

City of Albany  
**Policy & Guideline**

# **Workplace Violence Handbook**

(A guide for responding to violence and threats)

<b>Document Approval</b>			
<b>Document Development Officers:</b>		<b>Document Owner:</b>	
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<b>Document Control</b>			
<b>File Number - Document Type:</b>	CM.STD.7 – Policy   CM.STD.4 – Guideline		
<b>Synergy Reference Number:</b>	NP1766623		
<b>Meta Data: Key Search Terms</b>	Threats, Violence, Duty of Care		
<b>Status of Document:</b>	<b>Administrative decision:</b> Approved.		
<b>Quality Assurance:</b>	Compliance Officer Working Group, Executive Management Team		
<b>Distribution:</b>	Internal Document		
<b>Document Revision History</b>			
<b>Version</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Version Description</b>	<b>Date Completed</b>
1.0	Manager Governance & Risk (MGR)	Approved by the Executive Management Team and Chief Executive Officer as an approved working draft. NG1652858	11/12/2015
2.0	MGR	Executive Management Team (EMT) – 23/05/2017	09/06/2017

## CONTENTS

General Information .....	4
Objective .....	4
Policy Statement .....	4
Definitions .....	4
Responsibilities .....	5
THREATS OF VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE .....	6
Warning Signs: .....	6
THREATS AND THREATENING BEHAVIOUR.....	6
VIOLENCE .....	7
Violence in the Workplace .....	7
Off-Duty Violence/Threats .....	7
Domestic Violence.....	7
FOLLOW-UP ACTION.....	8
THREATS TO OTHER PERSONS, PROPERTY AND ANIMALS .....	8
Legislative and Strategic Context.....	8
Associated Documents .....	8
APPENDIX 1 - EMERGENCY RESPONSE CHECKLIST.....	9
COPING WITH THREATS AND VIOLENCE .....	9
TELEPHONED SUICIDE OR BOMB THREATS .....	9
APPENDIX 2 – PROTOCOL FOR RESPONDING TO PEOPLE THREATENING SUICIDE OR SELF HARM BY EMPLOYEES AND CONTRACTORS.....	10
PURPOSE .....	10
APPLICATION.....	10
BACKGROUND.....	10
RESPONDING TO A PERSON THREATENING SELF HARM OR SUICIDE .....	10
SUPPORT FOR THE PERSON WHO RECEIVED THE THREAT .....	10
REVIEW .....	10
APPROVAL AUTHORITY.....	10

## General Information

The City of Albany is committed to ensuring adequate safety for the security of its employees.

While the City of Albany is proud of its safe workplaces, we are concerned about the reality of violence in society and its potential occurrence in our workplaces. In recent years, we have all become more aware of violence and threatening behaviour in Australian workplaces. Violence in the workplace can have devastating effects on the productivity of organizations and on the quality of life of employees.

We must take all reasonable steps to protect ourselves and others in the workplace from violent incidents that may result in injury or harm and also to protect Government and personal property. By working together, we can ensure that the City of Albany establishes and maintains a work environment that is safe and healthy for all.

At the end of the handbook are appendices that provide guidance on dealing with violent situations, a list of resources for additional information.

## Objective

This policy position and guideline compliments the City's Critical Incident Management Procedure and the protocol for Responding to People Threatening Suicide or Self-Harm by Employees and Contractors.

This handbook provides you with guidance for responding appropriately to violence, threats, and reports of threats, or questions that arise.

## Policy Statement

All employees are responsible for maintaining a safe work environment. Acts of violence or threats of violence, explicit or veiled, verbal or written, are unacceptable and will not be tolerated in the workplace. This includes harassment, intimidation, and other disruptive behaviour. All reports of incidents will be taken seriously and will be dealt with appropriately.

