure No. 250-012-011, Disciplinary Actions. Disciplinary Actions for violence are normally severe. Violations by non-FDOT employees should be promptly reported to management or law enforcement authorities, as appropriate.

What is our goal? Reducing Violence through Prevention!!!

Awareness & Prevention

The Department promotes preventing Workplace Violence By:

- Making employees aware of the possibility of workplace violence.
- Taking action to prevent violence.

Awareness is recognizing that workplace violence can impact anyone, in any work setting, and across all levels of employment. Know your co-workers well enough to recognize changes in behavior or attitude.

When you're familiar with their typical behavior, you will be able to spot unusual behavior that may indicate the potential for violence.

Familiarize yourself with behavior which may lead to violence. You are not expected to become a behavioral expert, but your common sense, awareness, and intervention will promote a safe environment for all employees.

In the great majority of cases, a threat will not lead to a violent act. The threat itself, though, damages workplace security and must be addressed. In 85% of all reported cases of workplace violence, the offender showed warning signs over a period of time.

Categories of Violence

Law enforcement categorizes incidences of workplace violence into 4 types:

1. Violence by stranger;
2. Violence by client or patient;
3. Violence by current or former employee; and
4. Domestic violence that spills over into the workplace.

The first type, Violence by stranger, represents a large share of workplace violence and falls heavily on occupational groups whose jobs makes them vulnerable (i.e., taxi drivers, late night retail, those who carry cash). Because this category generally involves more high profile situations, prevention strategies center on the physical environment.

The second type, Violence by client or patient, includes employees who deal with dangerous people or who deal with unpredictable customers (i.e., healthcare, law enforcement). Because this category also usually involves more high profile situations, prevention strategies center on the physical environment.

Type 3, Violence by current or former employee, and Type 4, Domestic violence that spills over into the workplace, are generally seen in an office setting. When the violence involves an employee or someone close to an employee, there is a far greater chance of seeing warning signs and having the opportunity to prevent a catastrophic event.

Prevention strategies focus on behavioral awareness. At FDOT, we provide prevention strategies that focus on both the physical environment and behavioral awareness.

Worksite Resources: Security

Prevention Strategies that focus on the Physical Environment include:

- Require all employees to have and display picture ID badges.
- Require all visitors to check in, sign in, and wear a visitor ID.
- Train reception staff to prevent unauthorized entry.
- Report strangers on the premises.
- Keep secure areas locked.
- Keep fences and locks in good repair.

Worksite Resources: Awareness

Prevention Strategies that focus on Behavioral Awareness include:

- Pre-selection screening to prevent hiring violence prone employees.
- Training – all new employees are oriented to FDOT standards.
- FDOT has strong anti-violence standards of conduct in well publicized policies.
- The Ombudsman can assist with employee communication conflicts.
- Supervisors have the authority to send disruptive employee's home before conflict erupts.

Worksite Resources: Wellness

The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provides free and confidential services, 24 hours a day and seven days a week for state employees and members of their household. They may be reached by calling: 1-800-860-2058.

Help is available for:

- Dealing with personal stress
- Marriage counseling
- Domestic violence
- Dealing with anxiety and depression
- Dealing with anger management
- Dealing with financial stress; and
- Dealing with addictions

If you are considering referring an employee to EAP, contact the Human Resources Office for guidance.

Domestic Violence

Let's look at some ways to help the victim in a domestic violence situation:

- Take steps to keep the abuser out of the workplace and alert building security;
- Assist the victim in receiving counseling;
- Support the employee in securing a restraining order; and
- Be considerate of leave for medical treatment and/or court appearances.

The hotline for domestic violence assistance is 1-800-500-1119.

Prevention

To prevent violence in the workplace, you must have an action plan!!!

Don't be caught off guard. Intervene early to head off trouble. Have a planned response, including who will assist you, who will call senior management, and a prearranged plan for signaling a co-worker to call law enforcement.

The three effective steps to prevent violence are: detect, assess, and manage.

Detecting Behavior

Determine that the behavior you're seeing is not typical of your employee. A list of behaviors and attitudes are shown on the next few screens. This list is not exhaustive. Please note that evidence of these indicators may not necessarily indicate a violent act will follow.

If these "red flag" indicators occur in your office, they should alert you to pay close attention to the affected employee. Contact the Human Resources Office for assistance in guiding you through the appropriate response.

