



THE VIOLENCE

**Workplace Violence
Prevention Guide**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION	4
1.0 Introduction	4
1.1 What is the <i>Occupational Health and Safety Act</i> (OHS Act)	5
1.2 Specific requirements of the OHS Act	5
1.3 Workplace Violence Prevention Program	6
CHAPTER 2: WORKPLACE VIOLENCE	7
2.0 What is workplace violence	7
2.1 Domestic violence in the workplace	8
2.2 What type of workers are at risk	8
CHAPTER 3: PREVENTING WORKPLACE VIOLENCE	9
3.0 Performing a workplace violence assessment risk.....	9
3.1 Frequently asked questions	10
CHAPTER 4: CREATING A WORKPLACE VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAM	12
4.0 Workplace violence policy	12
4.1 Worker and supervisor training	13
4.2 Safe work procedures	13
4.3 Reporting and documenting violent incidents	14
4.4 Incident follow up and debrief	14
4.5 Injured worker	14
4.6 Program review	15
APPENDICES	16
Appendix A - Five Warning Signs of Escalating Behaviours	16
Appendix B - Sample Workplace Violence Incident Report Form	17
Appendix C - Sample Workplace Violence Risk Assessment	18

CHAPTER 1 - ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

1.0 Introduction

Violence in the workplace is a serious occupational hazard. Like other work-related injuries, injuries from violence are preventable. Various unwanted behaviours can happen in a workplace, ranging from offensive remarks to violence.

Workers may encounter violent individuals due to the nature of their work. This may include, but is not limited to a client, a customer, a volunteer, a student, a patient, a service provider, etc. Or the violent individual may be someone with no formal connection to the workplace such as a stranger or a domestic/intimate partner who brings violence or harassment into the workplace.

Every worker has a right to a healthy and safe workplace. To achieve this, employers and workers play contributing roles in creating and maintaining a positive and respectful workplace environment. It is important for employers to address inappropriate behaviours early to minimize the potential for workplace violence. Employers have specific duties regarding workplace violence under Part 52 of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* General Regulations.

This publication provides practical guidance and recommendations which are meant to help employers meet the requirements of the OHS Act and its Regulations.

For additional support, please contact:

Workers Compensation Board (WCB)
Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Division

ohs@wcb.pe.ca

902-368-5680 or **1-800-237-5049** toll-free in Atlantic Canada

24-Hour OHS Emergency Line 902-628-7513

For additional resources, visit our website at wcb.pe.ca
and download our **Guide to OHS Legislation App**
available for iOS and Android.



1.1 What is the *Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHS Act)*

The OHS Act and its Regulations set the minimum standards for occupational health and safety in the workplace and define the general safety principles for provincially regulated workplaces in Prince Edward Island.

A safe workplace starts with an understanding of the OHS Act and its Regulations. Both employers and workers are responsible for understanding the components of the OHS Act and its Regulations. The OHS Act, Section 12, states employers have to make sure that every reasonable precaution is taken to protect the health and safety of persons at or near the workplace. This includes ensuring that measures to prevent workplace violence are in place, such as providing a safe working environment, offering adequate training on conflict resolution and de-escalation techniques, and ensuring proper supervision to maintain a secure atmosphere for all workers. The employer is obligated to take measures to eliminate workplace hazards in order to prevent an incident from occurring.

This publication is not intended as a form of legal advice and should not be taken as a statement of the law. The information provided in this guide is for general application and therefore, the reader should always refer to the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* and its Regulations for specific requirements.

1.2 Specific requirements under the OHS Act

Did you know?

Workers have **THREE** basic rights to guide them in carrying out their safety responsibilities.

THE RIGHT TO KNOW

Workers have the **right to know** about the hazards of their jobs. They should know how to recognize and deal with those hazards so they will not cause injury or health problems to themselves or to others in the workplace.

THE RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE

Workers have the **right to participate** in health and safety in the workplace. Employers should consult with them on matters that affect worker's safety.

