

Workplace Violence Prevention

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PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines for both supervisors and staff when responding to threats, assaults, or other forms of violence in the workplace.

This policy also prohibits executive branch employees from carrying or storing all forms of weapons in the workplace, including impact weapons, electrical weapons, and firearms. This prohibition does not apply to law enforcement or other uniformed personnel who are authorized to carry weapons.

Many county employees interact directly with the public on a daily basis. A commitment to public service comes with many rewards but can also be very challenging. Sometimes, county employees may encounter individuals who respond to staff in an intimidating, threatening, or dangerous manner. This type of behavior directed at our employees will not be tolerated and will be dealt with appropriately.

POLICY APPLICABILITY

This policy applies to all executive branch departments, offices, divisions, and agencies including the Department of Assessments and the Department of Elections. This policy covers all executive branch officers and employees.

DEFINITIONS

"Workplace Violence" is any physical assault, threatening behavior or verbal threats occurring in the work setting. Workplace violence can be perpetrated by strangers, customers or clients, co-workers, personal relations, or other non-employees doing business for or with King County. It includes, but is not limited to:

- *Verbal violence* – Any verbal threat towards persons or property such as being sworn at or shouted at; obscene phone calls; and
- *Physical violence* – Any physical act such as threatening gestures, spitting, hitting, pushing, kicking, holding, impeding, or blocking the movement of another person, beatings, stabbings, suicides, shootings, rapes, an intimidating presence, and stalking.

"Firearms or Other Dangerous Weapons" includes, but is not limited to the following:

- Any device from which a projectile may be fired by an explosive;
- Any simulated firearm operated by gas or compressed air;
- Sling shots;
- Metal knuckles;
- Spring blade knife; and
- Any knife which opens or is ejected open by an outward, downward thrust or movement.

"Stalking" is defined in RCW 9A.46.110 as: "a person commits the crime of stalking if, without lawful authority and under circumstances not amounting to a felony attempt of another crime:

- (a) He or she intentionally and repeatedly harasses or repeatedly follows another person; and
- (b) The person being harassed or followed is placed in fear that the stalker intends to injure the person, another person, or property of the person or of another person. The feeling of fear must be one that a reasonable person in the same situation would experience under all the circumstances; and
- (c) The stalker either:
 - i. Intends to frighten, intimidate, or harass the person; or
 - ii. Knows or reasonably should know that the person is afraid, intimidated, or harassed even if the stalker did not intend to place the person in fear or intimidate or harass the person”.

POLICY

The county's prohibition against threats and acts of violence applies to all county employees. Violations of this policy by any covered individual will be followed by appropriate actions up to and including termination of employment.

In no case shall any employee or private person who legitimately reports threats or acts of violence be retaliated against. Any acts of retaliation should be reported immediately to the Division Manager, Department Director, or Director of the Department Human Resources (DHR).

Violence, threats, harassment, intimidation, and other disruptive behavior in our workplace perpetrated by strangers, customers, co-workers, personal relations, or other non-employees doing business for or with King County will not be tolerated; that is, all reports of incidents will be taken seriously and will be dealt with appropriately. Individuals who commit such acts may be removed from the premises and may be subject to disciplinary action, criminal penalties, or both.

Examples of Prohibited Workplace Violence

General examples of prohibited workplace violence include, but are not limited to, the following:

- All threats or acts of violence occurring on county property that adversely affect the business interests and goals of the county;
- All threats or acts of violence not occurring on county property, involving an employee of the county if the threats or acts of violence affect the business interests of the county;
- All threats or acts of violence not occurring on county property but involving a person acting in the capacity of a representative of the county; and
- Any threats or acts resulting in the conviction of an employee or agent of the county or of an individual performing services on the county's behalf on a contract or temporary basis, under any criminal code provision relating to threats or acts of violence that adversely affect the legitimate interests and goals of the county.

