

# **UNDERSTANDING AND RESPONDING TO VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE**

*Department of Health and Human Services*

**CRISIS MANAGEMENT TEAM GUIDELINES**

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## □ INTRODUCTION

The Crisis Management Team (CMT) is a group of agency specialists convened on an ongoing or ad hoc basis to implement policies regarding workplace violence; investigate and assess violent or potentially violent situations; implement the agency's action plan when required; and/or implement any corrective, preventive or follow-up action during or following an incident of violence.

The role of the CMT is distinct from the role of law enforcement personnel in violent or other crisis situations. In a crisis, law enforcement officials are the first to be contacted. The CMT provides liaison with law enforcement and oversees the organizational aspects of crisis situations.

Each work site should establish an ongoing Crisis Management Team because:

- ▶ there is an increasing number of threats of violence and actual violent incidents in the workplace;
- ▶ it is the responsibility of the agency and its management to provide a safe workplace for employees by having people trained to respond to potentially violent and violent events and a protocol for such response; and
- ▶ employees need to know protocol for dealing with threats and actual violent situations in the workplace.

This guideline is brief and is only intended to provide users with an outline of things to consider when setting up a Crisis Management Team. Since each team needs to be established based on LOCAL needs and situations, it is best to determine the specific details of how the teams will operate with the members of the local team and experts. Additional advice can also be obtained from members of the Department's Workplace Violence Intervention and Prevention Group in ASMB.

In sites where there are only a few employees or where a building is shared with other OPDIVs or Federal agencies, it is a good idea to first explore the establishment of a CMT with them. You may find that one already exists in your building that you can join and/or expand to include HHS employees.

In many violent or potentially violent situations the impact is likely to be widespread, affecting various parts of a building or site. Therefore, coordination with all agencies involved is essential. Also remember to involve employees in remote sites in planning team activities; they are often forgotten but usually have more complicated logistical concerns to consider.

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### **☐ IDENTIFICATION AND TRAINING OF TEAM MEMBERS**

Members of the CMT should be credible, represent certain functional areas of the Department, and have skills in selected areas. The key is having a well balanced team with the knowledge and ability to handle all aspects of violent or potentially violent situations.

#### **FUNCTIONAL AREAS REPRESENTED ON THE TEAM**

It is recommended that the following functional areas be recruited for membership on the team:

- ▶ building security
- ▶ medical staff
- ▶ Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
- ▶ union(s)
- ▶ employee/labor relations
- ▶ public affairs
- ▶ General Counsel
- ▶ violence experts such as assessment professionals
- ▶ senior management
- ▶ health unit
- ▶ law enforcement personnel (see note below)
- ▶ safety officer or safety committee member (see note below)

NOTE: Some locations do not have law enforcement or safety personnel on site. Where they are on site, it may be appropriate to include them on the team.

#### **ASSESSING TEAM MEMBER SKILLS**

Once members from the various functional areas are identified, the team needs to assess its knowledge and skills in these areas:

- ▶ characteristics of potentially violent workers and workplaces
- ▶ pre-crisis warning signs
- ▶ S. Anthony Baron's "levels of violence" (see Departmental guidelines)
- ▶ protocol for threat assessment
- ▶ protocol for crisis management and follow up
- ▶ local resources such as police, hospitals, etc., necessary for crisis response
- ▶ Critical Incident Stress Debriefing
- ▶ cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and first aid

Once skills and knowledge are assessed, next determine the training needs for group members.

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Training materials are readily available on the topic of workplace violence. Local law enforcement agencies are good places to start.

### **IDENTIFY WORKPLACE VIOLENCE EXPERT(S) TO ADVISE TEAM**

It is always a good idea to locate experts in the community who may be useful in helping the team get set up, trained, or provide ongoing consultation. Experts may be mental health professionals, law enforcement personnel or security consultants. There may also be violence experts among the local HHS staff who can be called on to help the team (if they are not already members).