## Definitions

Threatening Behaviour is an individual's threat, either overt or implied, to commit an act of physical aggression or harm at the workplace. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Threats to cause bodily harm or death to another person (including stalking, bullying, or other abusive or aggressive behaviour);
- Threats to commit sabotage or destroy, damage, or deface government or personal property located at the workplace;
- Making harassing or threatening phone calls; and
- Unusual, bizarre, or menacing behaviour or statements that a reasonable person would interpret as carrying the potential for violent acts.

## Responsibilities

We all have a responsibility to ensure that City of Albany remains a safe place to work.

Specific responsibilities are spelled out below.

**Assessment and Response Team (ART)** is a team responsible for evaluating our current ability to handle incidents, assessing the seriousness of a threat or violence problem, and developing response options. The ART will vary in size and composition based on the size and location of each office and the circumstances of any incident. Ideally, membership of the team will include:

- an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) counsellor;
- security personnel (where available); and
- a staff member from the Human Resources Team.

Depending on the circumstances, staff members who are involved. In larger offices, an ART should be established within 90 days of the publication of this handbook and should meet to evaluate the ability to respond to incidents; after the initial meeting, the ART will meet annually and in response to any violent or threatening behaviour.

In offices where there is no security, management should evaluate the current ability to handle incidents, consulting with the local law enforcement, within 90 days of the issuance of this handbook. Should violence or threatening behaviour occur in those offices, the local law enforcement should be contacted for an immediate response, and the HR Team consulted as to appropriate follow up action.

**Health & Safety representatives** are responsible for reporting threats, suspicious activities, or acts of violence to management. Where Health & Safety Representatives are involved in threatening or violent activities, either as a participant in violence or as a victim or witness, they are not to serve as are to members of the Assessment and Response Team.

Employees are responsible for reporting threats, suspicious activities, or acts of violence to their supervisor, regardless of the relationship between the individual who initiated the threat or threatening behaviour and the person who was threatened or was the focus of the violent behaviour. It does not matter when or where the threats occurred. Employees reporting threats shall not be subject to interference, coercion, discrimination, penalty, censure, or reprisal as a result of these reports. Employees are encouraged to provide their supervisors with updated emergency contact information; a sample form that may be used for that purpose is shown in Appendix 3.

**Employee Assistance Program (EAP)** counselling representatives are responsible for consulting with management and the HR Team on an appropriate response plan, and for providing short-term counselling and referral services to employees.

The City is to request EAP counsellors to serve on the Assessment and Response Team and assist in determining the severity of any threat and the appropriate response to the threat. If the EAP counsellor learns that an employee is at imminent risk for violence, he/she will notify the appropriate authorities for action.

**Contracted Security personnel**, where available, are responsible for taking necessary actions to ensure the safety of the workplace. This includes, but is not limited to, providing first response to violent acts, contacting local Police for immediate response as needed in individual circumstances, denying access to City of Albany facilities to individuals who pose a clear threat, and obtaining information as needed to make an assessment of an individual's potential for violent behaviour.

Contracted security personnel will be requested to serve on the Assessment and Response Team and provide advice and guidance to managers and employees on precautionary actions they should take in cases of threats or violence. Where security personnel are not available, their role may be fulfilled by Police enforcement or an appropriately qualified staff member when appropriate.

**Human Resources Team** is responsible for consulting with employees, supervisors, and managers when threats or violence have occurred and will assist managers in taking appropriate corrective action. They will convene a meeting of the Assessment and Response Team in response to any reported threat or violent act. In addition, servicing personnel offices will provide periodic training to managers and supervisors on appropriate responses to threatening and violent behaviour.

**Supervisors and line managers** are responsible for evaluating, investigating, and taking immediate appropriate action, consistent with this handbook, when threats or violence have occurred in the workplace. They should ensure that employees understand their responsibility to report threatening remarks or behaviour. Management should refer employees who are experiencing personal problems that may be impacting their performance or conduct to the EAP; however, employee participation is entirely voluntary. Supervisors and managers will serve as needed on the Assessment and Response Team.

