



Occupational
Health and Safety

ASSESSING THE RISK OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

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Introduction



In Nova Scotia, employers are responsible to make sure all workers have a safe working environment. Keeping people safe at work includes assessing and reducing the risk of workplace violence. Ways to address that risk are to ensure employees know about the hazard, they are informed about the protective measures in place and they are trained to safely handle any potential violence they may encounter at work.

A violence risk assessment can be a valuable tool to identify these kinds of risks. An important part of reducing violence at work is to address and eliminate any belief that violence is “just part of the job”. Employers and employees working together to identify and reduce the risk of violence can make their workplaces safer for everyone.

For workplaces covered by *Violence in the Workplace Regulations*, it is the responsibility of the employer to conduct a violence risk assessment and use best practices to avoid the impacts of violence. Some workplaces are obligated by law to carry out a workplace violence risk assessment, and create a workplace violence prevention plan.

They include, but are not limited to:

- healthcare and related workplaces
- educational settings
- places where correctional or security services are in use
- service sector where money is exchanged or liquor is sold or consumed
- other workplaces where employees interact with the public

To learn more about which workplaces are affected by the regulations, you can refer to the Violence in the Workplace Regulations.

<https://www.novascotia.ca/just/regulations/regs/ohsviolence.htm>

What is a Violence Risk Assessment?



A violence risk assessment can be an integral part of a functioning occupational health and safety management plan that improves the health, safety, and awareness of employees.

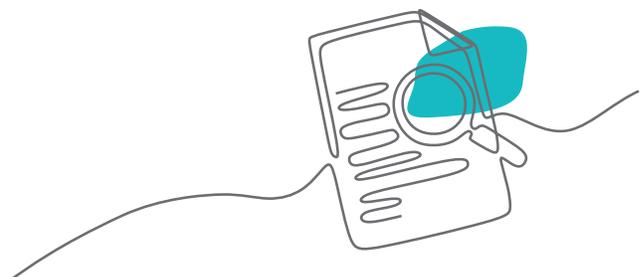
A workplace violence risk assessment:

- creates awareness of and identifies possible violence hazards and risks
- identifies who may be at risk and what that risk might be
- determines whether existing control measures to avoid violence are adequate or if more should be done
- prioritizes the risks and control measures
- attempts to prevent injuries or other consequences of violent behaviour (when the assessment is done at the design or planning stage), and;
- provides a record of due diligence.

A workplace violence risk assessment looks at each part of the workplace's operating procedures under standard conditions. It identifies and prioritizes the situations where the risk of violence is greatest.

Evaluating the risk of violence in one workplace can also establish criteria to compare one operation to others who share similar activities and risks. This allows companies to compare their experiences to others in the industry sector.

The assessment must be reviewed regularly – at least every five years—or when circumstances might introduce changing risks, such as a new type of violence, significant changes to operations or construction/renovation of the workplace.



Determining the Significance of the Risks



You can determine the significance of the risk by using a risk assessment tool. A risk assessment tool involves determining the chances of an event happening and the consequences or impact of the event. Risk assessment involves ranking the probability or chance of an event happening with the severity of the event.

1. Estimate the Probability

Probability is the measure of the chance for an uncertain event to occur. Exposure is defined in terms of time, proximity and repetition. It is expressed in terms of percentage.

This can be classified as: **Frequent, Likely, Occasional, Remote**

- ▶ **Frequent:** It is expected to occur several times in most circumstances (91 – 100%)
- ▶ **Likely:** Likely to occur several times in most circumstances (51 – 90%)
- ▶ **Occasional:** Might occur sometime (11 – 50%)
- ▶ **Remote:** Unlikely to occur /could occur sometime (0 – 10%)

2. Determine the Severity

Severity is the degree of impact of damage or loss caused due to the uncertain event and can be classified as: **Catastrophic, Critical, Marginal, Negligible**

- ▶ **Catastrophic:** Fatality, coma
- ▶ **Critical:** Severe injury - loss of, or use of limbs, hospitalization
- ▶ **Marginal:** Minor injury - bruises, cuts
- ▶ **Negligible:** No injury



3. Determine the Risk

After having estimated the probability and the severity, you combine the two answers to determine where the violence risk falls on the table below. The priority is classified into one of three categories, high, medium or low, which is mapped against the severity and probability of the risk.

Violence Risk Assessment Matrix

	SEVERITY			
PROBABILITY	Catastrophic	Critical	Marginal	Negligible
Frequent	High	High	High	Medium
Likely	High	High	Medium	Medium
Occasional	High	Medium	Medium	Low
Remote	Medium	Medium	Low	Low

The significance of the risk can be interpreted as follows:

-  **High:** Significant and unacceptable risks. Address immediately through a violence prevention plan.
-  **Medium:** Significant risks. Include in the violence prevention plan.
-  **Low:** Not significant for the purposes of requiring a violence prevention plan. Should be addressed through regular health and safety measures.

Note that the above risk categories are solely for example purposes. Organizations may develop other factors and characteristics appropriate to their needs.

