



The GMB Approach -

Tackling Violence at Work

This leaflet steps out the GMB approach to tackling Violence at Work

Tackling Violence at Work



The GMB, Britain's General Union, has thousands of members providing essential services to the public. While this type of work can be extremely rewarding, any job which requires contact with the general public brings risks. Workers in these occupations often face aggressive or violent behaviour. They may be sworn at, threatened or even attacked.

The GMB has 25,000 Safety Representatives. They are trained to assist managers to develop and implement preventative measures that will protect GMB members' health and safety.

The GMB can help you

What is violence and who is affected?

The government agency responsible for health and safety is the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). They define work-related violence as:

'Any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances related to their work'.

The HSE statistics show that verbal abuse and threats are the most common types of incidents and that physical assaults are comparatively rare. However, no-one should have to face such behaviour as they go about their work.

GMB members and other workers are on the frontline in many of the occupations most at risk.

Those most at risk include:

- Workers providing a service (refuse collectors, utilities workers, pub, hotel and catering staff, shop workers)
- The care sector (NHS workers, residential care workers, home helps, meals on wheels etc)
- Education (school support staff, caretakers etc)
- Security workers and staff who handle cash.

The problem is widespread however and 1 in 5 workers have been physically or verbally assaulted whilst at work.

What does the law say?

Health and safety law states that all employers should have a clearly defined statement of any potential risks including those that their employees might face from violence. The statement should spell out what action the employer proposes to take to reduce this risk.



In addition to this there are a number of laws which relate to violence at work. These include:

The Health & Safety at Work Act 1974

The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 places a legal duty on employers to ensure, as far as they possibly can, that their employees work in a healthy and safe environment and that their welfare is considered in any work activity.

Under the act an employer has an obligation to ensure any potential risk of violence is eliminated or controlled.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999

These Regulations state that employers must carry out a risk assessment to protect employees from exposure to reasonably foreseeable violence. A risk assessment is an examination to determine what hazards exist in your workplace. A hazard is anything that could cause harm to people, including verbal or physical abuse.

Employers must then decide whether there are enough measures to protect people or whether they need to take action to eliminate or reduce the risk of the hazards that they have identified.

A risk assessment on violence at work will:

1. Identify hazards

This means that an employer should look for situations arising from work where violence might occur.

For example jobs which require workers to deal with members of the public or a job that involves dealing with money. Your employer should consult you about this and should check the accident book.

2. Find out which employees could be harmed, and how this might happen.

Any employee who may have a vulnerable job or be placed in a potentially dangerous situation should be identified.

3. Evaluate the risks arising from the hazards and decide whether existing precautions are adequate or what more needs to be done.

The employer must look at the potential for a verbal or physical assault, and then put in place measures to eliminate or reduce the risk so that harm is unlikely.

Measures that employers should consider could include:

1. Protective screens for staff at risk
2. Security for late night staff
3. Changing shift patterns so that no-one works alone
4. Better lighting
5. Adapting the environment, if possible, to reduce the risk to employees
6. Training and information for staff in organising work so that the risk of violence is reduced
7. Training and information in how to deal with violent situations.

4. Record the measures that are being taking to prevent violence in their work place

This plan must be written down in organisations of five or more people. It should be communicated to all staff who may be at risk.

5. Review the findings of the risk assessment.

This should be done periodically, and should take into account any new information or circumstances employers might need to change or improve their policy if necessary.

Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977

Employers must consult with GMB Safety Representatives on all of the above steps. GMB Safety Reps may take up any issues of concern under these Regulations on any aspect of violence that concerns the health and safety of employees, including stress from the fear of violence.

GMB Safety Representatives have the legal power to take up issues relating to violence at work – and can help YOU.

The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) 1995

Under RIDDOR, any violent incident which requires the victim to take more than 3 days off work must be reported to the relevant enforcing authority.



GMB Safety Representatives make sure that the workplace is a safe place to work. Independent research has shown that where trade union Safety Representatives operate employees are 50% LESS LIKELY TO HAVE AN ACCIDENT than employees who do not have the benefit of trade union protection.

If you are not yet a GMB member – JOIN TODAY.

There are a number of simple steps that your employer can take to eliminate or reduce the risk arising from violence. The GMB 'Violence at Work' Checklist is set out below.

Environmental Measures

Workplace design can help prevent or reduce violence. Employers should consider the following suggestions (where relevant):

- Clear visibility and lighting for staff;
- Introduce cashless systems if possible;
- Site cash tills away from customers;
- Provide physical security at cash tills;
- Ensure that the minimum amount of cash is kept in tills – move cash safely and quickly from tills to secure zones;
- Place high value goods out of easy reach;
- Widening or raising counter heights;
- Staff should have access to a secure location;
- The layout of public areas should be bright, well decorated, and have seating;
- Bright lighting around the building and removal of any potential cover for assailants;
- Install screens where staff are most at risk; and
- Monitor high risk entrances, exits and delivery points.

