

Working Alone – Off-site Fact Sheets



WHO IS AT RISK?

Precautions should be used when workers are alone and working away from a central office. Unexpected events in unfamiliar environments can increase the risk of violence to the employee. Occupations in this category include:

- Real estate agents.
- Social workers.
- Inspectors.
- Enforcement officers.
- Home care or health care workers.
- Service or repair workers.
- Sales people.

What can the employer do?

In many situations, the nature of the off-site work involves a lone worker. It is important to conduct an assessment of the work employees will do to keep them safe even though they are working off-site, and often working alone.

- Have a check-in procedure in place. See Working Alone – General for more information.
- Provide training and education in how to avoid potentially violent situations, as well as conflict resolution and mediation.
- Allow the use of a “buddy system” in high risk situations – make sure employees know this option is available to them.
- Provide information on high risk geographical areas to all staff.
- Limit the time of day visits can be made to high risk areas/clients.
- Keep client records and ensure staff are aware if a client is known to be aggressive, hostile or potentially violent.
- Prepare a daily work plan so everyone knows where and when workers are expected somewhere.

What are some tips for working off-site?

Tips for working off-site safely include:

Do:

- Arrange to meet clients in a ‘safe’ environment where other people are around, such as a restaurant, hotel lobby, or their office/workplace.

- Wear comfortable, professional clothing and practical shoes which will enable you to leave quickly if necessary.
- Always wear or carry your identification badge. It will show that you are acting in an official capacity and that you are an employee doing your job.
- Carry only what is necessary. Large or numerous bags or cases are cumbersome.
- Always take your cell phone with you and keep it in a place you can access quickly.
- Avoid having new work contacts walk you to your car.
- Be alert and make mental notes of your surroundings when you arrive at a new place.
- Maintain a 'reactionary gap' between yourself and the client (e.g., out of reach of the average person's kicking distance). Increase the gap by sitting across from each other at a table, if possible.
- If you are referring to written material, bring two copies so that you can sit across from the client, not beside.
- Ask a colleague or "buddy" to come with you if something makes you feel uneasy. Tell your supervisor about any feelings of discomfort or apprehension about an up-coming meeting.
- Keep records and indicate if the client or patient is known to be aggressive, hostile or potentially violent. Do not leave out incidents that make you feel apprehensive.

Do Not:

- Do not enter any situation or location where you feel threatened or unsafe.
- Do not carry weapons of any type, including pepper spray. Weapons can be easily used against you and are illegal in some jurisdictions.

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