



General Order Number: 08-14	Effective Date: January 2010
Division: Health and Safety	
Chapter: Preventing Violence in the Work Place	
By Order of the Fire Chief: Marc S. Bashoor	Revision Date: N/A

POLICY

To establish a policy concerning work place conduct, work place security, and specific safety standards for firearms/weapons that is applicable to all members of the Fire/EMS Department.

Employees/members violating the provisions of this general order shall be immediately placed on administrative leave and/or removed from operations pending an investigation and administrative review of the circumstances surrounding the incident.

DEFINITIONS

Workplace Violence – Any physical assault, threatening behavior, or verbal abuse occurring in the work setting. 4 categories of workplace violence:

- Stranger on employee
- Customer on employee
- Significant other on employee
- Employee on employee

Workplace – Any location, either permanent or temporary, where an employee performs any work-related duty.

Department Disciplinary Coordinator (DDC) – Ensures establishment of guidelines for proper intake, documentation, and the handling of Disciplinary actions taken against an employee. These procedures are established in order to ensure that discipline is distributed fairly and equitably and in accordance with the guidelines that have been established in the Collective Bargain agreement, Personnel Laws, volunteer Disciplinary Process, and the General Orders.

Weapons – an object or device designed to injure or that could be to cause a harmful effect.

Fire Arms – any type of gun to include but not limited to:

- Handgun
- Pellet gun and/or air gun
- BB gun
- Stun gun

Facing Off Position – when two employees come face to face with each other in a threatening demeanor.



Assault - the actual threat to use force with the apparent ability, if not prevented, to execute that attempt which creates reasonable fear of imminent peril.

Battery - the unlawful touching of another.

Work site or workplace - any location whether owned or leased by the county or any other location not owned or leased by the county where a county employee is carrying out the responsibilities and duties of his/her job.

Property damage - intentional damage to property which includes property owned by the county, employee, visitors, or vendors.

PROCEDURES / RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Background

The goal of preventing violence in the workplace is to provide employees with a place of employment that “is free from recognizable hazards that are causing or likely to cause death or serious harm to employees.”

Employees have the duty and obligation to bring potentially violent situations to the attention of their immediate supervisor or manager.

The objective is to ensure the highest standard of health and safety for all members and the general public and to provide for the efficient and effective operation of the Department. This shall be accomplished by stating what is acceptable work place conduct, recognizing breaches in work place security, establishing a policy regarding firearms and weapons, and training members to recognize potential threats to personal safety in the work place and on the emergency scene.

Regarding violence in the workplace, the Department will maintain a “zero tolerance” policy.

2. Prohibited Conduct

Verbal

- Threats to inflict bodily harm, including vague or covert threats such as but not limited to:
 - “I am going to come back after duty and get you.”
- Abusive language and/or gestures toward supervisors, co-workers, or the public
 - “Displaying ones hand in the shape of a gun and act like you are shooting at a co-worker.”
- Making delusional statements inflicting harm
 - “I should go home get a gun and blow these people’s head off.”
- Threats to destroy property
 - “I am going to burn your house down.”



Physical

- Attempting or carrying out physical Assaults
- Striking, pushing, and other aggressive physical acts against another person
- Disorderly conduct (shouting, throwing, or pushing objects, and punching walls)
- Bringing guns or other weapons into the workplace (unless authorized)

3. Firearms/Weapons

The bringing of unauthorized firearms and other weapons into fire stations and/or other work sites is prohibited.

If a member is employed by a law enforcement agency that does not require the individual to carry an off-duty weapon, one shall not be worn in or around the fire station and/or other worksite. If the member is required to carry an off-duty weapon, every effort must be made to keep the weapon out of plain view when visiting the fire station/ worksite. The weapon of the member must not be visible to persons entering the fire station/worksite. It is the responsibility of the individual to properly secure their weapon.

No firearms of any type will be allowed to be worn or carried by fire and rescue personnel who are involved in emergency operations or during training evolutions.

The practice of bringing weapons in for cleaning, repair, or storage shall be limited to authorized facilities only.

