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## **Introduction**

Workplace violence has become a national phenomenon. News stories about violent incidents appear daily in the media. It is important not to ignore this reality. It is equally important to be well informed in order to respond appropriately and safely in the event of a threat or incident of violence.

Violence in the workplace may occur between employees (faculty, administrators, or staff), may be initiated by any other person against a University employee, or may be random violence which has no apparent connection to the University. There is no way to prevent random violence. However, in the workplace, there may be signs of escalating stress and threats prior to a violent incident. The stress may be work-related or resulting from outside factors. We can all learn how to recognize stress in ourselves and others, to manage anger, and to de-escalate potentially violent interactions.

This brochure has been prepared by the Workplace Violence Management Team as an aid to increase awareness and prevention of workplace violence at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. The intent of this brochure is to address openly the issues surrounding workplace violence in an effort to prevent such occurrences. It is not written to cause apprehension or alarm among University employees. We hope that you will read it and discuss the ideas and suggestions presented here with your colleagues and co-workers.

**FROM:** Chancellor David K. Scott  
**TO:** The University Community  
**DATE:**

*The University is committed to maintaining a safe working, learning, and living environment for all members of the University community.* The rise in the level of violence has become increasingly a matter of national concern. It is a concern on this campus as well. The incidence of aggressive behavior in offices, classrooms, residence halls, and elsewhere on campus is extremely disturbing since it can lead to threats of violence and even violence itself.

In an attempt to address this issue proactively, I want to advise you of the steps the University has taken to ensure a safe community. I also want to enlist your assistance in this effort. In February, 1995, I established the Task Force on Workplace Violence to examine the causes and incidence of violence on campus. The Task Force recommended to me several measures intended to prevent violence as well as to manage violent situations if they arise. These recommendations have been implemented and are outlined in this brochure.

*Threats, acts of aggression, and violence are unacceptable in the University community.* Although it is not always possible to prevent threatening statements or behaviors, as a concerned community it is our collective responsibility to report threatening statements or actions immediately. If you experience a threatening situation or know of any instance involving threats of physical violence toward **anyone**, whether from inside or outside the University community, it is imperative that you report it to a supervisor or department head, or to the Department of Public Safety at 545-2121, if appropriate.

Each report will be carefully assessed to determine an appropriate institutional response. This may include further investigation, security assistance, and/or contact with law enforcement authorities. Although departmental action may not be made public, subject to applicable state and federal law and University policies, you can be assured that all reports will be taken seriously and investigated promptly. Any threat or violent act by an employee or student will be considered serious misconduct and may be the basis for disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

For advice and assistance please refer to the resources listed on page XX of this brochure.

## WORKPLACE VIOLENCE MANAGEMENT TEAM

The Workplace Violence Management Team (originally the Task Force on Workplace Violence) was established to address in a systematic way the potential incidence and prevention of violence in the workplace. Its mission is to coordinate the University's efforts to address workplace violence, including proposing and updating related policies and procedures. To effectively accomplish its mission, the Team is divided into three workgroups -- Prevention and Education, Risk Assessment, and Crisis Management.

The **Prevention and Education** workgroup's responsibilities are to develop and to update policies and procedures, and to promote training on related issues such as managing conflict, anger, and stress. A primary focus is to provide broad-based training and awareness of available resources for supervisors on workplace violence, including violence prevention. Inquiries may be directed to Training and Development at 545-1787.

The **Risk Assessment** workgroup is available for consultation in situations of potential workplace violence to assess the level of risk, to identify the individuals at risk, and to determine security issues. The group can help to: 1) develop strategies to de-escalate a potentially violent situation, 2) make recommendations for action, 3) plan for various responses or outcomes, and 4) coordinate resources as needed. The group, however, is not a substitute for good management, nor does involving the team absolve a manager from taking any necessary and appropriate action. Consultation may be initiated by contacting the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) at 545-0350.

