



Fatal Risk Procedure

Workplace Violence

(HSE)

Document Number: A4006711



Excellence



Honesty



Accountability



Courage



Caring

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1. Objective

The aim of this procedure is to assist the Goulburn-Murray Water's (GMW) workforce in recognising, responding and managing aggressive, threatening, intimidating and potentially violent behaviors.

This procedure also outlines GMW's commitment to providing a working environment free of occupational violence and aggression and ensure compliance with the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004*.

GMW is committed to providing a safe work environment as far as reasonably practicable. GMW will provide appropriate training to workers and provide support to any worker who has been subjected to harassment or aggression by another worker, customer or stakeholder during their official duties or outside of working hours.

GMW has zero tolerance for Workplace Violence.

2. Scope

This procedure applies to all GMW workers in relation to any workplace violence experienced within their role at GMW.

2.1 What is occupational violence and aggression?

Occupational violence and aggression is when a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in a situation related to their work. It might come from anywhere – clients, customers, the public or co-workers.

2.2 What is work-related gendered violence?

Work-related gendered violence is any behavior, directed at any person, or that affects a person because of their sex, gender or sexual orientation, or because they do not adhere to socially prescribed gender roles, that creates a risk to health and safety.

3. Procedure

All reasonably practicable steps will be taken to eliminate or reduce the risk of workers or other workplace participants being exposed to work-related occupational violence and aggression.

Workers and other workplace participants must be consulted about the development, establishment and implementation of occupational violence and aggression prevention measures.



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Workers and other workplace participants whose work potentially involves them being exposed to hostile or aggressive members of the public, co-workers and contractors must receive appropriate information, instruction, training and supervision.

All incidences of violence or aggression must be reported and logged in IRIS as soon as possible. Incidents of workplace violence that involves physical harm, assault, threats of violence or abuse and stalking should be reported to the police.

All reported incidents and threats of violence or aggression must be promptly reviewed and appropriately followed up.

Timely and relevant support (e.g. EAP – Employee Assistance Provider) must be offered to workers and other workers who have been exposed to a violent or aggressive work-related incident.

Any incident which results in a worker being exposed to a violent, potentially violent or abusive act, would trigger either a safety investigation process (2-24-2 process) or a People and Culture Investigation.

The following guidance has been developed in general terms to assist supervisors, site managers and workers to develop the most appropriate procedure at their office or site location.

3.1 Customer Service – front desk in the office

- Take a slight step back to keep a safe distance between aggressor and worker.
- Use approaches aimed to defuse and deescalate and reduce the likelihood of the situation becoming aggressive or violent.
- Obtain as much detail as possible about the customers' issues or concerns.
- Request the assistance of colleagues or manager via pressing the duress button.
- If the customer begins to become difficult, where possible, calmly notify them that you are not comfortable with the situation. If the behaviour continues, stop the interaction and notify the customer of the need to reschedule or escalate to the supervisor for resolution.
- If the inappropriate behaviour ceases and the customer is composed, the interaction may continue. Inform your Supervisor/Manager of the incident.
- Be mindful of voice tone and body language.
- Show respect through active listening, empathy and speaking to them on their level.
- Document event in the IRIS system and place on appropriate file/GMW system.
- If approached by a customer outside of hours, then it should be documented in IRIS and dealt with the same as any other civil assault and referred to the police



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3.2 Handling difficult or challenging clients

- Look for signs of anxiety, agitation or anger being displayed by the client. Anger can be displayed in several ways: red face, shouting, panting, teeth gritting etc.
- 'Quiet' anger i.e. when someone is seething with rage underneath.
- It is a dangerous sign when someone suddenly shifts from being loud and boisterous to being quiet as it may indicate they have resolved to act.
- Respond quickly when a client becomes angry, difficult, agitated, distressed or upset. Focus on reducing possible triggers to prevent the situation escalating.
- Adopt neutral or non-confrontational body language (this can assist to prevent escalation).
- Upon feeling customers are building up an angry conversation, you should seek to terminate the conversation, and re-schedule for another time. I.e. time out please.

3.3 Customer Service – on the phone

- Stay calm and avoid talking to the caller if they are abusive, as it may trigger a negative response.
- Obtain as much detail as possible about the customers' issues or concerns.
- Be mindful of voice tone.
- Avoid slamming down the phone.
- Request the assistance of colleagues or manager.
- Show respect through active listening, empathy, speaking to them on their level.
- Where the customer is threatening, inform them you are not comfortable and if behaviour continues you will need to terminate the interaction and reschedule.
- Notify the Supervisor/Manager immediately.
- Document event in the IRIS system and place on appropriate file/GMW system.