Fire stations that host turkey shoots or gun shows shall notify the Office of the Fire Chief 24 hours prior to the event and have appropriate permits on display. Ammunition must be kept separate from the firearm while in the station.

Volunteer members who possess a gun permit for fund-raising activities shall follow the same guidelines as off-duty law enforcement officers.

NOTE: The above prohibition does not preclude authorized Prince George's County Fire Investigators from carrying out their official duties.

4. Work Place Security

It shall be the responsibility of the career supervisor/volunteer chief to ensure that a safe and secure work place exists for all members.

A periodic security assessment shall be done to ensure that a safe environment does exist. Items to be considered:

- Increased outdoor lighting in parking areas and corners of the building.
- Maintaining locks on windows and doors.



- Closing bay doors when not in quarters.
- Providing central entry points.
- Installing electronic security devices (i.e., cameras, buzzers, etc.).
- Questioning “strangers” in the work place.
- Background/security checks of new members as per General Order Division 11 Chapter 23.

5. Appropriate Work Place Conduct

All members shall conduct themselves in a courteous, efficient manner; be fair, impartial, ethical, and dignified in their relations with others.

- They shall be respectful and compliant to their supervisors.
- They shall refrain from using harsh and violent language and from disturbing other members unnecessarily.
- They shall not engage in altercations or boisterous arguments.
- Threats and physical altercations will not be tolerated.

6. Protective Orders

- If an employee/member has any type of protective order in place or pending, the employee or member should notify his/her immediate supervisor.
- A picture of the person who has the protective order against shall be provided and kept on file at the station/worksite
- Consideration shall be made to temporarily change the complainants work site.

Types of Orders

- Peace Order - A peace order is a civil protection order that you can file for in district court, which is supposed to help protect you from someone who is abusing you.
- Protective Order - In litigation, an order that prevents the disclosure of sensitive information except to certain individuals under certain conditions.
- Ex Parte Order - Restraining any party from going onto the grounds of or entering the dwelling that the parties share, from the residence, workplace, or school of the other, or from the day care or school of a child until further order of the court; prohibiting any party from knowingly coming within, or knowingly remaining within, a specified distance from a specified location.

7. Rude Conduct

Conduct that a “reasonable person” would classify as inappropriate or unprofessional in the workplace, will not be considered “violence in the workplace”, but rather a violation of the “Code of Ethics.”

Non-Emergency behaviors that would fall into this category include but are not limited to:



- Snapping fingers at another person
- Making a statement in an angry voice
- Display of being upset, angry, or frustrated.

8. Implementation/Enforcement

When an employee observes an act of violence or the threat of violence at work, whether involving employees or members of the public, the employee should report the incident immediately to his/her supervisor, the nearest supervisor or other management personnel.

When confronted with a violent situation, personnel should keep the following steps in mind:

- Stop and quickly analyze the situation.
- Take steps to ensure personal safety and the safety of others.
- If a gun or weapon is present, take cover and get underneath something,
- Call police, activate the emergency identifier on radio, and notify communications.

Complaints involving violence in the workplace

All complaints involving violence whether verbal or physical will be handled using a Three (3) Step Process.

Step One (1)

This step is used for minor disturbances between employees and/or members in which the station Commander or Volunteer Command Officer, worksite Manager, or senior firefighter can handle quickly and effectively. The employees and/or members can continue to work together without any further disruptive behavior. The Duty Major shall be notified of the situation and kept abreast of any further incidents.

The "Workplace Disturbance Report" shall be completed by the highest ranking officer present at the time of the incident, no matter how minor in nature and forwarded to the Office of Professional Standards for record keeping purposes. The Employee's Assistance Program or Volunteer Assistance Program is an option to be for all personnel.

Step Two (2)

This step is used for moderate disturbances between employees and/or members which rise to a point that cannot be handled at the station/worksite level. The Volunteer Chief, Duty Chief, Civilian Manager, Volunteer Major, or Battalion Chief shall be immediately notified. The employees and/or members shall be immediately separated and monitored until the arrival of the Command Officer.