THE RIGHT TO REFUSE WORK

Workers have the right to **refuse to do work** which they have reasonable grounds to believe would endanger their health or safety, or another person's health or safety. If a worker refuses to work, he or she must immediately report to a supervisor. Information on the legal requirements for a work refusal can be found in the OHS Act, Sections 28, 29 and 30.

Workers must be made aware of the risks of violence identified within the workplace and must be trained in the appropriate responses and safe work procedures established in the Workplace Violence Prevention Program (WVPP).

1.3 Workplace Violence Prevention Program

Developing a WVPP will provide workers with the tools they need to deal with potentially dangerous situations. Training workers to recognize escalating behaviour that has the potential to result in violence is an excellent way to prevent violence.

Employers and supervisors should provide workers with information related to the risk of workplace violence from a person with a history of violent behaviour.

This duty applies when a worker can be expected to encounter a violent person during their work and the risk of workplace violence is likely to expose the worker to injury.

The information disclosed should allow workers to identify the person with the violent history and, if appropriate, the triggers of the potential aggression.

However, the worker would not necessarily need to know all the personal information the employer has about the person with the violent history.

Employers and supervisors must not disclose more information than is reasonably necessary for the protection of a worker from injury.

**As an employer, do I have to tell every worker
about a person with a history of violent behaviour?**

Not necessarily. An employer would first have to determine which workers, if any, would be likely to encounter the violent person and if the risk of workplace violence was likely to expose the worker to injury.

Depending on the results of this assessment, the employer would not have to provide a worker with specific information about the violent person if the worker was:

- Not likely to encounter that person in their work,
- Not at risk of injury from that person.

Visit our website wcb.pe.ca for more information and additional resources.

CHAPTER 2 - WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

2.0 What is workplace violence

Workplace violence can take many forms, including threatening behaviour and physical attacks which may result in worker injury. Part 52 of the OHS Act General Regulations addresses violence in the workplace and defines it as the threatened, attempted or actual exercise of any physical force by a person other than a worker that can cause, or that causes, injury to a worker, and includes any threatening statement or behaviour that gives a worker reasonable cause to believe that he or she is at risk of injury.

It is important to note that:

- This definition states that the threat must consist of fear of or actual physical violence.
- The definition specifically excludes coworkers.
- The Regulations apply anytime the worker is doing assigned duties, regardless of the location.
- The Regulations set a minimum standard for health and safety. Employers are encouraged to conduct a careful assessment of hazards and go beyond the minimum standard where hazards are identified.

Workplace violence may include, but is not limited to:

- Verbally threatening to attack a worker.
- Leaving threatening notes or sending threatening emails.
- Shaking a fist in a worker's face.
- Wielding a weapon.
- Hitting or trying to hit a worker.
- Throwing an object at a worker.
- Sexual violence against a worker.
- Kicking an object, the worker is standing on, such as a ladder.
- Trying to run down a worker using a vehicle or equipment.

For more examples of escalating behaviour, see Appendix A.

WORKER-ON-WORKER VIOLENCE

Under the OHS Act, worker-on-worker violence is considered workplace harassment. For employer and worker obligations and guidance on this topic, please refer to the OHS Act Workplace Harassment Regulations and the WCB's Guide to Workplace Harassment Regulations. Both are available on the WCB website wcb.pe.ca.



2.1 Domestic violence in the workplace

A person who has a personal relationship with a worker – such as a spouse or former spouse, current or former intimate partner or a family member – may physically harm, or attempt or threaten to physically harm, that worker at work. In these situations, domestic violence is considered workplace violence.

Measures and safe work procedures in the WVPP can help protect workers from domestic violence in the workplace. For example, measures for the summoning of immediate assistance or for reporting of violent incidents could help protect workers from domestic violence when it may occur in the workplace.