3.4 Customer Service – out in the field

- Be mindful of your body language and tone of voice.
- Do not enter physical body space, always maintain a reactionary gap for safety.
- Use approaches aimed to defuse, deescalate and reduce the likelihood of the situation becoming aggressive or violent.
- Show respect through active listening, empathy, speaking to them on their level.
- Listen to the customer's grievance and ask questions to better understand.
- Communicate with empathy.
- Upon feeling customers are building up an angry conversation, you should seek to terminate the conversation, and re-schedule for another time. I.e. time out please.
- Notify the customer that the conversation will cease, then proceed back to your vehicle and notify Supervisor/Manager for resolution.
- Use 2 person up method, where possible – visit should be by 2 workers where possible.
- Document event in the IRIS system and place on appropriate file/GMW system.
- If approached by a customer outside of hours, then it should be dealt with the same as any other civil assault and referred to the police.



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3.5 Stages of Interaction

3.5.1 Preparation Stage:

- Prior to undertaking any interaction with customers, including going out onto site, all GMW workers need to prepare. This may include reviewing customer's notes held on file or in GMW systems.
- It is important to undertake a risk assessment to identify any hazards with regards to the customer interaction and develop a safety system of work.
- All GMW workers who are required to have interaction with customers as part of their role are to be instructed and trained as outlined in the manager's responsibilities.
- A safe system of work is to be established within the team and office on how to respond to customers who demonstrate inappropriate behaviour towards GMW workers, including emergency procedure / duress procedure.

Note: GMW maintains a number of sources of customer information on file and on GMW systems. The systems include Geo-cortex.

In addition, workers such as Customer Service Managers (CSM) in the areas of operation may also be able to assist in preparing for customer or site/ property visits.

3.5.2 Defuse Stage:

At this stage, workers are required to implement training and instructions, including safe system of work that has been provided to with regards to customer service interaction. These include:

- Customer service interaction techniques which defuse / deescalate any customer difficulty or aggression.
- Seek assistance from nearest team member.
- Remove yourself (and others if required) from the situation.
- Notify Supervisor / Manager.
- Where necessary enact the relevant Emergency Procedure / Duress Procedure.
- Physical harm, assault, threats of violence or abuse and stalking should also be reported to the police.

3.5.3 Debrief Stage:

At this stage, the situation has been resolved.

- Depending upon the scale of situation, an incident debrief will be conducted by the appropriate parties.
- The worker who has had the incident is required to place a report into IRIS with the support of the Supervisor/Manager.



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- Your Manager / Supervisor will review processes and procedures and make any necessary amendments. Your Manager / Supervisor will then make any relevant notifications so other workers are aware for future dealings, for example by highlighting customers land area in Geo-cortex as aggressive customer. This includes any updates to GMW files, and systems such as Geo-cortex.
- It is important to maintain a level of professionalism and confidentiality during and after any escalated situations with customers.
- In some circumstances the Supervisor/Manager and/or the health and safety team may conduct or arrange for additional debriefing sessions. The intent of these sessions is to assist in alleviating any stress caused by the incident.

Other types of assistance that GMW can provide include:

- Group discussions and/or counselling services required
- EAP – 1300 344 996
- Peer Support – Contact list is in supporting documents

See example: Appendix B – Flowchart - Corporate workplace violence

4. Responsibilities

4.1 Executive Leadership Team

Overseeing and ensuring the implementation of the requirements of this procedures within their respective functional areas.

- Ensure adequate resources are available to enable the effective implementation of this SOP.

4.2 Manager/Supervisor

Managers and Supervisors have a responsibility under the Work Health and Safety Act to provide a safe and healthy workplace for their staff. At GMW we actively support and promote GMW safety systems to minimise exposure to incidents of aggression.

Managers and supervisors have the responsibility to ensure:

- A local emergency response or duress response process is developed consulted, staff are trained, tested and available to guide staff in the process to be followed for an incident of client aggression.
- Office practices and procedures are reviewed and improved where required to provide a positive customer experience.
- Workers are provided with guidance and/or training to enhance skills in conveying information to clients
- Workers are trained and are competent in how to effectively manage and respond to aggressive clients, using approaches to reduce the likelihood of clients to become aggressive or violent.



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- Workers are provided with the skills and techniques to effectively manage clients and stay in control when interactions include intimidation, verbal abuse and threat.
- Workers who are in direct client contact areas such as counters are trained and experienced staff with a customer focus
- Workers are aware of the support systems including how to effectively terminate calls, remove self from situations and others and commence a duress situation to ensure safety.
- Will provide support, medical treatment, debriefing procedures and EAP support including competent counsellors.
- Complete as soon as practicable, necessary incident reporting, including police (where required), GMW IRIS report and/or WorkSafe etc.

