COVID-19 Occupational Violence Procedure

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# Purpose

The COVID-19 outbreak has increased the risk of occupational violence for workers, including when monitoring and upholding workplace COVIDSafe Plans and enforceable government directions regarding physical distancing, wearing masks, vaccination verification and mandatory check-in procedures.

ORGANISATION NAME is committed to providing a work environment that is free from occupational violence associated with COVID-19 related issues. ORGANISATION NAME has zero tolerance for occupational violence and as such has implemented this procedure to identify and manage the risks and assist any worker affected by aggression, threats or violence associated with the workplace.

# Scope

This procedure covers all workers and workplaces of ORGANISATION NAME, including workers working outside of workplaces managed by ORGANISATION NAME.

# References

* + - * 1. Model Work Health and Safety Act and Regulations
        2. Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 and Regulations 2017 (Victoria)
        3. [Preventing violence and workplace aggression – National guidance material (Safework Australia)](https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/preventing-workplace-violence-and-aggression-guide)
        4. [COVID-19 work-related violence information | Safe Work Australia](https://covid19.swa.gov.au/covid-19-information-workplaces/industry-information/general-industry-information/work-related?tab=tab-toc-employer)
        5. [Managing occupational violence and customer aggression | NSW Govt](https://www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19/business/covid-safe-business/keeping-workers-safe/managing-violence)
        6. [Violence in the workplace guide | SafeWork NSW](https://www.safework.nsw.gov.au/resource-library/violence-workplace-guide)
        7. [Work related violence: A guide for employers | WorkSafe Vic](https://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/resources/work-related-violence-guide-employers-pdf)

# Definitions

*Please note* that occupational violence and work-related violence can be used interchangeably.

**Occupational Violence**: any incident where a worker is abused, threatened or assaulted in the workplace, or while they are carrying out work.

Violence can come from:

* + - * 1. a co-worker (including a supervisor, manager or employer)
        2. a customer or client
        3. a person known to the organisation or worker
        4. a stranger or member of the general public

Examples of Occupational Violence include:

* + - * 1. striking, kicking, scratching, biting, coughing, spitting, pushing or any other type of intended direct physical contact
        2. throwing objects
        3. attacking with knives, guns, sprays, syringes or any other item that could cause harm to another person
        4. pushing, shoving, tripping, grabbing
        5. any form of indecent or criminal/physical assault
        6. verbal and/or written harassment or threats

# Roles and Responsibilities

The Employer/Managers and supervisors are required to:

* + - * 1. review the physical environment, layout of the workplace and activities of workers to ensure they are not at risk from threatening or aggressive behaviour from any person
        2. consult with workers as to the risk factors and identification of categories of activities or workers who are at risk of violent or threatening behaviour
        3. render appropriate assistance and support to workers subjected to threats or aggressive behaviour
        4. investigate and report any incidents or potential areas of aggressive, threatening or violent behaviour

Workers are required to:

* + - * 1. endeavour to manage their contact with third parties to allay fears and try to anticipate worsening behaviour
        2. be aware of the risks and the appropriate control measures for threats and/or aggressive behaviour
        3. report any incidents or potential areas of aggression to their direct supervisor
        4. attend all specified training and induction courses

# Procedure

## Hazard Identification

The nature and location of work, the types of clients, business hours and worker numbers can all effect the risk of exposure to occupational violence relating to COVID-19. The following information has been sourced from [COVID-19 work-related violence information | Safe Work Australia](https://covid19.swa.gov.au/covid-19-information-workplaces/industry-information/general-industry-information/work-related?tab=tab-toc-employer).

Violence and aggression from external parties may occur due to:

* + - * 1. general stress and anxiety in the community related to physical distancing rules, e.g. if people are not complying with the rules
        2. condition of entry requirements such as a requirement to check in with QR codes or having to wear a mask
        3. products and services are restricted or no longer available
        4. business hours are limited
        5. longer queues and wait times and limits on the number of customers in stores
        6. workers do not have the information on-hand to respond to customer requests or are insufficiently trained; procedures have changed and workers and customers are struggling to adjust
        7. not enough workers available to serve the public
        8. handling valuable or restricted items, for example cash or medicines
        9. providing care to people who are distressed, confused, afraid, ill or affected by drugs and alcohol
        10. workers are working in isolation, offsite or in the community
        11. increased isolation from support

Violence and aggression from within workplaces may occur due to:

* + - * 1. workers worried about the health risks they may be exposed to and the effectiveness of preventive measures
        2. roles or workloads are poorly distributed among work teams
        3. work schedules change with little to no notice
        4. there is less face-to-face supervision, or workers are more isolated from support networks
        5. workloads have increased or roles have changed, for example if extra focus is given to regular cleaning and disinfection of the workplace
        6. workers are not adequately trained or familiar with products, services or workplace procedures
        7. workers are worried about their job security
        8. the workplace culture is hostile or does not prevent violence and aggression.

Racial discrimination may also increase in the form of individual acts of aggression, or collective forms such as targeting workplaces with workers of a particular nationality or ethnicity.

There may also be stigma around; and the potential for violence or aggression towards; people who have had COVID-19, or those who seem to be acting inconsistently with public health requirements.

