

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS MANAGEMENT MANUAL

**Personnel
Directive**

Subject: **WORKPLACE VIOLENCE
PREVENTION AND CONTROL**

ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF PUBLIC WORKS, CITY OF LOS ANGELES

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PERSONNEL DIRECTIVE NO. 55

BACKGROUND

The problem of workplace violence has been one of growing importance for several years. On July 19, 1995, the City of Los Angeles joined an ever increasing number of employers who have experienced a catastrophic incident of workplace violence when a disgruntled employee shot and killed four City supervisors. Due to the "Piper Tech Incident," the City Council adopted a Workplace Violence Policy on July 29, 1998. The Board of Public Works adopted Personnel Policy No. 32 on September 3, 1998, to institute a Departmental workplace violence directive. Personnel Policy No. 32 directed the Office of Management-Employee Services to develop procedures, guidelines, and training programs to prevent and appropriately respond to incidents of violence. Policy No. 32 was revised in 2000 and is now Personnel Policy No. 19. During the last ten years, the Department has taken steps to address this problem and diffuse behavior before physical violence could occur. Even so, on February 24, 2005, our Department experienced a tragic incident of workplace violence when a Bureau employee shot and killed both his supervisor and a coworker.

The Department can effectively reduce the potential for violence in the workplace only through the ongoing development and maintenance of completely open communication between employees, supervisors, and managers. This Directive provides guidelines to assist Offices and Bureaus in developing a workplace violence prevention program in accordance with these concepts. This Directive also provides managers with the tools to respond to incidents of workplace violence in the event that something occurs despite everyone's best efforts.

The workplace is considered anywhere an employee is engaged in City related business. This means workplace violence may occur not only in City offices or yards involving employee-on-employee violence, but also field-based situations where a member of the public may be involved. This is a major concern in Public Works due to the many employees who work in the field alone or in small crews such as Refuse Collection Truck Operators, Construction Inspectors, Street Services Workers, and Street Lighting Electricians.

Workplace violence can take many forms such as:

- Violent physical actions;
- Direct or implied threats to do harm to another or to property, including intimidating use of one's body or physical objects;
- Verbally abusive or intimidating language or gestures;
- Threatening, abusive, or harassing communication, such as phone calls, letters, memoranda, faxes, and e-mail;

- Unauthorized possession of a weapon at the workplace, including on City parking lots;
- Destructive or sabotaging actions against City or personal property;
- Engaging in a pattern of unwanted or intrusive behavior against another, such as stalking, spying, and following; and
- Violation of a restraining order.

VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND PREPARATION

The best strategy to achieve a violence free workplace is to prevent violence or the threat of violence before it occurs. Fundamental to the success of the Department's efforts is completely open communication between employees, supervisors, and managers. Employees are the best source of information on potentially violent situations or individuals.

Employees should notify their supervisors and/or managers of credible threats of danger to themselves and to the workplace so that the necessary security measures can be implemented for the protection of the employee/victim, co-workers, and the work location. This includes advising supervisors about any restraining orders that cover the employee at the workplace or any potentially violent non-work-related situation that could likely result in violence in the workplace. All such reports will be kept confidential to the extent possible by the Department, while maximizing the safety and security of its employees, customers, and visitors.

Retaliation against any employee who reports workplace violence or a threat of violence will not be tolerated.

Office or Bureau management must take any report of a potentially violent situation or individual seriously. Upon the receipt of such a report, supervisors and managers must contact the Departmental Workplace Violence Prevention Coordinator (DWVPC) immediately before investigating the allegations and assessing the potential for violence. The DWVPC is assigned to the Office of Management-Employee Services and can be reached at (213) 978-1807. If the information is verified, the DWVPC, in consultation with Office or Bureau Management, will determine how to proceed in responding to the situation.

Due to the unique departmental organization in Public Works, the DWVPC and the Office of Management-Employee Services will fulfill the role established for the Department Threat Assessment Team as defined in the City's Workplace Violence Policy. Therefore, the DWVPC is responsible for:

- Evaluating and managing all reported threats or acts of workplace violence in the entire Department;
- Maintaining a centralized record of these incidents; and
- Documenting how each one was resolved.

The DWVPC will act as liaison to the City's Threat Assessment Team and can ask the City team, or any of its members, to help respond to potential or actual violence in any of the Offices or Bureaus. However, some Offices and Bureaus may want to establish a Bureau or Office threat assessment team to assist the DWVPC in responding to workplace violence incidents in the Office or Bureau.

Each Office or Bureau should periodically conduct a security assessment of all the environments where its employees work to:

- Assess the potential for violence or threat of violence;
- Identify existing security measures; and
- Recommend additional reasonable measures to increase workplace security.

In conducting this assessment, Offices and Bureaus should use joint labor-management teams to ensure that the security issues of line staff are identified and addressed.

Finally, Bureaus and Offices must educate and update employees regularly on workplace violence issues through relevant articles in newsletters, safety bulletins, and safety tailgate meetings. The DWVPC can assist Bureaus and Offices in the development, evaluation, and modification of all aspects of its workplace violence prevention program.