The **Crisis Management** workgroup coordinates crisis intervention when an incident of workplace violence occurs. Working with Public Safety, the workgroup coordinates resources and services for the victim, supervisor, and others affected by the incident. Group members follow up with the victim and others, arrange debriefing sessions as necessary, monitor campus climate in the aftermath, and evaluate the crisis management process. **In an emergency, call 911.**

## Guidelines

### Section 1: Awareness and Prevention

An organization's most important lines of defense against workplace violence are to combine preventive human resources practices with close attention to the warning signs of violent behavior. All employees should be aware of the warning signs, of what they can do to prevent potentially dangerous situations, and of how to respond to violence or threats of violence.

#### A. Definitions

**Acts of aggression** include verbal or physical actions that create fear of bodily harm or threaten the safety any employee, student, or member of the general public.

**Acts of violence** include any intentional or reckless act that causes injury or property loss to any employee, student, or member of the general public.

Examples of such behavior include:

- I. behavior or actions that would be interpreted by a reasonable person as carrying potential for violence and/or acts of aggression (e.g. throwing objects, waving fists, ranting speech, destroying property, etc.),
- II. any substantial threat to harm another individual or in any way endanger the safety of others,
- III. any physical assaults, and
- IV. any substantial threat to destroy property.

#### B. Warning Signs

It is known that individuals with a history of violence, currently untreated mental illness, active substance abuse, or persons who are experiencing a build-up of life and workplace stresses may be at high risk for acts of aggression or violence.

Examples of potential warning signs may include, but are not limited to:

- V. uncharacteristic behavior that might signal emotional distress,
- VI. evidence of alcohol or other drug abuse,
- VII. various forms of intimidation directed toward others,
- VIII. extreme changes in behavior and/or beliefs,
- IX. an obsession with weapons, gun magazines, or the discussion of weapons, and
- X. excessive interest in recent acts of workplace violence.

If you become aware of, or concerned about these or similar behaviors by an individual, you may want to discuss your concern with your supervisor or seek other assistance. Appropriate campus resources are listed on page XX of this brochure.

#### C. Supervisor Responsibilities in Helping to Prevent Workplace Violence

At the University of Massachusetts Amherst, all faculty and staff share the responsibility to report threats or acts of violence on campus to a supervisor, department head, or to Public Safety. Threats, acts of aggression, and violence are unacceptable in the University community. Such actions may result in disciplinary measures up to and including discharge. Criminal prosecution may result if federal, state, or local laws are violated. Any **acts of aggression** or **acts of violence**, as defined above, require intervention on the part of a supervisor.

Some examples of possible interventions include, but are not limited to:

- XI. consultation with supervisor,
- XII. contacting the Risk Assessment Team, or other appropriate resources,
- XIII. referral to EAP or other counseling resources,
- XIV. recommended or required training,
- XV. preventive feedback about unacceptable behavior,
- XVI. listening to concerns of other affected parties, and
- XVII. training employees to be aware of threatening situations.

When time and safety permit, you are urged to seek consultation from Public Safety, EAP, and/or Human Resources to determine an appropriate course of action.

If your office provides services to customers that may involve levels of tension or stress, or where there is a possibility of conflict, you may want to consider a physical security survey or assessment. If requested, staff from Public Safety can make recommendations regarding the physical security of your work space and offer practical safety advice about office arrangements, early warning signs, safe rooms, and other security measures. If interested, you should contact the Director of Public Safety at 545-2125 for more information.

## **Section 2: What to do if a threat or act of violence occurs**

### A. Guidelines for All Employees

#### **1. Try to Remain Calm:**

Calmness may be very difficult to achieve when an actual or potentially violent situation occurs. A violent or threatening person is more likely to respond to someone who approaches him or her calmly and confidently, without anger or defensiveness. Do not touch the person.

Other suggestions to assist you in de-escalating these situations:

- XVIII. Monitor your non-verbal cues.
- XIX. Avoid invasion of “personal space;” keep a safe distance of three to six feet.
- XX. Avoid any type of challenging stance (hands on hips, nose-to-nose, etc.).
- XXI. Moderate the tone, volume and rate of your verbal communication.
- XXII. Use empathetic listening - listen to what the person is really saying.
- XXIII. Don’t challenge, bargain or make promises.