2.2 What types of workers are at risk?

There are several factors that may increase a worker's risk of exposure to workplace violence. Research on workplace violence shows work activities that are most at risk are:

- Delivering health care and social services
- Handling cash
- Protecting or securing valuables
- Working in an area of high crime
- Selling or dispensing of alcohol or prescription drugs
- Providing services to the public or community
- Transporting people and goods
- Working alone in isolation
- Working from a mobile workplace
- Working late nights or very early mornings
- Providing security or regulatory enforcement services
- Working with unstable or volatile people

The following workers are often at a higher risk for violence:

- City transit or taxi drivers
- Convenience store attendants
- Gas stations attendants
- Health care workers
- Inspectors
- Jewellery store clerks
- Police, security and correctional officers
- Public works workers
- Retail workers
- Social services workers
- Teachers and education providers
- Veterinary practitioners
- Service persons in drinking and eating establishments

Workers should always feel safe and protected at work. Employers have a legal and moral responsibility to protect their workers and provide them with the training, education, and tools they need to complete their tasks safely.

Visit our website wcb.pe.ca for more information and additional resources.

CHAPTER 3 - PREVENTING WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

The OHS Act General Regulations set out the general duties of the employer in Part 52. Employers are responsible for ensuring all hazards in the workplace are identified. When it comes to workplace violence, the employer must:

- Perform a workplace violence risk assessment.
- Establish a WVPP that includes a workplace violence policy.
- Inform workers who may be exposed to the risk of violence in the workplace.

3.0 Performing a workplace violence risk assessment

The employer's main responsibility for first aid is to provide and maintain adequate first aid supplies and make sure assigned workers are trained in first aid. The cost of first aid kit supplies and training is the responsibility of the employer.

The employer has several responsibilities for assessing the risks of workplace violence. A template assessment is included as an Appendix to this guide.

The employer must:

- Assess the risk of workplace violence that may arise from the nature of the workplace, type of work or conditions of work.
- Consider the circumstances of the workplace and what is common in similar workplaces, as well as any other elements prescribed in regulation.
- Develop safe work procedures to control risks that are likely to expose a worker to injury. These measures and procedures must be part of the WVPP.
- Risk assessments should be completed in consultation with the workers in the workplace, and the employer should advise the Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee or Safety Representative of the assessment results. The assessment should be in writing and the employer must provide a copy to the committee or the representative.

Employers must repeat the assessment as often as necessary to ensure the workplace violence policy and the related program continue to protect workers from workplace violence.

The results of the violence risk assessment should be used to develop a WVPP specific to the needs of the workplace.

What we mean by:

- The **nature of the workplace** refers to the physical aspects of the workplace, whether it is a building, construction site, vehicle, or forest. This may include workplace lighting, lines of sight, depth of counters, entrances, exits and objects that could be used to hurt workers.
- The **type of work** refers to the activities workers perform, like handling cash, the sector of work, like health care, and people with whom workers interact, like customers, clients or patients.
- The **conditions of work** refer to other aspects like the hours worked, the surrounding neighbourhood and whether workers move from location to location, work alone or in isolation.
- The **circumstances specific to the workplace** could include:
 - Layout and design of the workplace.
 - Geographic location of the workplace.
 - Work carried out and conditions of work, including activities or circumstances associated with a higher risk of violence. See page 8.
 - Protective measures and safe work procedures, including security measures that may already be in place.
 - Past violent incidents in the workplace.

3.1 Frequently Asked Questions

How does the employer take into account “circumstances that would be common to similar workplaces”?

A specific workplace may not have experienced a violent incident but may share violence risks with similar workplaces. The risk of violence may be higher in certain sectors such as health care, social services, retail, hospitality, education, transportation, police, security and correctional facilities. Similar workplaces may also have common activities or work conditions.

Can one assessment be done for multiple workplaces?

A workplace violence risk assessment should be specific to the work location.

A similar type of work may be performed in multiple locations. However, the assessment must take into account the nature of the workplace and conditions of work. Each location should be assessed for its own unique risks of workplace violence in addition to the common risks.

For example, a company may operate many retail stores, all providing the same services. However, each store would have a unique location, surroundings and clientele, etc. In addition, the stores may have different interior physical layouts, equipment or hours of operation. So, even though the risks of workplace violence for the services provided may be similar, each store may have different risks specific to its different locations.

**A workplace violence risk assessment
should be specific to the work location.**

How often should reassessment take place?

It is recommended the employer review the assessment at least annually.