Pay attention to the following types of Red Flag Behavior:

- Upset over recent events – work or personal crisis
- Recent major change in behavior, demeanor, appearance
- Recently has withdrawn from normal activities
- Intimidating, verbally abusive, harasses/mistreats others
- Hypersensitivity to criticism
- Challenges authority
- Blames others – suspicious, holds grudges
- Use or abuse of drugs or alcohol
- Stalking or unwelcome romantic attention
- Makes references to other acts of violence

- Threatens to harm self or property
- Has a fascination with weapons
- Has a known history of violence
- Has communicated specific proposed violent acts

Now let's look at different types of Red Flag Attitude:

- Isolated or a loner
- Morally superior or self-righteous
- Feels entitled to special rights – rules don't apply to him/her
- Feels wronged, humiliated, degraded – wants revenge
- Believes the choices or options are limited – justifies violence

The following factors are examples of issues that may heighten the potential for violent behavior:

- Personality conflicts in the workplace
- Mishandled termination or disciplinary action
- Drug or alcohol use
- Stressors in an employee's personal life (financial, emotional, physical)
- Organizational changes (downsizing, layoffs)
- Economic climate

As an FDOT employee, you must analyze the following when assessing the situation:

- The Nature and content of the threat or threatening behavior;
- The Identified target;
- The Apparent motivation;
- Their Ability to carry out threat; and
- The Background of employee.

Alert your immediate supervisor. If your immediate supervisor is not available, contact another supervisor or contact the Human Resources Office.

Scenario #1:

Let's take a look at a scenario. One of your co-workers seems to be having a bad day. His actions don't rise to the level of inappropriate workplace behavior, but he's "not himself." What should you do?

- A. Notify your supervisor immediately.
- B. Tell your co-worker to calm down and "get over it – everyone has bad days".
- C. Continue working, but recognize any unusual behavior that may indicate the potential for violence.
If the behavior worsens, contact your supervisor.

Answer A: Although this might seem like the correct answer at first, you should be familiar with your co-worker's typical behavior and notice a change that could escalate into violence. If you then feel that the situation could escalate, then it would be a good time to notify your supervisor.

Answers B & C: That's incorrect. You should not escalate the situation. A hostile person is not going to respond well to a statement such as, "get over it – everyone has bad days".

Scenario #2:

Let's take a look at a scenario. Your co-worker is distracted and cannot concentrate, even though she has always been a good performer. Now she is calling in sick and is often late. You've seen several bruises on her face and arms, and she's indicated her partner has an anger problem at home. What should you do?

- A. Ignore the signs and believe that she will "get over whatever is bothering her".
- B. Demand that your co-worker tell you what is going on or you will tell her supervisor how bad she is doing at work lately.
- C. Talk to your supervisor and let them know that you think your co-worker is a victim of domestic violence.

Answer A & B: That's incorrect. Ignoring the signs of a domestic violence situation could result in the loss of a good employee, and demanding that your co-worker tells you everything could result in a hostile work environment. You should notify your Supervisor about your concern of your co-worker's recent behavior. Remember, domestic violence that comes through the office door becomes your concern, too.

Answer C: That's correct. You should notify your Supervisor about your concern of your co-worker's recent behavior. Remember, domestic violence that comes through the office door becomes your concern, too.

Scenario #3:

Let's take a look at another scenario. During today's team meeting, you noticed a co-worker seemed to be very aggravated and irritable towards comments being made about their participation in the current project. The employee then proceeded to lash out at members of the team and create an uncomfortable environment for the rest of the meeting. What should you do?

- A. Notify your supervisor immediately.
- B. Tell your co-worker to "deal" with the criticism.
- C. Leave the meeting and avoid the situation.

Answer A: That's correct. You should notify your supervisor immediately. Telling your co-worker to "deal with it" could lead to an altercation. Leaving the meeting would not solve the problem.

Answers B & C: That's incorrect. You should notify your supervisor immediately. Telling your co-worker to "deal with it" could lead to an altercation. Leaving the meeting would not solve the problem.

Scenario #4:

Let's take a look at another scenario. It's Monday morning and you're going about your usual morning rituals. You look up and notice that a recently terminated employee is charging into the office looking irate and intending to do harm. What should you do?

- A. Find a safe place to hide.
- B. Notify your supervisor immediately.
- C. Try and tackle the assailant.

Answer B: That's correct. You should notify your supervisor immediately. Your supervisor will then take the appropriate measures, based on the level of threat.

Answers A & C: That's incorrect. Although finding a safe place to hide would be your immediate thought, alerting your supervisor could prevent any violence that is about to happen. You should never try to tackle the assailant, unless you are in a life-threatening situation.

Scenario #5:

Referring to the last scenario, what if the recently terminated employee is carrying a gun? What should you do?

- A. Call 911.
- B. Notify your supervisor immediately.
- C. Find a safe place to hide.
- D. Tackle the assailant and apprehend his firearm.

Answers A, B & C: That's correct. You should immediately call 911, then notify your supervisor or another supervisor, and move to safety. If you cannot safely get to an exit, take refuge where you will be safe from the shooter.

Answer D: That's incorrect. You should never try to tackle the assailant, unless you are in a life-threatening situation. You should immediately call 911, then notify your supervisor or another supervisor, and move to safety. If you cannot safely get to an exit, take refuge where you will be safe from the shooter.

Remember:

- No Level of Threatening or Violent Behavior is Acceptable
- No Violent Incident will be Ignored
- Action Will be Taken on All Reported Violence – Without Exception
- Penalties – Up to and Including Dismissal

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