

MANAGER/SUPERVISORS

GUIDE

ON

**HOW TO RECOGNISE THE
POTENTIAL FOR A TARGETED
THREAT OF VIOLENCE IN THE
WORKPLACE**

Developed by:

*Occupational Safety,
BC Public Service Agency
and*

*The Government Security Office,
Risk Management Branch*

Contents

Targeted Threats of Violence	2
Background	3
Definitions	3
External Threat.....	4
Internal Threat	5
Determination Steps.....	5
Immediate Manager/Supervisor:	5
Table 1: Direct and Indirect Warning Signs	6
Suggested Actions for Targeted Threats of Violence	7
Questions:	7
Potential Suicide With No Indications of a Targeted Threat	8
Feedback	9
Resources	10

Targeted Threats of Violence

There may be times that you and your workplace are faced with a possible targeted threat of violence. This threat may come to your attention through: a call from an employee, client or another party identifying an incident, a discipline/termination process, or a direct threat to yourself from another person.

This guide is intended to assist the manager/supervisor:

- in identifying individuals who may pose a risk of a targeted threat of violence in the workplace, and
- recommended appropriate actions.

While it is impossible to accurately predict whether or not a person will commit a planned or premeditated act of violence, the presence of warning signs can alert us to an increased risk. It's important to note that not everyone who exhibits these warning signs will become violent. Statistically very few people pursue targeted violence.

Research into incidents of workplace violence has shown that the potentially violent person exhibits characteristics or signs prior to a violent act. Understanding these signs, recognising when they occur and acting on this knowledge and recognition are vital steps in mitigating a potentially serious situation.

The following pages provide identifiers for possible targeted threats of violence for both internal and external threats, and provide guidance in how you can assist in the management of the targeted threat.

[*Back to Table of Contents*](#)

Version 2 Updated November 01 2011

Background

The BC Public Service Agency (BCPSA) and the Government Security Office, Risk Management Branch, (GSO) have developed a comprehensive program to manage Threats of Targeted Violence in BC Public Service workplaces. This is a component of that overall program.

Definitions

As it pertains to this document:

- **Targeted Threat:** means any planned act, or expression of intent to plan to inflict physical or other harm against a person or a workplace. A threat can be spoken, written or symbolic.
- **Internal Threat:** Targeted threat from an employee(s) or contractor of the BC Public Service
- **External Threat:** Targeted threat from non-BC Public Service employee(s) e.g.: tax payer, ex-employee, external client, unknown, domestic spill-over.
- **Domestic Spill Over:** Targeted threat to a BC Public Service employee from a spouse/ex-spouse or family member that has the potential of taking place at the employee's workplace causing harm to the employee or others in the workplace.
- **Imminent:** About to happen – anticipate it will occur soon
- **Assessment:** The collection and review of information to determine the level and nature of threat posed by an individual or group.
- **Subject:** Person making the threat
- **Target:** Person(s) identified as at risk as a result of the threat

[*Back to Table of Contents*](#)

Version 2 Updated November 01 2011

External Threat

External threats can come in a number of forms and from a diversity of persons. It could be a disgruntled client who is unhappy with how a file is being handled and feels s/he is being unfairly treated, a group that does not agree with how the government is managing a particular issue, a domestic spill over, or a mentally unstable person who targets the BC Public Service. In our experience to date, the most common of the four is the person who feels unfairly treated.

Examples of an external targeted threat:

- Verbal or written threat to physically harm an employee(s) or others within the BC Public Service
- Verbal or written threat to set explosives, cause fire or through other harmful/damaging means to BC Public Service employees and worksite(s)
- An employee's spouse/ex-spouse, significant other or family member has threatened to do harm to the employee , which may result in domestic spill over at the workplace

Refer to [page 7](#) for suggested actions for Targeted Threats of Violence:

IF IT APPEARS TO BE AN IMMINENT THREAT THEN CONTACT SECURITY AND/OR 911 IMMEDIATELY

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

Version 2 Updated November 01 2011

*Occupational Safety, BCPSA
and The Government Security Office, RMB*

Page 4 of 10

Internal Threat

As with external threats, internal threats can come in a number of forms. It could be a disgruntled employee who is: unhappy with her/his work environment or the actions of the supervisor or co-worker(s), in disagreement with a disciplinary process against her/him, or an employee who may suffer a mental illness and who chooses to target the workplace.

Determination Steps

If changes in an employee's normal demeanour (as listed below in Table 1) are observed, managers/supervisors should consider:

- The presence of personal or work related stressors that may be affecting that employee's interactions with other employees.
- The likelihood this employee might pose a risk of harm to themselves or others.

The following steps are a guide to a course of review/action. However, managers/supervisors should exercise good judgement on the appropriateness of each step in relation to the circumstances of each situation.

Confidentiality: It's important to discuss any potential indicators in a confidential and sensitive way. If concerns are not treated confidentially they may increase the risk of the person in question acting in an undesirable manner. Additionally, if an assessment team is required they will achieve the best results if the work environment has not been filled with rumours and speculation. This will ensure that all employees are treated in a fair and respectful manner.