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Depending on the severity of the incident, placing the station/worksite out of service until the incident can be brought under control and/or resolved may be considered.

Examples of actions which are considered moderate in nature include, but are not limited to:

- Yelling and screaming
- Slamming doors
- Aggressively shuffling items on a desk
- Profane and/or abusive language
- Angered state that can't be brought under control quickly or he/she continues after attempts have been made to halt the behavior.

The employees can be separated by either moving them to another work site, which will be determined by the Duty Chief or placing the employees on Administrative Leave/Leave Without Pay (LWOP).

Both employees and/or members shall be referred to EAP/VAP through a supervisory referral.

The "Violence in the Workplace Questionnaire" shall be completed by the complainant(s) and collected by the Battalion Chief and/or Major/Manager with the assistance of the station officer or volunteer command officer.

Each employee or member involved in the violent behavior as well as any witnesses shall complete written statements immediately.

The Battalion Chief and/or Major/Manager shall collect all statements, review the package for completeness, and forward to the Office of Professional Standards by 0900 the next business day. If the incident occurs during the weekend, holidays, or after normal business hours, notification shall be made to the Departmental Disciplinary Coordinator (DDC) via email or through the Call Center.

Each employee/member shall be directed to contact the Office of Professional Standards to schedule an interview with the DDC. The DDC will ensure the following actions occur:

- Review the Violence in the Workplace Package and statements
- Schedule interviews with employee/member

Step Three (3) "Zero Tolerance"

Involves overt, obvious acts of violence either verbal, physical, or both. When disturbances involving employees and/or members rise to this level, rapid and immediate actions are required. The Station Officer/Manager or volunteer command officer shall immediately request the assistance of the Battalion Chief, On Duty Major, and the police department if the violent acts were physical in nature. The employees and/or members shall be immediately separated and monitored



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until the arrival of the Battalion Chief or Major/Manager. If an operational capacity, the station shall be immediately placed out of service and additional fire/EMS units shall be dispatched if EMS care is required. The station will remain out of service until the incident is declared under control by either a Major/Manager or the highest ranking command officer available.

Actions which are considered “Zero Tolerance” in nature are:

- Physical altercations
- Overt threats to inflict harm or bodily injury
- Pushing, shoving, chest bumping
- Employees/Members are in a “facing off” position, in a nose to nose position
- Stalking, chasing, and/or holding against ones will.
- Any display of guns or knives
- Any object picked up or displayed that can be used as a weapon

The Battalion Chief and/or Major/Manager shall operationally remove employees/members and on Administrative Leave/ Leave Without Pay (LWOP).

The “Violence in the Workplace Package” shall be completed by the complainant(s) and collected by the Battalion Chief and/or Major/Manager with the assistance of the station officer, Volunteer Command Officer or the Lt. Col. in charge of that respective command.

Each employee or member involved in the violent behavior as well as any witnesses shall complete written statements immediately.

The Battalion Chief/Manager and/or highest ranking Chief Officer is responsible to ensure that all statements are collected and forward to the Office of Professional Standards by 0900 the next business day. If the incident occurs during the weekend, holidays, or after normal business hours, notification shall be made as soon as practical to the Departmental Disciplinary Coordinator (DDC) by email or thru the Operations Call Center.

Direct each employee/member to contact the Office of Professional Standards to schedule an interview with the DDC. The DDC will ensure the following courses of action are completed:

- Review the Violence in the Workplace Package and statements
- Schedule interviews with employee/member

Both employees and/or members shall receive a supervisory referral to EAP/VAP.

Failure to comply with orders contained herein will result in disciplinary action.