## THREATS OF VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE

### Warning Signs:

No one can always predict when a human being will become violent. There is no absolute specific profile of a potentially dangerous individual; however, indicators of increased risk of violent behaviour are available. Some of these indicators may include, but are not limited to:

- Direct or veiled threats of harm;
- Intimidating, belligerent, harassing, bullying, or other inappropriate and aggressive behaviour;
- Numerous conflicts with supervisors and other employees;
- Bringing a weapon to the workplace, brandishing a weapon in the workplace, making inappropriate references to guns, or a fascination with weapons;
- Statements showing a fascination with incidents of workplace violence, statements indicating approval of the use of violence to resolve a problem, or statements indicating identification with perpetrators of workplace violence;
- Statements indicating desperation (over family, financial or other personal problems) to the point of committing suicide;
- Drug/alcohol abuse; and Extreme changes in behaviour.

Each of these behaviours indicates the potential for escalation of violent behaviour. None should be ignored. By identifying the problem and dealing with it appropriately, we may be able to prevent violence from happening. Employees who recognize these behaviours in themselves are encouraged to seek assistance from the Employee Assistance Program or their family physician. Any employees who notice the above indicators in co-workers should notify their supervisors. Supervisors who have seen the above indicators in an employee, or have received a report from one employee regarding another, should immediately contact their servicing personnel office for advice and assistance in determining the appropriate course of action.

## THREATS AND THREATENING BEHAVIOUR

The following types of behaviour are unacceptable, will not be tolerated and require appropriate actions by managers and supervisors. Employees who exhibit this type of behaviour will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action, which could include removal from employment.

Employees may also be placed on administrative leave or detailed to another position or office. The employee will also be referred to the Employee Assistance Program (EAP); although such participation is voluntary, an employee's participation in EAP counselling may mitigate the severity of any penalty arising out of the behaviour. Supervisors must contact their Human Resources Team for advice and guidance on the appropriate action.

Threats may be direct statements such as "I am going to kill you," or veiled statements such as "Something bad will happen to someone," "I'm afraid I may hurt someone," or "I think about killing myself." Some of the ways employees may receive threats include:

- Remarks made directly to the target of the threat orally, either in person or through telephone calls;
- Remarks made to one person about another; or Remarks made in letters, notes, or electronic messages.
- When you are aware of such threatening remarks, do not ignore the information, even if you do not personally believe the threat is serious. Employees who receive or witness threatening remarks must report them to their supervisors; supervisors must immediately contact their servicing personnel office, which will convene the Assessment and Response Team. The Assessment and Response Team will evaluate the situation, determine the seriousness of the threat and determine the appropriate action.

Intimidating or harassing remarks may not actually contain a threat. However, these types of remarks can create a hostile work environment and must be addressed. Employees should report such remarks to their immediate supervisors or higher level management, who should contact the Human Resources Team for advice and guidance on the appropriate action.

Intimidating, harassing, or confrontational behaviour can include such things as physically crowding, stalking, or directing menacing looks or gestures at an individual to create fear. Such actions are inappropriate and will not be tolerated. When ignored, they can escalate to more serious problems.

Employees should report intimidating or harassing behaviour to their supervisors. Supervisors should contact their servicing personnel office for advice and guidance on the appropriate action.

Irrational or inappropriate behaviour often bothers others and can be extremely disruptive. These behaviours may be a warning sign of violence or may be indicative of other problems. Examples of irrational or inappropriate behaviours may include unwelcome name calling, use of obscene language, throwing objects and the like. Employees should notify their supervisors when they witness or are the object of irrational or inappropriate behaviour; supervisors should contact their servicing personnel office for advice on the actions needed to respond to such behaviour.

## **VIOLENCE**

### **Violence in the Workplace**

Any violent act in the workplace must be immediately addressed. In an emergency situation, secure your own safety and then call security personnel or the local police. If you can safely do so, keep the involved parties calm and separated until help arrives. Medical attention should be obtained for any injured individuals.