However, the risks of workplace violence should be reassessed as often as is necessary to protect workers from workplace violence. For example, a reassessment should be done if:

- The workplace moves or the existing workplace is renovated or reconfigured.
- There are significant changes in the type of work. For example, more expensive items are being sold.
- There are significant changes in the conditions of work. For example, closing at a later hour.
- There is new information on the risks of workplace violence.
- A violent incident indicates a risk related to the nature of the workplace, type of work, or conditions of work that were not identified during an earlier assessment

Visit our website wcb.pe.ca for more information and additional resources.

CHAPTER 4 - CREATING A WORKPLACE VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAM

Establishing a WVPP helps the employer in protecting workers' physical and psychological safety. The program should include input from workers, and from members of the joint occupational health and safety committee or the safety representative. These individuals often have considerable knowledge of the workplace and how it functions.

The following components should be included in your WVPP:

- A Workplace Violence Policy.
- Details for completing a workplace violence risk assessment.
- Worker and supervisor training requirements.
- Workplace violence safe work procedures.
- Procedures for documenting, reporting, and investigating incidents.
- Procedures for incident follow-up.
- Details of how often and how the WVPP will be reviewed.

The WVPP may incorporate, or reference, existing programs, procedures or protocols related to workplace violence. For example, there could be existing procedures for emergency situations, incident reporting or personal safety.

4.0 Workplace Violence Policy

The Workplace Violence Policy must demonstrate a strong commitment to violence prevention and stress the importance of eliminating or controlling the risk of violence. This policy must be in writing and should be available to workers in the workplace.

The workplace violence policy should:

- Show an employer's commitment to protecting workers from workplace violence.
- Have a definition to describe what is considered workplace violence.
- Address violence from all possible sources such as customers, clients, employers, strangers, and domestic/intimate partners.
- Outline the roles and responsibilities of the workplace parties in supporting the policy and program. Workplace parties include, but are not limited to workers, employers, supervisors, managers, etc.
- Describe how incidents of workplace violence will be addressed.
- Show commitment to providing the necessary training for workers.
- Be dated and signed by the highest level of management.

4.1 Worker and supervisor training

When a worker is hired, employers should identify what information, instruction or training is needed for that worker. This is done by considering hazards associated with each specific job, as well as the measures and safe work procedures that are in place.

Similarly, the employer should identify what information, instruction or training is needed when a worker changes jobs.

Workplace violence awareness can be covered along with other occupational health and safety topics, including workplace harassment, or it can be covered separately.

Employers should also identify how often instruction or training should be repeated. Instruction and training can be done:

- On a regular basis.
- When there are significant changes to the risks encountered.
- When there are significant changes to the workplace violence prevention policy or program.
- When circumstances indicate additional instruction or training is needed, such as when safe work procedures are not being followed or workers do not know about them.

To protect workers, the employer must tailor the type and amount of information and instruction to the specific job and the associated risks of workplace violence. Workers in jobs with a higher risk of violence may require more frequent or intensive instruction or specialized training.

4.2 Safe work procedures

Safe work procedures are written safety instructions that must be created and followed by both workers and supervisors. These procedures will provide direction to workers outlining safe response methods and procedures for reporting incidents.

Make sure workers are aware of the controls that have been implemented to prevent incidents of violence by reviewing safe work procedures during safety training events.

Safe work procedures that address violence may include:

- Dealing with irate customers
- Making bank deposits
- Preventing robberies or what to do if a robbery occurs
- Providing care to an angry patient
- Travelling to and from work safely
- Working alone

4.3 Reporting and documenting violent incidents

Part of a proactive workplace culture is encouraging workers to document and report any workplace violence incidents. Workers must be trained to report incidents, including what documentation to fill out and to whom it must be submitted.

It is important to take all incidents seriously and reinforce the benefits of proper reporting procedures to all staff. A reporting form should include a section for worker recommendations.

After an incident occurs, an investigation must take place as soon as possible. The workplace is responsible for determining what incidents need to be investigated.

Investigating incidents

The purpose of an investigation is to determine what happened, why it happened and what the workplace will do to minimize the risk of it happening again.

When an incident of workplace violence occurs, the employer should first notify the police or emergency responders for immediate assistance.

