

OCTOBER IS WORKPLACE VIOLENCE AWARENESS MONTH

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

A Labor and Industries study from 2008-2012 shows workplace violence has crept into the top 5 causes of injuries and the top 10 causes of fatalities for Firefighters in Washington State. All employers must develop a plan in their APP that outlines measures to reduce workplace violence. The Fire Service is exposed to workplace violence in a variety of ways, from supporting law enforcement calls, EMS to victims, patient attacks, domestic violence situations, and even threats and acts of violence from co-workers or members at the station.

Workplace shootings and stabbings often get the most media attention, but other forms of workplace violence including hostile work atmospheres, threatening speech, and more subtle forms of physical intimidation affect firefighters, sometimes on a daily basis.

RECOGNIZE THE WARNING SIGNS

People's body language, tone of voice, and behaviors may be indicators of potential workplace violence. In particular, making direct or indirect threats, being argumentative, and showing physical signs of anger are strong warning signs. At times depression, isolation, or fascination with violent acts may be the signs.

According to FEMA, no one can predict human behavior, and there is no specific "profile" of a potentially dangerous individual. However, studies indicate that incidents of violence are usually preceded by patterns of behavior or other activities that may serve as warning signs.

Often, acts of violence by known assailants are preceded by a "gut feeling" of "something isn't right" with the person or the situation, do not ignore these feelings.

POLICY

It is our department's policy to protect our members from workplace violence by recognizing disruptive behavior and providing training to de-escalate or escape from

situations that may result in workplace violence.

Not all tense or uncomfortable situations result in workplace violence. However, officers and members should be aware of the following behaviors and attempt to help the individual find a calm peaceful way to address their concerns.

The following levels of disruptive behavior can be displayed by members of the public, family members, co-workers, or even criminals. Our response to each group should be similar, but our resources to deal with co-workers should follow the reporting and disciplinary procedures outlined as appropriate.

LEVEL 1 - DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIORS

- Intimidation
- Discourteous/Disrespectful
- Uncooperative
- Verbally abusive

LEVEL 1 RESPONSE

All members presented with any level of disruptive behavior can attempt to de-escalate the situation by:

- Remaining calm and polite.
- Do not argue, get defensive, or be sarcastic.
Build trust by listening and treating the offending person with respect.
- Displaying confident yet non-aggressive body language.
- Gathering information to help present solution options.
- Take all threats or acts of violence seriously.
- Document this behavior when displayed by a member at the station, on emergency calls, or when on duty.

WHEN IT IS A MEMBER:

In addition to above responses, an officer must follow up by counseling the member about the misconduct and how it affects the department, and the officer may institute the department disciplinary action, if necessary.

LEVEL 2 - ESCALATION

Argues with responders, vendors, coworkers, family, or management.

Refuses to obey direction from authority, agency policies, or procedures.

Sabotages equipment or steals property.

Verbalizes wishes to hurt others.

Stalks, harasses, or shows undue focus on another person.

Makes direct or indirect threats to coworkers or management (in person, in writing, by phone)

Views himself or herself as victimized by management (me against them) and talks about "getting even"

LEVEL 2 RESPONSE

Follow Level 1 Response de-escalation recommendations.

WHEN IT IS A MEMBER: As an officer, when a member exhibits signs of violence and the situation is not life threatening, follow the de-escalation techniques previously listed.

- After the situation has calmed down, meet with the member in private to discuss the inappropriate behavior. Counsel the employee in writing on the effect of the violent behavior and initiate appropriate disciplinary action based on the misconduct and/or disruption.
- Be aware of a potential violent response and provide yourself an escape route while meeting.
- If you are meeting alone with the member, and you are unable to defuse the situation or it re-escalates, ask the member to remain and excuse yourself from the meeting.
 - Immediately contact Law Enforcement
 - Notify or alert all personnel in the area
 - Treat as a Level 3 event.

LEVEL 3 - THREAT LEVEL ESCALATION

- Physical fights or assaults of coworker(s) or manager(s).

- Suicidal threats.
- Damage or destruction of property.
- Concealment or use of a weapon.
- Display of extreme rage or physically aggressive acts, throwing or striking objects, shaking fists, verbally cursing at others, punching walls, or angrily moving around.

LEVEL 3 RESPONSE

Secure the safety of self and others, by evacuating all non-necessary personnel.

