

Guide to Completing the Department/Work Group Risk Assessment

The goals of the risk assessment meeting are:

- To document foreseeable risks that could lead to violent incidents in your workplace
- To agree on reasonable and desirable remedial actions to reduce these risks and/or reduce potential negative consequences of an incident

When completing the Workplace Violence Prevention risk assessment, ensure all individuals are offered a chance to contribute their thoughts and experiences. Those individuals who are unable to attend the department meeting can be invited to submit their comments on paper – please direct them to the risk assessment form and this guide to completion on the Human Resources website. As the main aim of this exercise is to identify agreed actions, discussion is the best means of doing this, so live participation in the meeting is strongly encouraged.

Your role as facilitator of the risk assessment meeting is to encourage and guide discussion of the risks employees perceive should be reduced and help them decide what they want to do about them. The perception of risk is subjective, so it is important that all concerns are taken seriously and no individual is made to feel uncomfortable expressing their opinion.

If the group is unable to reach agreement on whether a particular risk needs to be acted upon, or what action to take, make a note of the issue on the risk assessment form. The WPVP advisory team will follow-up with you to clarify the issue and help resolve it at a later date with the affected employees. Try not to allow disagreement over one issue to prevent actions on other issues from being agreed.

The following guide is intended to provide prompts to aid your discussion and examples of the kinds of risks that your group may need to consider. It is suggested that you work through the three main categories of risk systematically to ensure nothing is missed. The concerns associated with the physical environment will have been completed by your building coordinator and zone mechanic during a walk-through conducted prior to your department meeting. Your zone mechanic will have initialed beside any minor concerns that will be taken care of through routine building maintenance, so it is unlikely that there will be a need for further discussion of these particular elements.

When considering actions to reduce identified risks, bear in mind that they may have wider consequences – by reducing one risk, we can inadvertently increase other risks. For example, by putting in more security measures, clients may experience more frustration because their access to services is more restricted. This can raise the risk of a violent incident. While we can't anticipate every possible consequence, it is important to weigh up the relative pros and cons of a remedial action and keep in mind what kind of environment you want to work in.

A list of prompts to aid discussion of potential risks is provided under each category heading below. Consider all of the following potential types of violent incident:

- Employee – employee in same department (close colleagues)
- Employee – employee in different departments (distant colleagues)
- Employee – student/visitor with legitimate reason to be there
- Employee – stranger without legitimate reason to be there
- Incidents not involving employees directly

1 Sample risks associated with the physical environment

Parking/area surrounding building

- Lighting
- Degree of isolation/seclusion
- Places to hide – eg bushes, trees, etc
- Access to emergency assistance
- Degree to which area is overlooked, eg by windows in other occupied buildings?
- Monitoring of the area - eg by regular security patrols or CCTV?
- Crime rates in local area?

Building exterior

- Places to hide?
- Alarms?

Access/exit routes, controls and signage

- Signposting of entrances/exits
- Visibility of entrances/exits for monitoring who comes in and goes out
- Are entrances/exits kept locked when they should not be in use, eg after office hours? (ideally, the number of access points to a building should be kept to the minimum that will meet the needs of the users, while preserving emergency exit routes)
- Can visitors walk around the building freely, or are there controls in place to restrict access?
- Is signage sufficient to prevent visitors getting lost/entering areas of the building they shouldn't be in?
- Do visitors need to be signed in/out?

Building interior design/layout of work space

- Is office furniture arranged in such a way that there are obvious places to hide?
- Are there areas where an employee could be attacked without their colleagues being aware?
- Is the work area organized so that visitors have minimum need to access areas where employees work?
- Is furniture arranged so that exit routes are clear and easily reached in an emergency?
- Which way do desks face?

Work space usage

- Are desks kept free of objects that could be used as weapons – eg letter openers, paperweights?
- Are there items such as plants or piles of files that prevent employees having a clear view of each other's work spaces or access/exit routes?

Access to emergency equipment and backup

- Is emergency equipment such as fire alarm boxes, fire extinguishers, first aid supplies, etc easy to access and do employees know how to use the emergency equipment available?
- Are emergency contact numbers clearly posted in all relevant areas?
- Might employees need other ways to alert emergency services, eg panic buttons/similar systems?

Other

- Prompt employees to consider other potential risks not covered above

2 Sample risks associated with work practices

Nature of the work

- Do employees work with cash – are safe cash-handling practices used?
- Do employees work with medications – if not, is this clear or could anyone mistakenly believe that medications are kept on the premises?
- Do employees work with hazardous chemicals?
- Do employees work with individuals who are often distressed or likely to be psychologically unstable?
- Do employees work in community-based facilities or visit locations away from campus?
- Do employees work in isolated areas of the campus?

Shifts/working hours

- Do employees work shifts that require early morning or late evening/night start or end times?

Staffing numbers

- Do employees ever work alone or in small numbers where they have no access to emergency backup?

Policies and procedures

- Is there a security escort service after hours to make sure lone workers get safely to their cars?
- Do any of the policies or procedures relating to the work of the department cause unnecessary delays or frustrations to colleagues or clients?
- Are employees familiar with grievance and disciplinary policies to address unacceptable behavior?

