

## **Section 23: WORKPLACE VIOLENCE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Many King County employees interact directly with the public daily. Occasionally county employees may encounter individuals who respond to staff in an intimidating, threatening, or dangerous manner. Violent behavior at work is now recognized as a serious occupational hazard, and efforts to control this workplace hazard are shared by safety and health professionals, employees, and management. Consequently, the King County Executive ordered all county departments to enact administrative policies necessary to implement a Workplace Violence Prevention program PER 18-7 (AEO).

### **APPLICABILITY**

The Workplace Violence Prevention policy covers all Executive Branch managers and employees.

### **RESPONSIBILITIES**

Managers and Supervisors are to:

- Take reasonable steps to protect employees and others from acts of violence in county facilities or related to county business.
- Respond to reports of or knowledge of violence.
- Initiate the investigation process when necessary.
- Notify the law enforcement agency having jurisdiction, if appropriate, and take suitable disciplinary action if it is determined that an employee has committed an act of violence.
- Keep records of all violence incident reports.
- Consider using the Alternative Dispute Resolution Program as a resource to mediate disputes in the workplace.
- Develop and make available training on the issues of workplace violence.

All executive branch employees are to:

- Report all known threats or acts of physical violence.
- Report concerns regarding any person outside the workplace who might harm them.

## **TRAINING**

As stated above, departments are responsible for making available training on the issues of workplace violence. Such training may include information on:

- Thorough hiring practices to include background checks as necessary
- Preserving employees' dignity during discipline and termination
- Improving communication skills of supervisors, with emphasis on proper administration of progressive discipline and dealing with terminations and layoffs
- Dealing with disgruntled citizens and perceived threats
- Identifying warning signs of potential violence
- Personal safety training – how to prepare for and survive acts of workplace violence
- Stress reduction programs

Workplace Violence Prevention classes are available from Safety and Claims Management. Additionally, Risk Management offers an on-line class for supervisors.

## **INCIDENT RESPONSE PROCEDURES**

Immediately after a violent incident or threat occurs, a manager in the affected department should focus first on providing for the medical, psychological, and family needs of affected victims. Other immediate steps that a manager should consider taking, where appropriate, include:

- Call 911. Report the incident to the local police department and support law enforcement activities (e.g. crime scene investigation, interviewing witnesses, victims and others).
- Assist the victim.
- Secure work areas where the disturbance occurred.
- Account for all employees and others, including those who may still remain in the area where the disturbance occurred.
- Notify Safety and Claims Management (206-477-3350) of the incident.
- Fill out incident reports and claims forms, as required.

Following the event, additional attention to victims' medical and psychological needs should be considered.

## **RESOURCES**

The following King County documents offer additional information on how to prevent workplace violence. They can be accessed via the King County Safety and Claims Management web site:

<http://kingcounty.gov/employees/HumanResources/SafetyClaims/Safety/Policies/WorkplaceViolence.aspx>

### **King County Workplace Violence Prevention Policy PER-18-8 (AEP)**

The policy enumerates examples of prohibited acts and inappropriate conduct. It also lists information that should be gathered should an incident occur. The policy also has two useful appendices:

Appendix 10-1: Preventing and dealing with Workplace Violence – a Manager’s Checklist. In addition to a 12-point checklist, a list of possible warning signs of violence is included.

Appendix 10-2: Violent Incident/Threat Report Form.

### **Workplace Violence: Prevention, Intervention, and Response. A Handbook for King County Directors, Managers, Supervisors and Leads**

This 11 page manual covers the county’s policy, and includes sections on learning to identify the potential for violence, setting the tone in your workplace, and diffusing threats.

## **REFERENCES**

Executive Order PER 18-7 (AEO) – Workplace Violence Prevention

Executive Policy PER 18-8 (AEP) – Workplace Violence Prevention

Executive Policy PER 18-5 (AEP) Domestic Violence in the Workplace