4.3 Employees

Workers have the responsibility to ensure:

- During client interactions it is essential for staff to remain alert and aware of their surroundings with safety at the forefront in their mind at all times.

It is important that during client interaction for staff to:

- Identify signs which may lead to aggressive and potentially violent behaviour
- Identify ways to defuse and avoid confrontations
- Adopt approaches aimed at reducing likelihood of clients becoming violent
- Adopted approaches and own behaviours to control anger and stay in control
- Adopt approaches to manage distress
- Remain conscious of personal safety and identify opportunities to seek assistance from colleagues, managers, or exit the scene.

5. Definitions

Occupational Aggression: This is defined as any incident where a worker feels threatened as a result of abuse or harassment or if the worker is assaulted in the course of their employment. Aggressive behaviour at GMW may include but is not limited to the following:

- verbal, physical or psychological abuse (including bullying and harassment)
- threats or other intimidating behaviours (e.g. spitting, gesticulating)
- intentional physical attack (e.g. hitting, pinching, biting or scratching)
- threats or attacks with weapons or objects
- any form of indecent physical contact, including sexual harassment or sexual assault
- property or equipment damage



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6. Procedure history

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A4006711	28 September 2021	Glenda Smith, General Manager People Culture and Safety,	A4149081
A2470458	9 June 2015	John Calleja, Managing Director	NA

7. Associated Documents

Procedure name	#
Occupational Health and Safety Act (Victoria) 2004	
Occupational Health and Safety Regulations (Victoria) 2017	
Emergency Response Procedure	A3988235
OHS Incident Reporting and Investigation Procedure	A3859790
Working Alone or Remotely Procedure	A3795409
Peer Support Contact List	A3795409
Flowchart - Corporate workplace violence	A4197318



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8. Appendices

Appendix A - Procedural Overview / Toolbox

This Appendix is designed to provide an overview of the requirements of this procedure – it is to be used as an aid/refresher to the procedure, and is not to be used in isolation without prior training of the procedure. Section 4 – Responsibilities has not been included within this Appendix (Please see Procedure for respective details)

The aim of this procedure is to assist the Goulburn-Murray Water’s (GMW) workforce in recognising, responding and managing aggressive, threatening, intimidating and potentially violent behaviors.

- GMW has zero tolerance for Workplace Violence.
- This procedure applies to all GMW workers in relation to any workplace violence experienced within their role at GMW.

Sect.	Requirement
3 Procedure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workers and other workplace participants whose work potentially involves them being exposed to hostile or aggressive members of the public, co-workers and contractors must receive appropriate information, instruction, training and supervision • All incidences of violence or aggression must be reported and logged in IRIS as soon as possible. Incidents of workplace violence that involves physical harm, assault, threats of violence or abuse and stalking should be reported to the police • All reported incidents and threats of violence or aggression must be promptly reviewed and appropriately followed up • Timely and relevant support (e.g. EAP – Employee Assistance Provider) must be offered to workers and other workers who have been exposed to a violent or aggressive work-related incident • The following guidance has been developed in general terms to assist supervisors, site managers and workers to develop the most appropriate procedure at their office or site location <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 3.1 Customer Service – front desk in the office - 3.2 Handling difficult or challenging clients - 3.3 Customer Service – on the phone - 3.4 Customer Service – out in the field
3.5 Stages of Interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3.5.1 Preparation Stage: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All GMW workers who are required to have interaction with customers as part of their role are to be instructed and trained as outlined in the manager’s responsibilities - A safe system of work is to be established within the team and office on how to respond to customers who demonstrate inappropriate behaviour towards GMW workers, including emergency procedure / duress procedure • 3.5.2 Defuse Stage: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - At this stage, workers are required to implement training and instructions, including safe system of work that has been provided to with regards to customer service interaction. • 3.5.3 Debrief Stage: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - At this stage, the situation has been resolved - The worker who has had the incident is required to place a report into IRIS with the support of the Supervisor/Manager



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Sect.	Requirement
3.5 Stages of Interaction cont.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Your Manager / Supervisor will review processes and procedures and make any necessary amendments - Your Manager / Supervisor will then make any relevant notifications so other workers are aware for future dealings, for example by highlighting customers land area in Geo-cortex as aggressive customer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ This includes any updates to GMW files, and systems such as Geo-cortex - In some circumstances the Supervisor/Manager and/or the health and safety team may conduct or arrange for additional debriefing sessions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The intent of these sessions is to assist in alleviating any stress caused by the incident - Other types of assistance that GMW can provide include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Group discussions and/or counselling services required ▪ EAP – 1300 344 996 ▪ Peer Support – Contact list is in supporting documents - See Appendix B – General Customer Interaction Workflow



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Appendix B – Flowchart - Corporate workplace violence (A4197318)