Examples of Threatening or Violent Conduct

Specific examples of conduct that may be considered threats or acts of violence prohibited under this policy include but are not limited to the following:

- Hitting, grabbing, or shoving an individual;
- Threatening to harm an individual, their family, friends, associates, or their property;
- The destruction, threat of destruction, or vandalism of property owned, operated, or controlled by the county;
- Making or participating in harassing or threatening telephone calls, letters, or other forms of written or electronic communication;

- Intimidating or attempting to coerce an employee to do wrongful acts that would affect the business interests of the county; and
- Stalking.

Prohibited Weapons in the Workplace

This policy prohibits executive branch officers and employees from wearing, transporting, or storing, firearms or other dangerous weapons within county buildings or facilities, in a county vehicle, or on their person while on county business. Any employee in possession of a firearm or other weapon within county buildings or facilities, in a county vehicle, or otherwise fulfilling job responsibilities may face disciplinary action including termination of employment. Possession of a valid concealed weapons permit authorized by the state of Washington is not an exemption under this policy.

Exemptions

This policy does not apply to:

- Law Enforcement personnel engaged in official duties;
- Security personnel engaged in official duties; and
- Persons engaged in military activities sponsored by the federal or state government, while engaged in official duties.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Employee Responsibilities

Each employee of the county is required to report incidents of threats or acts of physical violence of which they are aware.

Employees should also report any behavior they have witnessed which they regard as threatening or violent when that behavior is job related, appears that it might be carried out on a county site, or is connected to county employment. Employees are required to report the incident regardless of the relationship between the individual who initiated the threat or threatening behavior and the person or persons who were threatened or were the focus of threatening behavior.

County employees should make an incident report to their immediate supervisor, and the supervisor should notify their division/department management and the department's Human Resources Manager. The department's Human Resources Manager should then notify the Department of Human Resources Central Employees Services Division Director or designee. Any workplace violence or threat should be electronically reported at the [King County Incident Reporting Website](#). Managers may also seek assistance from the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and the Safety and Health professional assigned to their department.

If any employee has reason to believe that a person outside the workplace might harm the employee in any way, the employee is required to report those concerns to the employee's immediate supervisor, or next level manager if a supervisor is unavailable.

Department Responsibilities

King County Departments shall:

- 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 violence investigation process when necessary;
- If it is determined that an employee has committed an act of violence, notify the law enforcement agency having jurisdiction, if appropriate, and take suitable disciplinary action.
- Keep records of all violence incident reports.
- Consider using the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Program as a resource to mediate disputes in the workplace.
- Develop and make available training on the issues of workplace violence for managers and employees. Training may include:
 - Thorough hiring practices to include background checks as necessary;
 - Preserving employee's 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 customers and perceived threats;
 - Identification of warning signs;
 - Personal safety training- how to prepare for and survive acts of workplace violence; and
 - Stress reduction programs.

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:

- Calling 911 to report the incident to the local police department and support law enforcement activities (e.g., crime scene investigation, interviewing witnesses, victims, and others);
- Assisting the victim(s);
- Securing the work area(s) where the incident occurred; and
- Accounting for all employees and others, including those who may remain in the area where the incident occurred.

Additional attention to victims' medical and psychological needs should be considered.

EMPLOYER INVESTIGATION

After an incident occurs, a detailed investigation is required. All incidents, including threats, should be investigated as soon as possible. The investigation should focus on fact-finding to prevent reoccurrence. Basic information that should be gathered during an investigation includes but is not limited to:

- Who was threatened;
- Who made the threat;
- Witness statements;
- Any previous incidents involving the victim and person making the threat;
- What is the relationship between the victim and the threat maker;
- What was the threat;
- What were the circumstances surrounding the threat, including events leading up to the threat;
- When, where, and how was the threat made;
- When, where and how was the threat to be carried out;
- Information solicited from the person who made the threat; and

- An overall review of the incident to determine how the county handled the situation and what changes or improvements could be implemented. This should be done only after initial legal review and approval.

QUESTIONS

Refer questions or comments to your agency's [Human Resources Manager](#) or the Department of Human Resources.