Procedures

Employers should set out clear procedures to prevent violence. These might include:

- Ensure staff levels are appropriate to the task and the time of day;
- Inform staff of the procedures;
- Measures to tackle violence should be part of every health and safety course that is run and should be treated as a standing item on the Safety Committee agenda;
- Establish emergency procedures i.e. on what staff should do, where they should go; emergency telephone numbers etc.;
- Rotate high risk jobs;
- Ensure that no-one works alone in potential high-risk situations;
- Provide transport for staff who work alone;
- Provide personal alarms for high risk staff;
- Provide solutions training in recognising and dealing with violence;
- Have clear procedures which allow employees to stop the job in dangerous circumstances.

Security Systems

Employers should consider employing security staff if the risk assessment identifies they may be needed.

CCTV should be considered if there is a high risk of violence to staff. The use of CCTV however should be carefully planned and should not be used to monitor staff behaviour.

Training

Training should be used so that all employees know what procedures and policies exist to prevent violence at the workplace. The emphasis must be on preventing violence, rather than tackling it. The employer should use training to gain knowledge of their employee's experiences and thoughts of how to prevent violence. Training could also include:

- The policy and systems in dealing with the issue;
- Recognising and dealing with abusive and aggressive customers;
- Identifying irrational behaviour, nervousness, hostility and aggressive stance;
- Looking at the causes of violence;
- Explaining to staff what to do following a violent incident e.g. do not tackle or follow violent offenders, how to raise the alarm, where to go for safety etc.;
- Managing potential situations through using skills such as listening, remaining calm, being assertive rather than aggressive, offering a compromise, attracting the attention of colleagues etc.;
- Counselling services available to victims of violence.

Specific Causes of Concern

Lone Working

People who work alone can be particularly vulnerable to violence. There are many occupations where employees may be at risk, for example home care workers visiting clients, cleaners working after normal hours, a cashier at an all night petrol station and so on.

The law states that employers must assess the risk of lone working and where it cannot safely be carried out, put in place arrangements for help or back up.

Employers will also need to give some thought to lone workers as to how they will be supervised and what procedures they have in place should the home worker become ill, have an accident or if there is an emergency.

Keeping in touch with lone workers is essential. It is crucial that employers provide a mechanism whereby they can continually remain in communication with lone workers.

The GMB believes that employers should consider providing all lone workers with a mobile phone or a panic alarm so that they can call for help at any time. Employer's should also consider introducing systems so that an employees whereabouts are known at all times and employees are required to contact a base or office at regular intervals.

Taking no action is not an option for employers, and ensuring that two way communication can take place is essential for ensuring that lone workers have some protection from the risk of violence.

Care workers including health care assistants, ambulance staff and hospital porters face more than twice the national average risk of assault at work.

Home visits

Visiting Clients in the home is another area of concern, particularly where the employee is working alone. Any type of job – be it a gas service engineer, a home carer, a meals on wheels assistant etc – which involves visiting homes should be assessed for the risk of violence.

The assessment should include as much information on the person or area as possible, including any past history of violence from the client or their relatives. Information from other agencies, such as the police, should also be used where possible.

If home visits cannot be avoided employers should consider the following:

- Initial contact should be in a public area, such as an office
- Staff should be fully briefed on the person or area that they are going to visit
- Staff should be trained in strategies to prevent violence
- The provision of personal alarms or communication systems
- A system of communication with colleagues, reporting back to base, or the monitoring of staff whereabouts
- A system of accompanied visits, with a security escort if necessary.

NHS

Zero Tolerance to Violence in the NHS

In 1999 the Government initiated a 'Zero Tolerance' campaign to stop violence to staff working in the NHS. It is estimated that approximately 84,273 violent incidents occur against NHS Trust staff each year.

Care workers including health care assistants, ambulance staff and hospital porters face more than twice the national average risk of assault at work. Under the Zero Tolerance campaign all Trusts are required to have systems in place to record violence against staff and to have published strategies in place to achieve a reduction of such incidents. Health authorities must also reduce attacks on staff by 30% by 2003.

The GMB believes that other employers should follow his example and adopt a similar zero tolerance approach.

The GMB Can Help

Violence at work is a potentially serious problem. However, the risks can be minimised through good safety management.

The GMB can provide help and expertise and wherever you work you need the protection that GMB membership brings.

If you are not yet a member of the GMB join today and ensure that your workplace is safer.

Remember if you are not a member of the GMB we can't help you.

You're safer in the GMB!



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The GMB is Britain's leading union for health and safety. We have 25,000 Safety Representatives who offer advice and help on health and safety problems. To back up our Representatives the GMB has a network of health and safety specialists in each of our 10 Regions. The union also has a large National Health and Safety Department providing advice and support to Safety Representative and the Regions. It is widely acknowledged that the GMB offers the best health and safety service of any trade union.

If you are not yet a GMB member – JOIN TODAY.



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