Getting Started



1. Decide who will do the assessment, remembering that the Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee or Health and Safety Representative, if your workplace has one, must be consulted about recommendations made regarding the violence risk assessment.
2. Enter the employer's name, assessment date and name of the assessor(s).
3. Describe the workplaces or tasks covered by this assessment.
 - For smaller employers, such as convenience stores, there may only be one workplace, and so only one assessment is needed.
 - Larger employers may wish to divide the operations into workplaces or tasks with similar predictors of violence. For example, a debt collection operation may divide its staff into those who deal with customers personally and those who perform administrative support functions with no customer contact. In this way, the employer can focus its violence prevention efforts on those areas where it is needed the most.
4. Check the boxes as accurately as possible and make sure to answer each question. If there is doubt about whether one of the points apply, the answer to that question should be "Yes."

5. Prioritize the risks. Ranking or prioritizing them is one way to help determine which are the most serious safety hazards so they can be addressed first. Priority risks are usually identified by determining how much or how often an employee is exposed to the situation or conditions, and the potential for harm. Assigning a priority to the risks helps create an action list.

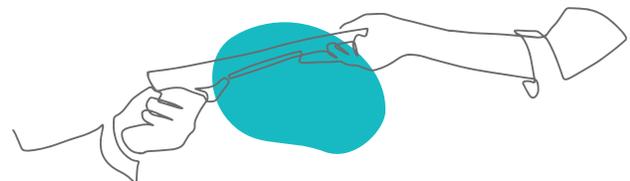
The following factors play an important role:

- percentage of employee exposed to the hazard,
- frequency of exposure,
- degree of harm likely to result from the exposure,
- probability of occurrence.

There is no one simple or single way to determine the level of risk. Ranking hazards requires the knowledge of the workplace activities, urgency of situations and, most importantly, objective judgment.

6. If the answer to any of the questions on the Violence Risk Assessment form is "Yes", the assessors and anyone making safety recommendations must determine the level of risk and, if necessary, the possible solutions to reduce it.

Appendix: Violence Risk Assessment



Moving Forward



An employer must prepare a violence prevention statement. The statement shall be reviewed with employees and a copy posted in a prominent location(s) in the workplace. Components of the statement shall include but are not limited to the employer's recognition that violence is a hazard, any form is unacceptable, emotional and physical harm can result from violence and a commitment the employer will eliminate/minimize violence as much as possible.

If completion of the Violence Risk Assessment form identifies the need to reduce the risk of violence, then the risk areas should be prioritized and a list created. The next step is to decide on ways to control the risks. Once agreement is reached regarding the most effective steps to address the risks of violence and how to implement and communicate them, those steps become the foundation of a violence prevention plan.

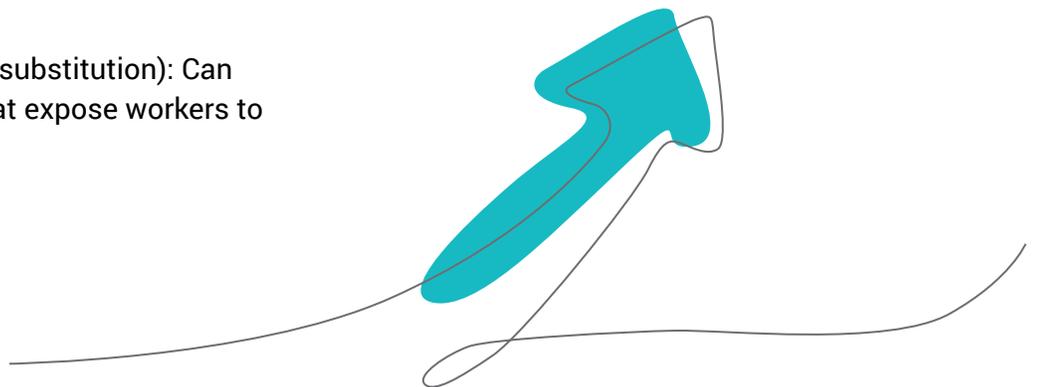
Risk control methods are often grouped into the following categories:

- Elimination (including substitution): Can the primary factors that expose workers to violence be changed?

- Engineering controls: Will changes to the physical environment, equipment, or tools prevent or lessen the potential for violent acts to occur?
- Administrative controls: Are employees trained to recognize and respond to potential problems? Do they know the procedure(s) to minimize risks?
- Personal protective equipment: Are there equipment or devices that should be used to reduce the likelihood or impact of violence?

Once a plan to prevent violence in the workplace is in place, it will be communicated to all workplace parties. Encourage everyone involved to take steps to reduce the likelihood and severity of violence in the workplace.

Remember to complete the assessment process at least every five years or whenever changes to workplace operation might affect the potential hazards or risks.



Communication Equals Prevention



Employees must be aware of and prepared for any hazards they might face on the job, including violence. New and existing staff need to be informed about the violence prevention measures that are in place, and what tools they must use to effectively reduce or control those hazards.

