

Preventing Violence to Retail Staff



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Violence, and fear of violence, are serious issues for the retail industry and, whilst the work of the British Retail Consortium's Retail Crime Initiative seems to demonstrate that retailers are having some success in containing the growth of the problem, much remains to be done.

The BRC therefore welcomes the publication of this guidance on *Preventing violence to retail staff* as a significant step in helping retailers.

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This guidance is issued by the Health and Safety Executive. Following the guidance is not compulsory and you are free to take other action. But if you do follow the guidance you will normally be doing enough to comply with the law. Health and safety inspectors seek to secure compliance with the law and may refer to this guidance as illustrating good practice.

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Who should use this guidance?

Senior managers and shop owners

You will be responsible for setting and putting into practice an effective policy and strategy for managing the risk from possible violent incidents in the workplace. It is important that you are seen to be actively committed to and support measures to reduce the risk. You will also be responsible for monitoring their success or failure and introducing new measures or revising strategies as a result.

If you are a small retailer, you will want to know what practical steps can be taken to reduce the risk of violence to your staff at work.

Shop and branch managers

You will be responsible for implementing the health and safety policy and strategy whether nationally, regionally or locally. You will therefore need to be adequately briefed on the issue. This will help you to ensure that management systems and training programmes take into account the issue of violence and its impact on staff, and that there is an upward flow of information to senior policy makers.

Those who can effect change in the business

Anyone who might have a role in developing personnel, safety or security policies and procedures; for example personnel staff or those responsible for health and safety or security within the business.

Introduction

1 Violence at work and the fear of it can affect anyone. For retailers, violence and its impact can lead to low staff morale, high absenteeism and staff turnover, expensive insurance premiums and possibly compensation payments. For staff, it can cause physical and mental pain, stress and disability. In the extreme, fatalities among staff can and do occur. These can all have a secondary effect on the success of the business. Violence in retail workplaces can create a bad atmosphere and can affect customers as well, often leading to loss of sales and profit.

2 Many retailers are realising that where their staff are involved in a violent incident and are absent as a result, their business could be losing someone with vital skills. Valuable time is then lost in retraining or recruiting other staff. Retailers will therefore have a keen self-interest in setting up and maintaining safe working practices and as a result safeguarding their resources.

3 This booklet provides practical guidance for retailers and their staff on how the problems and causes of violence might be tackled. It sets out an approach that can be adopted as everyday practice. Action need not be expensive or complicated. Simple measures such as changing a pattern of work can help to ensure that staff are not put at risk.

4 The booklet is intended for all staff in the retail sector. However, much of the information and guidance contained will be relevant to all businesses and can be adapted to suit individual needs.

5 Bomb threats require special consideration and measures to deal with them are not covered by this guidance. Your local police station will be able to provide further advice on this issue.

Violence

What is violence?

6 Violence can take many forms, ranging from life-threatening physical attacks to verbal abuse (for example from customers). Agreeing a definition is the first step in setting up a system to prevent, control and manage the issue of violence at work. This will help you to decide what your policy on violence should cover. It is important that all staff are aware of the definition and their responsibilities under the policy.

7 HSE defines violence to staff at work as:

'any incident in which an employee is abused, threatened or assaulted by a member of the public in circumstances arising out of the course of his/her employment.' (Poyner B and Warner C: *Preventing violence to staff*)

This definition may not quite fit your workplace. If not, it may be useful to talk over and agree an alternative with your staff.

8 Verbal abuse and threats will probably be the most common type of incident. Verbal abuse can be very distressing. If you are aware of the warning signs that could lead to a violent situation, you will be better placed to take action to reduce or prevent future incidents.

9 Physical assaults, explicit threats and their effect can be clear, but verbal abuse and its impact may be harder to determine. People will have different perceptions about the behaviour they find threatening or offensive. Some will find the abuse annoying; for others it will cause distress. It is important that you treat each reported incident seriously to ensure that staff are aware of your commitment to the matter.

10 Here are some examples of violent and abusive situations. Would you know how to deal with them?

'He smashed a bottle and threatened me with it.'

'I was pushed into the storeroom and the door locked.'

'It was awful to be spat at.'

'She just shouted and screamed at me. I didn't know what to do.'

'She just grabbed me round the neck.'

11 The guidance contained in this booklet will help you to deal with these situations and inform you of other sources of help.

Who is at risk?

12 Anyone who has contact with members of the public is at risk. In particular, people who handle money, work alone on night shifts or whose work takes them out of the workplace. Specific examples include:

branch managers and shop managers;
checkout operators;
retail sales staff;
petrol filling station staff;
car park staff;
mobile service workers, for example TV repair staff;
staff carrying cash;
mobile shops;
security staff;
delivery staff;
maintenance and repair staff;
managers of small businesses, particularly when taking on a security role;
restaurant and fast food operators who work late at night;
drivers of delivery vans;
licensed goods vehicle drivers;
mobile workers.

This not an exhaustive list of all groups at risk.

13 Some incidents may occur outside the workplace but may still be related to the work activity, for example an attack on a shop assistant by a customer in the street, following an incident in the shop. It could also include a kidnap and hostage situation. Although these may be uncommon, managers with staff in high risk positions may wish to consider seeking advice from their local Crime Prevention Officer. It is important that you are aware of all possible instances where violence as a result of work might happen.