### **☐ TEAM ADMINISTRATION**

Once the membership of the team has been selected and trained (if necessary), the next step is to make some decisions about the administration of the team. Each of the major administrative areas to be decided is described below.

#### **DEFINE PARAMETERS OF TEAM INVOLVEMENT**

It is important to recognize that Crisis Management Teams are limited in the types of situations to which they can respond. Sometimes, it is more appropriate for another group or person to respond to the crisis. The team should:

- ▶ identify the types of incidents appropriate for team response (i.e, harassment, threats, physical aggression). See Departmental guidelines for assistance in identifying the types of violence that may occur.
- ▶ identify the incidents which need to be referred to other officials (i.e., natural disasters, bomb threats).

#### **DECIDE ABOUT THE OPERATION OF THE TEAM**

Below are some areas to consider when deciding about how the team will operate on a day-to-day basis and the scope of these operations.

- ▶ Identify the team convener and an alternate.
- ▶ Define the role of each member.
- ▶ Define the geographic territory that will be covered by the team.
- ▶ Develop procedures for convening the team.
- ▶ Develop emergency identification credentials (i.e., badges) that will be recognized by local law enforcement.
- ▶ Develop an emergency communication system that can be used in the event that

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regular phones or communication equipment cannot be accessed (i.e., cellular phones, radios).

- ▶ Establish process for members to maintain and update skills.
- ▶ Establish procedures for reassessing CMT protocols and procedures on an ongoing basis.
- ▶ Develop procedures for collecting data on workplace violence, trends, risk factors, etc. on an on-going basis.

### **□ DEVELOP PROTOCOL FOR INVESTIGATING THREATS AND RESPONDING TO INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE**

Once the team has made decisions about how to operate and maintain itself as discussed above, procedures for carrying out the work of the team must be established. Below are some ideas to consider in this area.

- ▶ Develop procedures for receiving incident reports and for providing feedback throughout the investigation process.
- ▶ Establish protocols for working with police, rescue personnel and security.
- ▶ Identify and follow a process for **assessing** a threat. Check Departmental guidelines to make sure all issues are considered. Assessment may include a full threat assessment by a professional trained/certified in this area. It is critical that the procedures incorporate an immediate response to **ALL** reports of potentially violent and violent situations.
- ▶ Develop procedures for intervening in and following up on violent incidents.
- ▶ Plan procedures for debriefing those involved after the threatening or violent situation is over.
- ▶ Develop plans/activities for supporting post-incident recovery and getting back to work.
- ▶ Plan and rehearse responses to **ALL** possible scenarios (including domestic violence). Remember that in an actual event a well rehearsed team is far more effective.
- ▶ Determine how incidents will be documented and reported to management locally.
- ▶ Identify specific local management officials to whom incidents will be reported.
- ▶ Decide how records regarding the team's activities and reports/investigations, especially Critical Incident Stress Debriefing information, will be maintained.
- ▶ Identify management representatives who will communicate management support to employees affected by a violent situation.

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### **☐ COMMUNICATE ESTABLISHED PROCEDURES**

After the CMT decides the procedures for response and investigation of violent or potentially violent situations, the workforce must be made aware of them so that they know who to contact for help and what will happen when they do. To this end, the CMT will:

- ▶ develop procedures and methods for communicating CMT protocols to all personnel in the location. Be creative in getting the word out, particularly to those employees in remote sites. The Department has developed a written brochure to help the team with this area.
- ▶ collaborate with training staff to develop ongoing orientation and training in prevention and crisis management/intervention procedures. The Department has developed a training curriculum to assist in this area.

### **☐ WHEN AN INCIDENT OCCURS...**

Below are a few additional tips for making the CMT an effective part of human resource management in the Department.

- ▶ Follow established response procedures. This is easy to forget in the middle of an emergency.
- ▶ Debrief and analyze the effectiveness of established procedures on an ongoing basis and particularly after responding to an actual situation. Learn from each event. Learn also from the on-going data collection.
- ▶ Discuss preventive measures to avoid similar incidents in the future.
- ▶ Take care of yourselves...these are stressful situations!