MANAGER/SUPERVISORS

GUIDE

ON

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

Developed by:

Workplace Health and Safety,
BC Public Service Agency
and
The Government Security Office,
Risk Management Branch

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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 to identify:

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

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.

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 GSO embraced these practices and together 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.
Definitions

As it pertains to this document:

**Assessment:** The collection and objective review of information to determine the level of threat of violence posed by an individual or group.

**TTVMP:** Targeted Threat of Violence Management Program

**Domestic Violence in the Workplace:** Targeted threat to a BC Public Service employee by a family member, household, or intimate relationship that has the potential of taking place at the employee’s workplace causing harm to the employee or others in the workplace.

**EFAS:** Employee and Family Assistance Services – Morneau Shepell.

**External Threat:** Targeted threat from non-BC Public Service employee(s) e.g.: taxpayer, ex-employee, client, inmate, ex-inmate, gang member.

**Imminent:** About to happen – anticipate it will occur soon.

**Internal Threat:** Targeted threat from an employee(s) or contractor of the BC Public Service.

**Subject:** Person making the threat.

**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, symbolic or gesture e.g. finger across the throat, dead animal left on the doorstep.

**Target:** Person(s) identified as at risk as a result of the threat.
**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, domestic violence in the workplace, 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, partner, boyfriend/girlfriend or ex-spouse has threatened to do harm to the employee, which may result in domestic violence in the workplace.

Refer to page 7 for suggested actions for Targeted Threats of Violence.

**IF IT APPEARS TO BE AN IMMINENT THREAT**

**CONTACT SECURITY AND/OR 911 IMMEDIATELY**
**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. Managers/supervisors should exercise good judgement on the appropriateness of each step in relation to the circumstances of each situation.

**Confidentiality**

It is important to discuss any potential indicators in a confidential and sensitive way. The risk of the person in question acting in an undesirable manner may increase if concerns are not treated confidentially. 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 immediate manager/supervisor should be cognisant of direct and indirect warning signs. 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.
Table 1: Direct and Indirect Warning Signs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indirect:</th>
<th>Direct:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>These changes in normal demeanour may not signal the potential risk of violence. 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.</td>
<td>The following warning indicators are more serious and may signal a potential risk of violence. These indicators may or may not be accompanied by some of the –Indirect– indicators.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Sudden mood swings, outbursts or sudden refusals to comply with rules or to perform duties</td>
<td>□ Previous direct or indirect threats of harm to a co-worker or others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ An increase in rude or abusive behaviour</td>
<td>□ Subject’s identification with people who use violence to solve problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ A change in the employee’s personality/behaviour at work (e.g. an outgoing employee becomes withdrawn)</td>
<td>□ Subject’s indications of desperation to the point of discussion and/or threats to harm others and/or self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Deteriorating relationships with co-worker and supervisor</td>
<td>□ Subject carries a weapon or indicates access to weapons</td>
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<tr>
<td>□ Possible drug or alcohol abuse</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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 Services (EFAS) – Morneau Shepell.

If you need assistance in this process contact the BC Public Service at 1-877-277-0772 or email AskMyHR: www.gov.bc.ca/myhr/contact

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 AskMyHR: www.gov.bc.ca/myhr/contact

Proceed immediately to contacting the BC Public Service at 1-877-277-0772 or email
AskMyHR: www.gov.bc.ca/myhr/contact

Note: If your ministry has an internal Occupational Safety Manager/Advisor then s/he should be contacted as well.

**IF IT APPEARS TO BE AN IMMINENT THREAT THEN CONTACT SECURITY AND/OR 911 IMMEDIATELY**
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 (contact by MyHR)
- Your Ministry Security Officer
- Your Ministry’s OSH Manager/Advisor (if you have one).
- When appropriate, the Shop Steward or Union Representative (generally this will be done on the recommendation of the TTVMP)

The TTVMP 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 AskMyHR: www.gov.bc.ca/myhr/contact or Government Security Office, Risk Management Branch

Back to Table of Contents
**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**

- **Employee at Work**: Supervisor to Call EFAS at 1-800-655-5004 for the employee (aka “warm referral”), then allow for privacy.

- **Employee off Work/On Work Disability**: Connect employee with EFAS OR request that EFAS call the employee.

**Follow-up/Other Scenarios**

- For all scenarios above, check that employee has connected with EFAS 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**: EFAS “People Leader Advice Line” (1-800-655-5004) is a valuable resource for Managers/Supervisors if general debriefing of the situation is required (but EFAS will not discuss individual cases).

**Additional Considerations**

Mental illness, including thoughts or threat of 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:

**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 EFAS 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 EFAS. Provide EFAS a brief summary and hand the phone over to the worker and allow them to talk in private.

**EFAS:** employee and family assistance service has dedicated intake councillors on staff 24/7 to assess and provide guidance on how best to handle the situation. The EFAS 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:** EFAS 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.

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

- **AskMyHR** Online Service Request:
  - [www.gov.bc.ca/myhr/contact](http://www.gov.bc.ca/myhr/contact)
  - 250-952-6000 or Toll Free 1-877-277-0772 (Mon-Fri, 8-4:30pm PST)

- Occupational Safety Specialists, BC Public Service Agency

- **Ministry Security Officers**

- Occupational Safety 24 hour emergency phone contact
  1-250-952-0911

Resources

**MyHR**

- **BCPSA Occupational Safety**
  - Sample Telephone Threat Checklist
  - Sample Threat Report
  - Guide: Recommended Best Practices Developed for Co-Located Ministry Worksites on Delivering Service To Clients That Exhibit Unacceptable Behaviour
  - Preparing for a Potentially Violent Meeting
  - Travelling To and From Work and Client’s Offices

- Address a Respectful Workplace Issue
- Addressing Domestic Violence in the Workplace

- **Health Issues – LifeSpeak Video Library**
  - Having Difficult Conversation with Confidence
  - Mental Health in the Workplace for Managers

- **Employee and Family Assistance Services (EFAS)–Moreau Shepell**
  - 1-800-655-5004 (24hrs)
  - People Leader Advice Line – for Managers

General Incident or Loss Report (**GILR**) **

WorkSafeBC - Domestic Violence in the Workplace (see Resource Toolkit)
Training

**BCPSA Learning and Education**

- OHS Violence Prevention Seminar: Practical Skills (classroom)
- Managing Conflict (on-line)
- Developing Skills for Effective Conflict Resolution (classroom)

**Justice Institute of BC**

- Threat Awareness (on-line)