Immediate Manager/Supervisor:

The following are changes in normal demeanour that can either identify personal problems (indirect) that are less likely to result in harm to others or be a precursor to the potential risk of violence (direct) resulting in harm to others. The immediate manager/supervisor should be cognisant of direct and indirect warning signs.

[*Back to Table of Contents*](#)

Version 2 Updated November 01 2011

Table 1: Direct and Indirect Warning Signs

Indirect:	Direct:
<p>These changes in normal demeanour <u>may not signal the potential risk of violence</u>. Instead they may result from the worker feeling ill, experiencing separation/divorce or a personal or family crisis. This may temporarily change the worker’s work/social performance, but not suggest any risk of harm to others.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Sudden mood swings, outbursts or sudden refusals to comply with rules or to perform duties <input type="checkbox"/> An increase in rude or abusive behaviour <input type="checkbox"/> A change in the employee’s personality/behaviour at work (e.g. an outgoing employee becomes withdrawn) <input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorating relationships with co-worker and supervisor <input type="checkbox"/> Possible drug or alcohol abuse <p>You should discuss these behaviour/performance indicators with the employee. If an employee is dealing with a personal crisis as described above then support and possibly professional help may be needed. Advise the employee of resources available through the Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP).</p> <p>If you need assistance in this process contact the BC Public Service at 1-877-277-0772 or email MyHR@gov.bc.ca</p> <p>If any of the “direct” indicators are combined with the “indirect” then immediately contact the BC Public Service at 1-877-277-0772 or email MyHR@gov.bc.ca</p> <p>.</p>	<p>The following warning indicators are more serious and <u>may signal a potential risk of violence</u>. These indicators may or may not be accompanied by some of the “Indirect” indicators.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Previous direct or indirect threats of harm to a co-worker or others <input type="checkbox"/> Subject’s identification with people who use violence to solve problems <input type="checkbox"/> Subject’s indications of desperation to the point of discussion and/or threats to harm others and/or self <input type="checkbox"/> Subject carries a weapon or indicates access to weapons <p>Proceed immediately to contacting your the BC Public Service at 1-877-277-0772 or email MyHR@gov.bc.ca.</p> <p>Note: If your ministry has an internal OS Advisor then s/he should be contacted as well.</p>

IF IT APPEARS TO BE AN IMMINENT THREAT THEN CONTACT SECURITY AND/OR 911 IMMEDIATELY

Version 2 Updated November 01 2011

Suggested Actions for Targeted Threats of Violence

If you believe there is a risk of targeted violence then discuss the situation with a senior manager. It is important to only involve those persons necessary to assist in the analysis, mitigation and management of the threat. Too many persons becoming involved in a communication chain may hinder an effective assessment.

Key persons to involve:

- The BC Public Service at 1-877-277-0772 or email MyHR@gov.bc.ca
- Your [Regional OS Specialist](#), BC Public Service Agency (will be contacted by the [MyHR](#))
- Your [Ministry Security Officer](#)
- Your ministry's OSH Adviser (if you have one)
- When appropriate, the Shop Steward or Union Representative (generally this will be done on the recommendation of the BCPSA targeted threat of violence assessment team)

The BCPSA/GSO will conduct a targeted threat of violence analysis to determine the level of threat and make recommendations on mitigation strategies.

Note: The basics of threat management are to take “early and certain action,” therefore when issues arise, especially those with indicators of a potential threat of targeted violence, they must be addressed immediately. If a response to potential violence issues is cursory or delayed, it can wrongly give an impression that these behaviours are acceptable and allow the problem to continue. Aggressive or violent behaviour is unacceptable at all times.

IF IT APPEARS TO BE AN IMMINENT THREAT THEN CONTACT SECURITY AND/OR 911 IMMEDIATELY

Questions:

If you have any questions pertaining to targeted threats of violence please contact The BC Public Service at 1-877-277-0772 or email MyHR@gov.bc.ca or [Government Security Office, Risk Management Branch](#)

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

Version 2 Updated November 01 2011

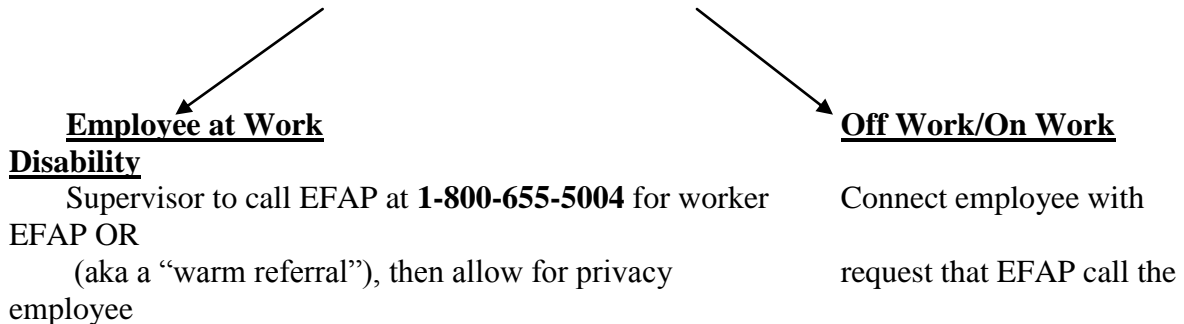
Potential Suicide With No Indications of a Targeted Threat

What if a person is threatening suicide and there is no indication of a targeted threat?