Locations and procedures for interacting with visitors to the department

- Are visitors dealt with in areas that can be easily observed/monitored by other employees?
- Are visitors supervised at all times?
- Do employees have easy access to backup from colleagues if they encounter a difficult situation with a customer/visitor?
- Are procedures in place for dealing with distressed/angry clients/customers and do all employees know what they are?

Work loads/stress levels

- Are work loads such that employees feel overwhelmed/unable to cope?
- Are stress levels due to work and/or home circumstances unacceptably high?

Other

- Are employees equipped with personal attack alarms where necessary?
- Do employees have access to cell phones or radios they can use to summon emergency assistance and do they know how to do this?

3 Sample risks associated with individuals/specific client groups

Nature of contact with visitors

Do employees interact with visitors/customers face-to-face?

Is the need to have confidential conversations appropriately balanced with the need for employee safety?

Nature of interactions with colleagues from other departments/work groups

Do employees often interact with colleagues with needs they are not trained to deal with?

Do employees have a problem solving/troubleshooting role that frequently leads them to interact with colleagues who are angry or frustrated?

Sources of guidance and support for work and/or personal issues

Do employees have a supportive relationship with their colleagues/supervisor/direct reports?

Do employees know where to go for advice, guidance and support on challenging work and non-work issues?

Information, knowledge and skills to deal with violent or other emergency situations

Do employees have adequate knowledge/training to deal confidently with their client group?

Do employees have adequate training in how to respond to emergency situations that can reasonably be anticipated from the nature of their work and the environment in which they operate?

Other

Prompt employees to consider other potential risks not covered above

Training needs

Most employees will ideally take the initiative themselves to request training they need as a result of participation in this risk assessment. The facilitator should refer employees to their own supervisors to discuss training needs as well as recording them on the risk assessment training needs form.

Employees can also be directed to contact Catriona McCarroll, cmccarro@brockport.edu, 395-5115.

Request for specific support to reduce risks

Once the remedial actions to reduce risk have been identified, the facilitator should encourage the department/work group to discuss what they can do themselves and what they need help with.

Department action plan

Ensure that actions to be completed within the department are documented and that someone is responsible for each action and recording that they have been completed. If, in the process of working on remedial action within the department, you find that external help is required after all, please complete an additional request for specific support form and send it to the Office of Human Resources.

Next year's risk assessment

Please highlight to all team members the need to report new risks whenever they arise by submitting the WPVP risk reporting form to the Office of Human Resources (the form will be available soon on the Human Resources website. Although we need to do a risk assessment every year, future years will ideally just involve a check to see nothing new has arisen that hasn't already been reported, because we'll be gathering information about risks on an ongoing basis.

Guidance for employees who work in more than one building

The complexity of college operations and our physical environment make it impossible to provide rigid rules for completing the risk assessment process. Our best guide is to apply common sense to identifying where we can contribute best and rely on those who are assessing other areas we may also use to identify the risks for us. The department action plans and the prioritized remedial action plans produced by the WPVP advisory team will be communicated to those affected so there will be an opportunity then to identify any omissions.

Many employees work in more than one building. Employees should be given the choice of which team risk assessment they take part in. The following recommendations are intended to offer guidance on this issue. If you have any questions this guidance does not answer, please contact:

Adrienne Collier	acollier@brockport.edu	395-5119	or
Catriona McCarroll	cmccarro@brockport.edu	395-5115	

Each employee should elect to attend the department risk assessment to which they can contribute most. For example, some faculty whose department is based on the main campus work at the Metro Center. It is likely that they can contribute more to the risk assessment process by joining a department meeting at the Metro Center, even if this is not their home department. Individuals in such situations will make this judgment for themselves, in consultation with their manager/supervisor. If they have any issues they wish to be discussed by their home department, they can submit written comments to their department chair/head before the meeting.

Unless anyone has strong concerns about a particular issue in another building and wish to have this documented separately, please focus on completing the risk assessment in the building in which people have their main base/office. The building coordinators and zone mechanics will capture the risks associated with the physical environment in all the buildings so employees can focus most of their attention on work practices and client groups.

Comments on other buildings can be documented on an extra copy of the risk assessment sheet dealing with the physical environment. It is not necessary to separate the risks associated with work practices or client groups in this way as these are largely independent of the physical environment.

At the end of the risk assessment process, the completed forms will be distributed among sub-groups of the WPVP advisory team. The sub-groups will be organized to create teams with knowledge and expertise relating to particular areas of the campus. Risk assessment forms will be given to the most appropriate team based on the areas they know best.

Some practical tips

There is no one right way to manage this risk assessment discussion. Here are some practical suggestions to use if helpful in your situation. (We will gather and share feedback on what you found worked and what didn't at the end of this exercise to provide more detailed guidance next time)

- Write up the goals of the meeting on a flip chart or board and draw people's attention back to them if the discussion drifts off track.
- It may be helpful to start with a quick run-through of all the topic headings first to score off any that don't apply in your area.
- Allocate appropriate time slots to the remaining topics so that you get through the whole process in the time available.
- Allocate the time-keeping responsibility to someone other than the main facilitator.
- Ask the group to give this person permission to stop a discussion mid-flow when its time allocation runs out on the understanding that you'll come back to the topic later as time allows.
- Document unresolved issues for the WPVP advisory team to follow-up on. Don't allow them to dominate the whole meeting.