## **2. Assess What's Happening**

## **Suggested Responses**

**XXIV.**Is it safe to ask the threatening or aggressive person to leave the scene?

Calmly ask the person to leave.

**XXV.**If it is not safe to ask the person to leave, are you able to leave ?

Clear the affected area.  
Call **911** with concise information.

**XXVI.**If you are not able to leave, is it safe for you or someone else to call for help?

Call **911**, or ask someone else to do so. Wait for Public Safety; try to keep yourself and others calm.

**XXVII.**If it is not safe to leave and you cannot call for help, what should you do?

Try to stay calm.  
Make your voice and facial expression flat.  
Clear the affected area if it is safe to do so.  
Wait for Public Safety.

**XXVIII.**If you notice that someone else is in danger and cannot safely call for help, what do you do?

Call **911** with clear information.

**XXIX.**Is a weapon involved?

Call **911** or have someone else do so.

### **B. Guidelines for Supervisors During an Incident**

In addition to following the above guidelines, supervisors, when possible, should:

**XXX.** determine the location and safety of all staff members,

**XXXI.** be available for consultation with Public Safety and other authorities to provide necessary information and to determine when it is safe to return to the workplace,

**XXXII.** try to model a calm, safe response to assist in de-escalating the situation, and

**XXXIII.** listen attentively to staff members concerns, information, and fears.

## **Section 3: After a threat or violent act occurs**

### **A. Reporting**

After the safety of the workplace is restored, staff directly affected by the situation will be asked by Public Safety to provide statements. Staff may also be asked to provide a written summary of the events.

When all of the facts are known and the parties involved have had a chance to collect themselves, information will be shared with other staff as appropriate.

Being involved in a threatening or potentially violent situation may have residual physical and psychological manifestations. Anyone involved is encouraged to seek appropriate resources. See page XX in this brochure for available resources.

### B. Anticipate Public Inquiry

If you are contacted by the media, please direct all inquiries to the University News Office at 545-0444. Other inquiries should be directed to an appropriate supervisor.

### C. Supervisory Responsibilities After an Incident Occurs

Supervisory follow-through after an incident will affect unit operations, morale, and the response of those involved. Good follow-through includes the following steps.

- XXXIV. After the safety of the workplace has been restored, provide the facts, details, and names of witnesses to Public Safety.
- XXXV. Provide reassurance to individuals, family members, and co-workers that the problem is being addressed. This will control rumors and calm the environment.
- XXXVI. Be prepared to work with the Workplace Violence Management Team to coordinate an institutional response to the incident and to assist those involved in accessing appropriate resources.
- XXXVII. Initiate disciplinary action, as appropriate.

### **Conclusion**

This brochure is only a starting point. We hope that, having read it, you will discuss the ideas and suggestions presented here with your colleagues, co-workers and staff. Supervisors are encouraged to devote part of a staff meeting to a discussion on the issue of violence in the workplace or arrange for Training and Development to conduct a workshop. While the potential for violence can never be totally eliminated, awareness and education are key to its prevention and may help to minimize its effects.

## **IN CASE OF EMERGENCY DIAL 911**

### **Campus Resources**

For Risk Assessment Consultation

Employee Assistance Program  
545-0350

For Information on Coping with Threats  
of Violence in the Workplace

**Human Resources**  
545-0380

Employee Labor Relations  
545-2736

Ombuds Office  
545-0867

Mental Health Services  
545-2337

*(if an undergraduate student is involved)*

Dean of Students  
545-2684

*(if a graduate student is involved)*

Dean of the Graduate School  
545-5271

For Information on Personal Safety

Public Safety  
545-2121

For information on coping with Domestic  
Violence and Sexual Assault

Everywoman's Center  
Counselor/Advocate Program  
Crisis Hotline  
545-0800

For Information on Employee Training  
and Organizational Development

Training and Development  
545-1787

For Information and/or assistance in  
coping with the aftermath of a violent  
incident.

Employee Assistance Program  
545-0350