The Human Resources Team should be immediately notified of the incident and will convene the Assessment and Response Team.

Police must immediately be contacted if it is reported that an employee or visitor has a firearm or other dangerous weapon at the worksite. Do not attempt to disarm the individual yourself.

If the violent individual is an employee, he/she must immediately be removed from the workplace and placed on administrative leave pending a determination of the appropriate response to the violent act. The employee's identification and any access keys should be confiscated to ensure that the person cannot enter the workplace again without permission from the Executive; where possible, this should be done by the Security personnel or local Police.

The violent individual will be subject to discipline, up to and including removal from the employment. He/she

may also be subject to criminal penalties; in such cases the employee may be indefinitely suspended without pay pending resolution of the criminal charges.

If the violent individual is a visitor, he/she will be removed from City of Albany premises by the security personnel or local Police and will be subject to criminal penalties.

Individuals who witness a violent act in the workplace should make as many observations as they can about the incident. These observations and any actions taken in response to the act should be documented when safely possible; this documentation should be in writing and dated. Copies of these notes should be given to security personnel and the servicing personnel office. These notes may provide valuable information and will be useful when proposing or taking corrective or precautionary measures.

The EAP will be available for critical incident counselling for employees who witness or are the subject of the violent behaviour. Such counselling may consist of group meetings or individual employee sessions. Employees will be allowed administrative leave to attend such sessions.

### **Off-Duty Violence/Threats**

If an employee commits a violent act or engages in threatening behaviour while off-duty, the response to such off-duty conduct will depend on the type and severity of the violence, and its nexus, or connection, to the employee's City of Albany position. Each case of off-duty violence or threats will need to be individually evaluated. If the behaviour is clearly related to the workplace, it will be treated as it occurred on duty. A supervisor who learns of an employee's off-duty violence must immediately contact the servicing personnel office. The Human Resources Team will provide advice on the appropriate action.

### **Domestic Violence**

The effects of domestic violence can show up at work in the form of reduced productivity, absenteeism, and increased risk of violence in the workplace. Any employee who has obtained an order or protection or restraining order against an individual should notify the security personnel and, where possible, provide them with a picture of that individual. In cases where there is a clear threat to workplace safety the Assessment and Response Team will be convened as needed.



Employees who are victims of domestic violence can contact the EAP counsellor or their supervisor for assistance. Supervisors, team leaders, and co-workers who suspect an employee is being abused at home can contact their supervisor or the EAP for assistance.

### **FOLLOW-UP ACTION**

Following any threat or violence incidence, the Assessment and Response Team will review the response(s) to the situation to assess the appropriateness of the response and determine what could have been done better. They will also determine what preventive measures should be implemented to prevent or lessen the impact of a similar incident. Management will be advised of the results of this review.

Anyone exposed to threatening or violent events, at or away from work, needs support from family, co-workers, and management. When they receive this support, they may feel less isolated, distrustful, and withdrawn. Active support tends to promote increased commitment, productivity, and better recovery. Individual or group counselling sessions may be necessary for some individuals. The EAP and servicing personnel office can help supervisors and employees choose appropriate post-violence activities.

### **THREATS TO OTHER PERSONS, PROPERTY AND ANIMALS**

Western Australian Police have power to detain and involuntarily commit members of the public to a Mental Health facility under the Mental Health Act 1996.

The following threats must be referred immediately to the Police:

- Physical Harm to another member of the public; and
- The threat of a Criminal Act against public or private property (i.e. arson, physically destroy, poison, blow up).

A threat to harm “animals” (domestic, livestock and natural fauna) must be reported to the RSPCA.

### **Legislative and Strategic Context**

This policy and guideline compliments the Protocol between the Western Australia Police Service and the Mental Health Division of the Health Department of Western Australia

### **Review Position and Date**

This guideline was approved on 11 December 2015.

This guideline is to be reviewed by the document owner annually.