When the worker is safe and the scene is secure, the employer must make sure that an investigation appropriate to the circumstances is conducted. The person conducting the investigation can be internal to the workplace, such as a supervisor, senior manager, or human resources staff, work at another employer location, like a corporate office, or maybe someone external to the organization.

4.4 Incident follow-up and debrief

A post incident review will determine if the actions taken in response to the incident were effective. If appropriate actions were not taken to protect the workers, this must be addressed by the employer and other control measures and worker training must be provided. It is important to make sure that any procedure changes are documented in the program and that workers are informed.

4.5 Injured worker

When a worker has a work-related injury or illness, they need to see a doctor, nurse practitioner, physiotherapist, or chiropractor if they need medical care. The worker needs to tell that health care provider that they were injured at work. The injured worker can go to the WCB website wcb.pe.ca and click "File A Claim". That is the quickest way to start the claim process.

All workers will react differently to violent incidents in the workplace. Even after the completion of an incident investigation and worker debrief, workers may still deal with psychological challenges when returning work, including guilt, shame, anxiety or fear, concentration problems or other post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms.

As an employer, be sure to talk openly about the incident with workers, be aware of the signs and symptoms of PTSD and encourage workers to reach out for support and counselling services if they are struggling.

As the employer, once the worker has notified you of this work-related injury or illness, you must also submit an Employer's Report within three (3) days of being notified. The Employer's Report is required even if the worker has not missed time from work.

4.6 Program review

The employer should make sure that the WVPP is reviewed and modified, when necessary. Reviews help identify hazards and make sure that the most effective controls are in place.

Reviewing past incidents allows workers and employers to gain a better understanding of the higher risk tasks and areas in the workplace where workplace violence may exist. Proper and continual program evaluation allows for ongoing improvements to the WVPP.

A standard review of the Workplace Violence Prevention Program may consist of:

- Reviewing the process for completing high-risk activities.
- Inspecting and assessing controls in place to prevent violence.
- Discussions with workers and supervisors about the program.
- Reviewing instruction and training curriculum to make sure they are still relevant.

The findings of the review should be shared with workers and the Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee or Safety Representative at the workplace.

Visit our website wcb.pe.ca for more information and additional resources.

Appendix A – Five Warning Signs of Escalating Behaviour

Workers can be trained to identify these signs. Written safe work procedures can indicate a specific action to take at different points in the escalation of the behaviour.

WARNING SIGNS BY CLIENT/CUSTOMER	POSSIBLE RESPONSES
<p>Confusion</p> <p>This behaviour indicates that a person is bewildered or distracted. The person may seem unsure of what to do.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to concerns • Ask clarifying questions • Provide factual answers
<p>Frustration</p> <p>This behaviour can indicate resistance to information or reaction, impatience, or a sense of defeat. The person may try to bait you.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be sincere in your attempt to clarify • Reassure the person • Prepare to remove yourself and go to a safe location
<p>Blame</p> <p>This behaviour can escalate. The person may find fault with other's actions, accuse you, hold you responsible or blame you. This is the start of a potentially hazardous situation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disengage and bring another person into the discussion where possible • Use a team approach • Bring the client back to the facts • Use probing questions to demonstrate an attempt to understand
<p>Anger</p> <p>Anger is characterized by visible changes in body posture. Actions may include pounding fists, pointing fingers and shouting. This signals very risky behaviour.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use venting techniques • Don't offer solutions • Don't argue with comments made • Prepare to remove yourself and go to a safe location • Contact supervisor or security
<p>Hostility</p> <p>Hostility is characterized by physical actions of threats which appear imminent. This includes acts of physical harm or property damage. Out of control behaviour signals they have crossed the line.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use venting techniques • Don't offer solutions • Don't argue with comments made • Prepare to remove yourself and go to a safe location • Contact supervisor or security

Appendix B – Sample Workplace Violence Incident Report Form

Date of incident:	Time:	Location of incident:
Name of victim:		Job title:
Was medical attention required? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		Was the WCB Employer’s Report completed? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Was the supervisor notified? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		Was police called? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Description of the incident:		
Was the victim injured? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		If yes, please describe the injuries.
Were weapons used? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		If yes, please describe the use of weapons.
Please include name and contact information of witnesses, if there are any.		
Please describe the offender and their relation to the victim, if any. Please include their contact information if it is known.		
Recommendations:		