INTERVENTION AND REPORTING GUIDELINES

These guidelines apply to situations and behaviors involving the potential for violence, the threat of violence, or actual violence in the workplace. The procedures cover steps to take when dealing with current and former employees who present early warning signals of danger, potential danger, or immediate danger. These guidelines also apply to other persons (e.g. contractors, customers, or other non-employees) who may pose similar threats to City employees as well.

1. Early Warning Danger Signals

An individual may display early warning signs of behavior or language that, if not addressed, could result in violence in the workplace. These warning signs include:

- Changes in regular behavior patterns, especially a deterioration of general behavior and/or work performance;
- Withdrawal from others at work and appears to have few, if any, friends;
- Increased irritability or expressed feelings of victimization, such as blaming others for the employee's work problems and feeling disrespected or humiliated;
- History of fighting, arrests, or domestic violence;
- Indirect threats; and
- Suffers from extreme mood swings.

The employee's supervisor should evaluate, verify, and document any such behavior. If appropriate, the supervisor should encourage the employee to seek treatment through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or health provider. The supervisor may want to contact the DWVPC for assistance in responding to this type of behavior too.

In cases where an individual who is not a City employee is exhibiting these types of behavior, it is important to notify a supervisor promptly and document any incidents or behavior. Security should be advised so appropriate precautionary steps are taken in the event the situation escalates and the individual must be removed from the workplace.

2. Potential Danger

An employee may display advanced warning signs of potential violence that may cause significant emotional distress for others in the workplace. This type of behavior or language would be in a greater degree than warning signals discussed in the previous section. Be most particularly aware of:

- Belligerent or defiant behavior;
- Harassing, abusive, or threatening language;
- Paranoid language or actions;
- May be severely depressed or suicidal;
- Fascination with weapons or acts of violence; or
- Preoccupation with a particular City employee.

As explained in the previous section, any such behavior should be evaluated, verified, and documented. Disciplinary action should be instituted, if warranted. In instances where the supervisor reasonably believes that substance abuse is a contributing cause for the employee's deteriorating behavior, the supervisor should arrange for an immediate substance abuse assessment in accordance with existing policies and procedures.

Occasionally attempts to defuse the situation fail and the behavior creates a disruption in the workplace. An employee may be in such a mental or physical condition that the employee cannot, or will not perform his/her duties, or has become an immediate risk to him/herself, co-workers, or the public. In these situations, the supervisor, at the direction of the Bureau or Office Director or his/her designee, may place the employee off duty, on paid administrative leave, and immediately begin disciplinary proceedings, if appropriate.

Where an individual who is not a City employee causes the potential danger, it may be possible to defuse the situation verbally. However, if efforts to resolve the situation fail, all affected employees should attempt to remove themselves from the situation. If necessary and possible, City security or the police should be notified and the individual removed from the workplace.

As soon as it is practicable after such an incident, Office or Bureau management should meet with the DWVPC to develop an intervention plan for the individual creating the danger and for the other employees in the workplace. This plan may include removing an employee from the workplace, if that has not yet been done, separating employees who were fighting each other to different work locations, proposing disciplinary action, and/or referring the employee to the City psychologist for a work fitness evaluation. If an individual who is not an employee caused the incident, the plan may include taking additional security or precautionary measures in the workplace.

3. Immediate Danger

Circumstances may arise in which a person may pose a clear and present threat of danger of harming him/herself or others. Examples of posing an immediate danger include:

- Brandishing or using a weapon;

- Causing harm or risk of harm to self or another; or
- Making credible direct threats to cause such harm.

Where an individual poses an immediate danger, the following steps should be taken:

- A. Call **911** when a weapon is involved or when there is an immediate and direct threat to someone's life.
- B. In all other cases, call security, if available, and/or place a non-emergency call to the local police station for assistance in controlling the situation.
- C. Notify other persons in the area of immediate danger.
- D. If violence occurs, take immediate action to care for the needs of affected employees.
- E. Once the critical period of immediate danger of violence has passed, Office or Bureau management should contact the DWVPC to initiate steps to establish a timely and appropriate departmental response to mitigate the impact of the traumatic events upon the affected employees and help them cope with the aftermath from the incident.

In addition to the above, if it is an employee who poses the immediate danger, the following steps should be taken by supervisory or management personnel in the Bureau or Office:

- A. Place the employee off duty with pay.
- B. The affected Office or Bureau management, along with the Office of Management-Employee Services, should determine whether a work fitness evaluation would be required before the employee's return to duty.
- C. If appropriate, pursue discipline in accordance with departmental disciplinary policies and procedures.
- D. In instances where the employee is cleared to return to duty, hold a meeting with the DWVPC and appropriate members of the City's Threat Assessment Team to develop an immediate and long-range plan for the employee and the work site.

CONCLUSION

Although workplace violence remains a rare occurrence in the Department of Public Works and the City in general, our February 24, 2005 incident was a devastating experience for all City employees. Full cooperation by all employees is necessary if the Department is to continue to maximize the safety and security of its employees, customers, and visitors. By everyone working together, the risk of violence in the workplace, whether on the street, in a Bureau maintenance yard, or in an office, can be reduced to an absolute minimum.