### **Associated Documents**

- Business Unit – Emergency Response Procedures
- City Info: Corporate: Employee Assistance Program - Albany Counselling Providers
- City Procedure: Corporate: Employee Assistance Program
- City Procedure: Critical Incident Management Procedure
- City Protocol for Responding to People Threatening Suicide or Self-Harm by Employees and Contractors
- Protocol Between the Western Australia Police Service and the Mental Health Division of the Health Department of Western Australia





## APPENDIX 2 – PROTOCOL FOR RESPONDING TO PEOPLE THREATENING SUICIDE OR SELF HARM BY EMPLOYEES AND CONTRACTORS

### PURPOSE

To provide practical guidance on responding to, and managing, people threatening suicide or self-harm.

### APPLICATION

This protocol applies to all City of Albany employees, contractors and volunteers who may be engaged in contact roles.

### BACKGROUND

You may on occasion be confronted by a distressed person threatening suicide or self-harm, either in person, on the telephone or in writing. Such situations can be difficult to handle, especially when the majority of employees are not trained or qualified to assist the person with such related issues.

There are numerous factors which may have influenced or led a person to the point of making such a threat. You must take the threat seriously and you have a duty of care to the distressed individual to, as far as possible and practicable, provide them with the support they need to obtain the professional care and assistance that they need.

The City of Albany takes the health and safety of its employees very seriously. This document provides:

- guidance on the procedures to be followed to ensure the person making the threat receives support; and
- guidance on the support services available to employees who have received the threat.

### RESPONDING TO A PERSON THREATENING SELF HARM OR SUICIDE

- Take the person and the threat seriously.
- Advise the person that threats of suicide or self-harm are taken seriously and that you may need to refer them to someone who is more appropriately trained or qualified to provide assistance.
- Inform the person that you have a duty of care to ensure that they are safe and have appropriate support.
- Seek details of the person making the threat, i.e. name, address, telephone number, treating doctor details and the person's current location (if threat made by telephone).
- Encourage the person to seek immediate support from a friend, partner, General Practitioner or an appropriately qualified health worker and supply them with telephone numbers such as:

- **Lifeline WA** (provides a 24-hour, 7 day a week Telephone Crisis Support Service, to assess and co-ordinate the necessary referral for treatment of individuals with mental health issues)
- **Lifeline 131 114.**
- Persons can call Lifeline 7 days a week from 6pm to 10pm through Online Crisis Chat via [crisis.chat.lifelinewa.org.au](https://crisis.chat.lifelinewa.org.au)
- Other useful numbers by Department:
  - Dads@Lifeline: (08) 9261 4451
  - Community Education and Training: (08) 9261 4467
  - Lifeline General Enquiries: (08) 9261 4444 | Email: <mailto:lifeline@lifelinewa.org.au>
- If the person refuses to seek such support, wherever possible seek their agreement to contact a support person or service on their behalf.
- Advise the person that you will be contacting and providing their details to:
  - **Great Southern Mental Health Services Albany** | Hardie Road, Spencer Park, Albany WA 6330 | Tel: 08 9892 2440 | Open from 8.30am to 4.30pm Monday to Friday)
- For immediate life threatening or dangerous situations call **000** for **emergency services**.
- Do not attempt to counsel the person or make a judgement about whether you think the person will carry out the threat of suicide or self-harm - refer the matter to appropriately qualified personnel at the earliest possible opportunity.
- Notify your manager immediately and outline the course of action you have taken.

### SUPPORT FOR THE PERSON WHO RECEIVED THE THREAT

The person who was the recipient of the threat should be encouraged to utilise free confidential support and counselling through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

The EAP is a service that provides employees with confidential and professional counselling and related services to assist them in resolving issues that may be work related or of a personal nature.

Employees are encouraged to access the EAP service as early as possible.

### REVIEW

This protocol will be reviewed after three (3) years unless earlier review is required.

### APPROVAL AUTHORITY

Chief Executive Officer