Immediately contact Law Enforcement.

The officer in charge should consult with officials, such as functional area experts, for help in assessing/responding to this situation.

If confronted with an offending person, the officer or member should:

- Have unnecessary people clear the area.
- Remain calm, speaking slowly, softly, and clearly.
- Ask the person to sit, to see if he or she is able to follow directions.
- Acknowledge they are upset and ask what you can do to help make the situation better.
- Do not promise things you cannot deliver.
- If no weapon is displayed, ask questions about the complaint, such as:
 - What do you hope to gain by your actions today?
- Direct aggressive tendencies into other behaviors, give other choices about how to react. (Example, "maybe we can go outside and get some fresh air").
- Secure your personal safety first—you may have to leave the area if your safety is at risk.
- Contact other people who may be in danger. Keep emergency numbers for members up to date and accessible.
- Cooperate with law enforcement personnel when they have responded to the situation. Be prepared to provide a description of the violent or threatening individual, details of what was observed, and the exact location of the incident.

PREVENTION OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

For our department to build a culture that prevents work place violence, we need to create a friendly, open, work environment that is impartial, consistent, and has mechanisms for feedback.

Our department must avoid the attitude of “it can never happen here” and have escape routes and plans identified for members who may be at risk.

Our department shall institute a security plan and system that only allows authorized individuals to enter the Stations.

We will educate members annually on Workplace Violence using this information and other courses on:

- Communications
- Conflict resolution
- Anger management
- Stress reduction
- Bullying

BULLYING POLICY

It is our department policy to provide for the mental, emotional, and physical well being of our members by having an anti-bullying policy.

Bullying is the use of power or intimidation to exert control or show dominance over another person.

Bullying is detrimental to department morale and must be recognized, owned, and fixed by the department leadership.

Excellence in leadership does not allow for bullying at any level in our department. Unacceptable behaviors related to bullying include:

- Demoralizing members by repeated public singling out or professional humiliation of members while on scene or at training.
- Targeting specific members with unsubstantiated claims of lack of effort or skill.
- Intimidating use of discipline or competence procedures.
- Destructive innuendo and sarcasm about a members personal life.
- Making inappropriate jokes and persistent teasing, name-calling, insults, or intimidation.
- Inconsistent enforcement of policy or holding the member to a different or higher standard than other members.
- Using work to exert undue pressure, including requiring overtime, unreasonable deadlines, and unnecessary work assignments.
- Lack of recognition with the intent of destabilizing members. Making them never feel ‘good enough’ to be a Firefighter.

REPORTING

Members who feel they have been bullied may report the actions to an officer or to the Chief.

Members will have an opportunity to report such actions at their yearly performance evaluation by a survey or form.

Officers shall notify the Chief of such a report, whether is was verbal or written.

The Chief or designee will first attempt to mitigate the behavior by providing additional training and mentoring to help

OCTOBER SUGGESTED TRAINING SCHEDULE

| | TRAINING SUGGESTION | DEPARTMENT ACTUAL TRAINING SCHEDULE |
|---------------------------|--|--|
| WEEK 1 DATE: | TOOLS/ELECTRICAL SAFETY (SC MEETING) | |
| WEEK 2 DATE: | FIREGROUND OPS - FOAM | |
| WEEK 3 DATE: | WORKPLACE VIOLENCE/ HARRASSMENT | |
| WEEK 4 DATE: | SCBA QTRLY - STRUCTURAL FIREFIGHTING EVOLUTION | |
| OPTIONAL FULL DAY: | | |
| OTEP DATE: | | |

the person exhibiting bullying identify, acknowledge, and change their behavior. The victim of the actions will also receive additional training and help to thrive in the department.

It may be necessary to document and address patterns that may have built over years, with the goal of changing to a department culture that doesn't tolerate such behaviors.

An officer or member exhibiting on-going

bullying behavior will be subject to the department's disciplinary procedures.

OUTCOME

Our anti-bullying policy is designed to make a safe work environment for our members, physically, mentally, and emotionally.

REFERENCES:

FEMA ONLINE Course IS-106.15: Workplace Violence Awareness Training 2015

Workplace Bullying: What We Know, Who Is to Blame and What Can We Do? (Rayner, Hoel and Cooper)

Customize our program: _____