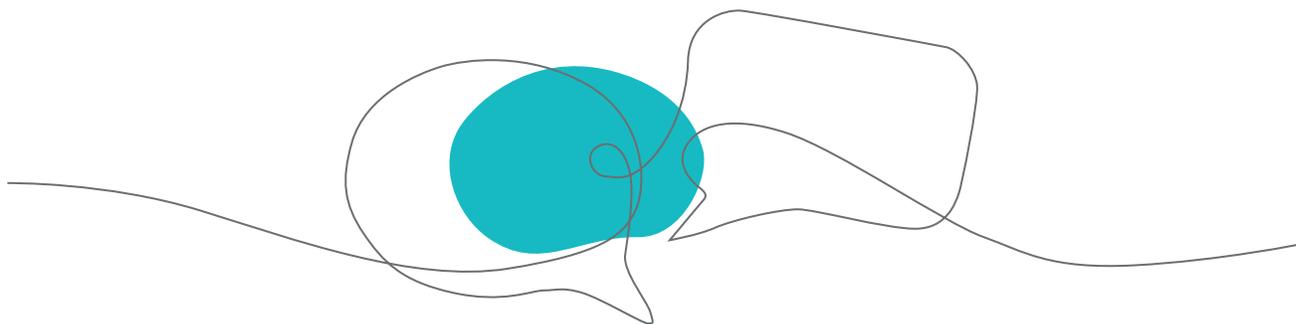
These measures and tools can be communicated in many ways, but the most effective is during pre-job safety planning. The employer and workplace parties must identify new violence risks when they arise and the specific procedures and measures that will be used to deal with them.

Accountability and information sharing are important. Which person or team is responsible for the job task? What are the reporting requirements of the team, and its supervisors? What needs to be reported, and to whom? What is the system to ensure that information needed to work safely is communicated quickly and effectively to everyone who could be at risk?

Workplace violence can affect the health and safety of every employee and employer. There are high personal costs from the emotional trauma and physical injury experienced by the victims, their families, and co-workers. Taking the time to evaluate and address the risk of violence in your workplace can reduce these effects.

Everyone has the responsibility to ensure a safe working environment for themselves and others.

For more resources to help you conduct, communicate, and act on a workplace violence risk assessment or other workplace hazards, contact the Occupational Health and Safety Division of Nova Scotia Labour, Skills and Immigration.



Appendix



Violence Risk Assessment

Name of Workplace: _____ Assessment Date: _____

Assessors: _____

Workplace or Tasks covered by this Assessment:

Questions

When you are open to the public, are there times when only one employee is present?

Yes No

Do your employees handle cash or other valuables?

Yes No

Do your employees provide a service where they may feel threatened by another person?

Yes No

Do your employees offer care services for others (i.e. health care or community workers)?

Yes No

Are your employees involved in enforcing discipline to others (i.e. teachers)?

Yes No

Do your employees deliver or collect items of value?

Yes No

Do your employees exercise authority over others (i.e. enforcement officers)?

Yes No

Do your employees inspect other people's private property (i.e. planning inspectors, assessment officers)?

Yes No

Do your employees provide security services (i.e. security guards, sheriffs)?

Yes No

Do your employees sell or dispense cannabis, medications or alcohol?

Yes No

Do your employees work in community-based settings (i.e. nurses, social workers and other home care staff)?

Yes No

Do your employees walk to their vehicle or building during times when there is limited light (i.e., late Fall or early Winter)?

Yes No

Do your employees work during periods of intense organizational change (i.e. mediator during strikes or lock-outs)?

Yes No

Do your employees deal with or handle firearms or other weapons?

Yes No

Have employees in the workplace experienced violence in the past?

Yes No

Does a risk of violence exist in the industry sector?

Yes No

Do incidents of violence occur in other workplaces in the same industry?

Yes No

Violence Risk Assessment

Beyond the organizational factors listed on page 1, the employer should consider the following situations or events which may increase the potential for violence:

- late hours of the night or early hours of the morning
- tax return season
- overdue utility bill cut-off dates
- during the holiday season
- pay days
- report cards or parent interviews
- performance appraisals
- located near to buildings or businesses that are at risk of violence (i.e. bars and banks)
- located in areas isolated from other buildings or structures.

If there is the potential for violence at this workplace or while doing a task, describe the violence.

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What activity or function of the workplace or task may trigger violence?

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Violence Risk Assessment

Describe the predicted type of violence (i.e. assault, robbery, threats, etc.).

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Describe the frequency with which the predictors of violence occur (i.e. if the predictor of violence was "Deposit money to the bank", the frequency may be "Every Monday"; if the predictor of violence was "Doing inspections", the frequency may be "Number of inspections done per year").

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Make a list of who is at risk from this violence, preferably using job titles as opposed to personal names.

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For more information

Occupational Health and Safety Division
Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration

Telephone: 902-424-5400 or

Toll-free: 1-800-9-LABOUR
(1-800-952-2687)

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