

FDOT's Zero Tolerance for Violence Supervisor 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. As the head of your work unit, you are responsible for maintaining a safe and secure environment.

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.

As the supervisor, you have a major role to play in maintaining a violence-free environment.

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

Supervisors may be hesitant about involving themselves in an employee's personal life, but domestic violence that comes through the office door becomes your concern, too.

In fact, our procedure states that supervisors will "make every effort to grant leave with or without pay, adjust schedules or work assignments, when it is not unduly disruptive, to include time off for medical and legal assistance, court appearances, counseling, and relocation.

Section 741.313(2)(a), Florida Statutes Provides 3 days of leave on demand for a victim of domestic or sexual violence, even if the victim has no leave balance.

(Note: There are strict confidentiality rules for this kind of leave – ask the Human Resources Office for more information.)

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

At DOT, we encourage the practice of MBWA – **management by walking around**.

This is just one of the tools to promote awareness of your employees. If you know your co-workers well, you will be able to quickly spot behavior, attitudes, or comments that are unusual.

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.

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.

When assessing the situation, place the threat or threatening behavior on a hierarchy of danger from High to Low.

Don't forget!! DOT has a ZERO TOLERANCE policy. You are required to address every threat or instance of threatening behavior, regardless of where it falls in the spectrum.

Scenario #1:

Let's take a look at a scenario. Your employee 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 know that you need to address this, but she has not told you there are problems at home or with her partner. You wonder why the sudden change over the last several weeks, and sense that everything is not right at home. What should you do?

- A. Ignore the signs and believe that she will "get over whatever is bothering her".
- B. Have a private discussion with your employee and make every effort to support your employee.
- C. Refer your employee to the Employee Assistance Program without first finding out what is causing the problems with them.

Answer A: That's incorrect. Ignoring behavioral signs that may lead to violence is not an option. You should sit down and discuss your concerns with your employee. You may be hesitant about getting involved in an employee's personal life, but behavior that affects the office becomes your concern, too. If the situation involves domestic violence, provide the appropriate resources (Domestic Violence hotline and/or EAP) and call the Employee Relations Manager for guidance.

Answer B: that's correct. You should sit down and discuss your concerns with your employee. You may be hesitant about getting involved in an employee's personal life, but behavior that affects the office becomes your concern, too. If the situation involves domestic violence, provide the appropriate resources (Domestic Violence hotline and/or EAP) and call the Employee Relations Manager for guidance.

Answer C: That's incorrect. Although you may refer them to the Employee Assistance Program, you must first sit down and discuss your concerns with your employee. If the situation involves domestic violence, provide the appropriate resources (Domestic Violence hotline and/or EAP) and call the Employee Relations Manager for guidance.

Scenario #2:

Let's take a look at a scenario. One of your employees looks to be having a bad day. His actions seem harmless, like he is just blowing off steam. Using the hierarchy of danger, select the threat level that you believe the employee is displaying; high, medium, or low.

If you chose High or Medium, then you are incorrect. The correct answer is Low. Fortunately, this employee is displaying a low threat level. Use your conflict resolution and effective listening skills to defuse this low threat situation. Contact your Human Resources Office or Employee Relations Manager for guidance related to possible disciplinary actions. Typically, a verbal counseling will suffice for this threat level.

Let's take a look at how you can respond to this type of situation.

1. Respond quietly and calmly. Try to defuse the situation. Move to a more private area, but have another manager or senior employee witness.
2. Do not take the behavior personally, even if you become the target.
3. Ask respectful questions – show concern and interest – avoid confrontation.
4. Summarize what you hear the person saying to make sure you are communicating clearly.
5. Focus on areas of agreement and solving the problem.

Scenario #3:

Let's take a look at another scenario. During today's staff meeting, you noticed an employee 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 the other members of the team and create an uncomfortable environment for the rest of the meeting. Using the hierarchy of danger, select the threat level that you believe the employee is displaying; high, medium, or low.

If you chose High or Low, then you are incorrect. The employee is displaying a medium threat level that could escalate if the situation is not handled properly. Your conflict resolution skills come into play for this medium threat situation. Contact your Human Resources Office for guidance related to possible disciplinary actions and referral to the Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

Let's take a look at how you can respond to this type of situation.

1. If possible find a quiet, safe place to talk, but do not isolate yourself, keep doors open, and stay close to a door. Maintain a safe distance and do not turn your back.
2. Act calm and remain seated if possible to be non-threatening. Indicate the desire to listen and let the employee talk.
3. NEVER touch the person.
4. Set limits. "If you shout or swear, I'll have to ask you to leave."
5. Do not mention discipline or consequences.
6. Prearrange for another employee to summon help.
7. If the situation does not calm down, excuse yourself and call 911.

Scenario #4:

Now let's take a look at the last scenario. It's Monday morning and you're going about your usual morning rituals. You look up and notice that a recently let-go employee is charging into the office waving a firearm around and looking to harm other employees. Using the hierarchy of danger, select the threat level that you believe the employee is displaying; high, medium, or low.

If you chose Medium or Low, then you are incorrect. The employee is there to harm you and other people. You should immediately call 911. Assign an employee to notify the Senior Manager and building security, and most importantly, move your employees to safety. If you cannot safely get your employees to an exit, take refuge where you believe it is safe from the shooter.

Remember, do not intervene in a situation that should be handled by law enforcement!

The same skills you need as a leader and manager will guide any efforts at intervention.

The effects of violence do not disappear after the act is over. Clear communication and timely support are critical.

Our goal is prevention. If a violent act occurs in your office, be alert to continuing effects of violence. Use your resources (the Human Resources Office, Employee Relations Manager, and EAP) to provide support to your employees.

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

Thank you for reading the Florida Department of Transportation Zero Tolerance for Violence Computer Based Training. Please select the “print certificate” button, fill it out, and turn it into your TRESS Coordinator for credit.