9. Additional Information

Warning signs of possible violent behavior:



- Evidence of possible drug use or alcohol abuse
- Serious stress in individuals personal life
- Continual excuses/blame
- Inconsistent work patterns
- Poor on-the-job relationship
- Concentration problems/confusion
- Poor health and hygiene
- Unusual/changed behavior
- Previous threats/threatening actions
- Decreased productivity
- Attendance problems

Escalating levels of violence: Level One

- Refuse to cooperate
- Spreads rumors and gossip to harm others
- Consistently argues with co-workers
- Belligerent towards customers/clients
- Constantly swears at others

Escalating levels of violence: Level Two

- Argues frequently with customers, vendors, co-workers, and management
- Refuses to obey company policies and procedures
- Sabotage
- Verbalizes wishes to hurt co-workers and/or management
- Overly interested in discussing violent crimes

Escalating levels of violence: Level Three

Frequent displays of intense anger resulting in:

- Recurrent suicidal threats
- Recurrent physical fights
- Destruction of property
- Utilization of weapons to harm others
- Murder, rape, and/or arson

De-escalation techniques

- Extend empathy and avoid ridicule, threats, blame or belittling
- Allow the hostile person to save face
- Redirect their energy
- Remain calm, speak slowly, softly, and clearly
- Avoid being defensive



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- Provide space and watch body language
- Listen carefully and ask clarifying questions
- Remain non-confrontational
- Focus on behavior, not attitude.

REFERENCES

N/A

FORMS / ATTACHMENTS

VIWP - Initial report and Questionnaire

Workplace Disturbance Report

Office of Professional Standards

Name of Person Filing Report:		Phone:	
Department:		Date Completed:	
Name of Supervisor Notified:		Date Notified:	
Name of person alleged to be acting violently or making threats:			
Date on which this occurred:			
Place at which this occurred:			
Who or what was threatened?			
What was said?			
Did physical action accompany the threat? If so, describe.			
What weapons were used, if any?			
Who else was present? Include name, department, address, and phone number.			
Has this happened before? When and where? Was it reported?			
Please include additional relevant information:			
Signature of Reporting Employee:		Date:	
Signature of Supervisor Notified:		Date:	

Office of Professional Standards

Violence in the Workplace (VIWP) Questionnaire

Name of Person Filing Report:		Phone:	
Department & Shift Assignment:		Date Completed:	
Name of Supervisor Notified:		Date Notified:	
Name of person alleged to be acting violently or making threats:			
Date on which this occurred:			
Place at which this occurred (give specific facts indicating where incident occurred)			
Who else was present? Include name, department, address, and phone number.			
Did the respondent use or threaten to use physical force against you? explain (type of threats made, degree of threats, & how the threats were made).			
Did physical action accompany the threat? If so, describe.			
Did the respondent use a weapon? Have access to weapons? What type of weapon? Where it was located? What weapons were used, if any?			
Did the respondent have the ability to carry out the threats or use physical force? Explain			
Did the respondent have to be restrained or prevented from using physical force against you? (by whom and who they were restrained)			

Did the respondent put you in fear of your life or safety? How?

Did the respondent threaten you with immediate or future harm? Explain?

Did you engage in an argument with the respondent? What was the argument about? Who started the argument? Explain.

Did the respondent use harsh or violent language towards you? Explain

Did the respondent harass you? Explain how you were harassed.

Was this the first time the respondent threatened to use or used physical force/violence against you? If not, explain the previous incident.

What injuries did you suffer as a result of this? Did you require medical treatment or hospitalization? Explain.

Where the police called to the scene? By Whom? What was the name of the Officer(s) that responded? What did the Officers do upon arrival?

Was a criminal complaint filed? By whom? Were any arrests made? Explain

Office of Professional Standards

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE INITIAL REPORTING FORM

Name of Person Filing Report:		Phone:	
Department:		Date Completed:	
Name of Supervisor Notified:		Date Notified:	
Name of person alleged to be acting violently or making threats:			
Date on which this occurred:			
Place at which this occurred:			
Who or what was threatened?			
What was said?			
Did physical action accompany the threat? If so, describe.			
What weapons were used, if any?			
Who else was present? Include name, department, address, and phone number.			
Has this happened before? When and where? Was it reported?			
Please include additional relevant information:			
Signature of Reporting Employee:		Date:	
Signature of Supervisor Notified:		Date:	