Where there is potential for violence to occur, a hazard identification assessment should be conducted in consultation with workers. The hazards can be documented on the [COVID-19 Risk Assessment Template](https://go.pardot.com/l/395202/2021-12-07/c3pbnl/395202/1638858163YD3qF4Hh/COVID_19_Risk_Assessment.docx).

## Assessing risks

It is not a legal requirement to document and assess all hazards and risks. Where hazards have been identified on the COVID-19 Risk Assessment Template, risk assessment of the residual risk likelihood and severity should be completed to assist in understanding the severity of the risk and priority for implementing control measures.

## Control measures

The following table provides suggested occupational violence prevention guidelines specific to COVID-19 risks in the workplace.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Risk categories | Prevention guidelines |
| Physical Work Environment | * + - * 1. increase security measures such as security officers, video cameras, or duress alarms to manage entry to the workplace         2. ensure both indoor and exterior lighting offers adequate illumination         3. arrange furniture and dividers such that service areas are visible and the movement of workers is not restricted         4. install protective barriers or screens to isolate workers from the general public, where possible         5. when people work alone or at night, restrict public access to workers         6. make sure potentially harmful objects cannot be thrown or used to harm someone         7. establish a safe haven for workers and others         8. install signage advising that any sort of violence or aggression will not be tolerated |
| Work Systems | * + - * 1. customers and clients should be informed about new/changed COVID-19 restrictions imposed by the federal or state government (e.g. the obligation to sign in with a QR code or wear a mask), and should be encouraged to show tolerance, respect, and understanding         2. manage expectations of customers and clients with communications about the nature and limits of the products or services (e.g. inform customers of reduced services, wait times, their place in the queue, or offer them other methods for non-urgent requests, such as online forms)         3. place purchase limits on the sale of in-demand goods or take them off the shelves and require customers to ask for them specifically         4. provide information as soon as possible on the availability of services/products or processing delays         5. clarify the procedures which customers may not be familiar with, such as physical distancing in stores and queuing procedures         6. adapt opening hours if necessary, and clearly communicate this to the public         7. avoid workers needing to work in isolation and provide sufficient staff during periods of high customer attendance         8. monitor workers when they are working in the community or away from the workplace, for example a supervisor checks in regularly throughout the shift         9. working with customers (in person or over the phone) should be alternated with other work responsibilities, and staff should be given regular breaks where possible from interacting with customers and clients         10. train workers on how to deal with difficult clients, how to resolve conflicts, and when to escalate problem calls to supervisors, as well as incident reporting protocols         11. ensure workers are informed of their right to stop working in dangerous conditions |

## Reporting and Investigation

The reporting and investigation of incidents/near misses of aggression, threats or violence should be undertaken as per the ORGANISATION NAME Hazard/Incident Reporting Procedure.

Where an incident of occupational violence has been reported, managers/supervisors must:

* + - * 1. conduct an investigation to find out what happened
        2. look at possibilities of complaint resolution
        3. provide the complainant with support, maintaining proper confidentiality

In certain cases it may be necessary to:

* + - * 1. provide first aid or arrange medical treatment
        2. provide access to counselling and debriefing (for example, the Employee Assistance Program)
        3. relieve the worker of their duties to allow recovery
        4. if required, notify relevant state regulatory authorities
        5. in the case of criminal acts, notify the police

Refer to Appendix 1 for a template Interview Record for Occupational Violence, which may assist in prompting further information/details of the incident.

## Training, information and instruction

On induction, workers shall be informed of ORGANISATION NAME zero tolerance to occupational violence and the processes and procedures for reporting any occupational violence incidents. Additional training in situational awareness, managing an incident and de-escalation techniques may also be provided to workers in roles with a higher risk of exposure to violence (e.g. customer-facing roles).

# Document Control

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Version | Date | Author | Comments/amendments |
| 1 | 2/12/21 | Mercer Marsh Benefits | Initial document |
| 2 | 4/04/22 | Mercer Marsh Benefits | Review and update, April 2022 |
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1. : Interview Record for Occupational Violence

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Worker Details:** | |
| **Name:** |  |
| **Position:** |  |
| **Work Location:** |  |
| **Contact Number:** |  |
| **Date & Time of Interview:** |  |
| **Interviewer:** |  |
| **Contact Number:** |  |
| **Summary of Incident Details** | |
| **Brief summary of incident/s and behaviours (What happened?)** |  |
| **Was physical force or threats to use physical force involved?** |  |
| **Did this happen to you or someone else?** |  |
| **Was anyone else involved? If so, who? Witnesses?** |  |
| **Has the type of incident occurred before or since?** |  |
| **How often has this happened?** |  |
| **Describe what happened immediately before the incident?** |  |
| **Was any action taken after the incident/s? Describe** |  |
| **What effect has the incident has on the worker? Describe and by whom** |  |
| **What action does the worker seek?** |  |
| I have read this document and agree this summary is a true and accurate record of my interview.  Signature:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: / / | |
| **Name of Witnesses Present** |  |

Marsh Pty Ltd

One International Towers Sydney

100 Barangaroo Avenue

Sydney, NSW Australia 2000

PO Box H176

Australia Square, NSW Australia , 1215

www.marsh.com/au

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