Appendix C – Sample Workplace Violence Risk Assessment

RISK FACTORS	YES	NO	UNSURE
Working alone or in small numbers. For example, working after regular business hours or during travel.			
Working in isolated locations. For example, working in basements or locked rooms.			
Working with the public			
Handling money or valuables			
Working at night or early in the morning			
Delivering, collecting or storing drugs, liquor or tobacco			
Working in public buildings or areas			
Young or inexperienced staff members			
Neighbourhood or community with a history of violence			
Previous incidents of violence at the workplace			
PARKING LOT	YES	NO	UNSURE
Are the entrances and exits well-marked and lit?			
Is there enough lighting?			
Is the lot patrolled or monitored? • If yes, are there signs stating this?			
Have vehicles been stolen or vandalized?			
Are escorts or buddies available to walk people to their cars?			
Is there a way to call for help in the parking lot?			
Is the parking lot isolated?			
Are there areas to hide like bushes, doorways, or garbage bins, etc.?			
OUTSIDE AND AROUND THE WORKPLACE	YES	NO	UNSURE
Are there signs of vandalism, or has there been vandalism in the past?			
Is there enough lighting?			
Are entrances and exits well-marked and lit?			
Are there places to hide like bushes, doorways or garbage bins, etc.?			
Is the building isolated from other buildings or businesses?			
Are there other businesses nearby that have a high risk of violence?			

OUTSIDE AND AROUND THE WORKPLACE (CONTINUED)	YES	NO	UNSURE
Is the outside of the building patrolled or monitored?			
Are there fences or gates around the property to restrict access?			
Is access to the building restricted or limited?			
Is there a system to alert staff members when someone enters? Is the building locked? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If yes, when? • If yes, are keys or codes replaced immediately when lost or stolen? 			
RECEPTION AREA	YES	NO	UNSURE
Is access restricted with locks, buzzers, telecom or check-in, etc.?			
Is there enough lighting?			
Is there a clear view of all entrances and waiting areas?			
Are there places to hide like behind plants, in stairwells, elevators, alcoves or washrooms?			
Is furniture designed to reduce contact between staff members and the public?			
Are there any objects that could be used as weapons?			
Is furniture secured to the floor?			
Is there a way to call for help?			
Is there a clear, unobstructed means of escape?			
Is access to other areas restricted with locks, or codes, cards, buzzers or check-in?			
Are visitors or clients easy to identify by wearing badges or name tags?			
Is there a way to flag visitors or clients who have a history of violence?			
GENERAL	YES	NO	UNSURE
Is there enough lighting?			
Can the lights be turned off?			
Are there places to hide like behind plants, in stairwells, elevators, alcoves or washrooms?			

GENERAL (CONTINUED)	YES	NO	UNSURE
Can the end of each stairwell, hall or elevator be seen like with the use of mirrors?			
Is public access to the washrooms controlled?			
<p>Are there individual offices or rooms?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If so, is furniture arranged to allow a quick exit? • If so, is furniture designed to reduce contact between staff and the public? • If so, is there a way to call for help? Are there private areas for staff members like lunchrooms, change rooms and washrooms? • If so, is access restricted to staff use only with codes, keys or cards? 			
Are there secure places for storing money or valuables?			
<p>Is cash kept on site?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If so, is there a safe for large amounts of cash? 			
<p>Are security personnel or equipment on site?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If so, are the personnel trained and security equipment checked regularly? 			
POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND TRAINING	YES	NO	UNSURE
Is a Violence Prevention Policy posted?			
Are there emergency response plans for violent incidents?			
Are there procedures for investigating violent incidents?			
Have all staff members been trained about the policies and safe work procedures?			
Have all tasks or areas with an increased risk of violence been fully assessed?			
Have all staff members had the job-specific training required to reduce the risk of violence?			

Original source: Safe Work Manitoba