Scenarios and Actions

LEVEL 1: Imminent Suicide Threat/Employee Suddenly Leaves Work
CALL 9-1-1

LEVEL 2: Non-imminent Suicide Threat/Concern



Follow-up/Other Scenarios

- For all scenarios above, check that employee has connected with EFAP (Employee and Family Assistance Program) or other support, and ensure your own follow up with the employee.
- When a suicide threat/attempt occurs during a period of disability OR a disability claim arises as a result of a suicide threat/ attempt, contact a [BCPSA Occupational Health Nurse](#) to advise them of this issue and initiate case management services.
- Recurrent threats of self-harm should be referred to a BCPSA Occupational Health Nurse or seek human resources advice.
- Ministry clients who threaten suicide should be referred to/connected with a Crisis Line at: **1-800-SUICIDE (784-2433)**
- Contact a BCPSA [OS Specialist](#) when the safety of others may be of concern.

NOTE: EFAP’s “Key Person Advice Line” (1-800-655-5004) is a valuable resource for managers/ supervisors if general debriefing of the situation is required (but EFAP will not discuss individual cases).

Additional Considerations

Mental illness, including thoughts or threat for suicide, can present in many ways—some fairly recognizable, others more subtle. If you have concerns, rather than ignore these, share your observations with the employee in question. What follows are some situations/circumstances and behavioural signs that may suggest a mental health concern and/or suicide threat, and signal the need for action:

Version 2 Updated November 01 2011

Situations/circumstances

- Family death
- Relationship problems/divorce
- Abuse—mental or physical
- Using/abusing alcohol and or drugs (including recreational drugs)
- Loss of job or demotion
- A series of smaller crises/losses over a period of time
- Financial problems

Behavioural signs to watch for (and confirm with someone else)

- Depressed Mood
- Crying/Distress
- Withdrawal
- Apathy
- Personal Isolation
- Talk of suicide/suicide plan
- Performance and/or attendance problems
- Expressed feelings of hopelessness/worthlessness
- Change in behaviour or unusual behaviour

FAQs about suicide

TERMS:

Suicide Threat or Concern: verbal and non-verbal (behaviours or actions) communication regarding intent to self harm.

Recommended Response: advice for supervisors and managers handling a suicide threat

Warm referral: the practice of placing a call to EFAP on behalf of a worker that you are concerned about. While the worker is present, let them know you are concerned about them and that you are calling EFAP. Provide EFAP a brief summary and hand the phone over to the worker and allow them to talk in private.

EFAP: employee and family assistance program has dedicated intake counsellors on staff **24/7** to assess and provide guidance on how best to handle the situation. The EFAP provider will talk to the employee of concern directly and co-ordinate treatment and appointments as necessary.

911: emergency response number. The caller will need to provide the 911 operator with details of the concern, name of employee/customer and address of where the employee/customer is located (if they have it). The caller should stay with the employee/customer until help arrives. If the caller is the one who is at immediate risk of self harm or suicide, advise caller you are contacting 911 (on another line), stay on the phone with the caller until help arrives.

Crisis Line: EFAP is for the BC Public Service employees. The general public should be connected with the Crisis Line community resource or 911 as appropriate. The Crisis Centre is available **24/7** for confidential assistance. 1-800-Suicide (784-2433).

BCPSA Occupational Health Nurse: Medical professionals with specialized training to assist and support BC Public Service employee health. Lower Mainland 604 660 2587. Vancouver Island 250 952 4228. Interior and Northern Region 250 371 3831.

BCPSA OS Specialist: Safety professionals with specialized training to assist with occupational safety concerns in the workplace.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

Version 2 Updated November 01 2011

Feedback

Broadly available assessment and management of Targeted Threats of Violence is a recently developed process within Canada. Given the paramount importance of personnel safety, we are pleased that BCPSA and RMB embraced these practices and together have adopted a leadership role to protect staff.

In conducting Threat Assessments and Management the manager/supervisor is an essential player in that process by helping your Ministry to ensure the safety of staff.

Please provide any suggestions to improve this document, or make it more user friendly, to governmentsecurityoffice@gov.bc.ca

We thank you for your support and participation.

Resources:

[BCPSA Occupational Safety Website](#)

[Sample Telephone Threat Checklist](#)

[Sample Threat Report](#)

[Preparing for a Potentially Violent Meeting](#)

[Travelling To and From Work and Client's Offices](#)

[General Incident or Loss Report \(GILR\)](#)

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

Version 2 Updated November 01 2011

*Occupational Safety, BCPSA
and The Government Security Office, RMB*

Page 10 of 10