14 You should look at all the jobs/tasks done by your staff to identify which particular groups will be at risk. It will be important to take into account the views of staff themselves. If you have them, there is a legal duty to consult trade union safety representatives (see Appendix 1, paragraph 4). Their training and experience can make a valuable input.

What causes violence/aggression?

15 There are many causes of violent behaviour. Some may be easy to identify, such as frustration, anger, misunderstanding, stress, communication problems, conflict with authority and theft/robbery. Some can happen between staff and customers because of poor retail service or inferior products. People can become excited and tensions and inhibitions are let out, increasing the chances of verbal or physical abuse. How staff react to these could determine whether a situation is inflamed. For example an unsympathetic attitude may result in increased frustration,

anger etc leading to a violent incident, although of course poor service by staff does not justify violence.

16 There will be particular incidents where it will be impossible to analyse why a person behaved in a particular way, but it will still be possible to think of ways of preventing or alleviating such situations. Accepting that there are risks and wanting to find a solution is vital in dealing successfully with the issue.

17 Training will help to identify some causes early on. It can also provide information and practical skills on how to deal with potentially violent situations and on avoidance techniques. (Further information on training is set out in paragraphs 64 to 69.)

Policy

Developing a policy statement

18 The policy will be a clear and well-defined statement of your views on the issue and what actions you propose to take to tackle violence at work. The policy will show that you consider the risk of violence towards your staff to be a serious matter. In a large retail company the policy should be agreed at a very senior level to ensure commitment from the top down. A senior manager should be given the overall responsibility and control of the policy. This should not be delegated to junior staff.

19 The policy should provide an authoritative statement on how the risk will be controlled. It should also set out how preventative measures will operate, for example training, changing work patterns or the environment. It will also enable all staff, particularly those who will be involved in implementing the policy, to be aware of their own responsibilities as well as those of their employer.

20 It is important that senior management provide support and commitment to the policy to ensure that it is carried through effectively. The support should be visible, strong and active in order to have an effective impact on the culture of your business.

21 A successful policy and its measures will need the support and co-operation of all staff. Consultation with managers, supervisors, security, personnel, safety officers, staff and trade union safety representatives on the content, implementation, monitoring and review is a valuable way to secure support, and is vital in determining its success. This may take you more time, but it will produce better results.

22 An integrated policy will need to include:

- recognition of the problem and a commitment to introduce measures for dealing with violence to staff;
- arrangements throughout the process for consultation and communication with staff and trade union safety representatives, where appointed;
- setting up reporting arrangements for formally reporting, classifying and recording all incidents;
- arrangements for security and safety issues, deciding who is responsible, in terms of individuals or a committee;
- declaration of full support of all staff who have suffered verbal abuse or physical injury;
- arrangements for after-care support, including counselling, special leave, advice on legal action;
- appropriate monitoring and investigation of all incidents and identifying action to be taken; notification to the appropriate authorities;
- training for all staff on all aspects of violence, for example how to recognise it, how to deal with the potential impact etc, information on staff procedures for support;
- training for managers and supervisors on how to identify the impact of violence which may develop at a later stage and how to deal with it when it happens;
- action, where possible, to minimise risks by considering practical measures: this could include changes in the design of the working environment, whether installation of safety and security devices etc will be effective;
- monitoring and reviewing the effect of all the measures.

23 Once you have agreed the policy, staff need to be aware of its existence. You could publicise the policy by circulating a copy to all staff; holding staff meetings on the issue; including an item on the policy in induction courses and health and safety courses.

24 The policy is not an end in itself, but provides a framework for action and initiatives. A successful policy will require effective monitoring and regular review to ensure that it is meeting its prime objective, the control of risk.

Consulting staff

25 Consulting and involving staff throughout the process will have significant benefit to your business:

- it will show a genuine commitment to tackling the problem;
- it will ensure that any reporting or monitoring scheme is practical and effective;
- the knowledge and experience of staff are valuable resources when deciding on practical preventative and protective measures;
- staff who have been fully consulted will have a stronger commitment in helping to implement the policy and measures.

26 Regular consultation will help to monitor and review the policy, to make sure that preventative measures are useful, that protective procedures are being followed, and that training is working. If you have trade union safety representatives appointed under the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977 (see Appendix 1, paragraph 4), you will need to consult them on health and safety issues.

Finding out if you have a problem

27 The first step is to find out if violence in your workplace is a problem. It may not always be obvious as staff can hide their concerns. Some retailers have already tackled this issue and have set up procedures to monitor and review the problem. Others will probably be unsure where to start. The best way is to seek the views of all staff, particularly those who deal with members of the public. They will have firsthand knowledge and possibly experience of either an actual violent incident, or where the potential for one exists. Consultation will also help you to ensure that the true scale of the problem is established. Your risk assessment will also help to identify areas of concern. See Appendix 2 for advice on how to do a risk assessment.

28 It is important to include information from near miss incidents where no-one was actually hurt but the potential for harm was there. This can often be useful in preventing a future more serious occurrence. Since the risk of violence will vary according to area, it is important that this exercise is carried out in individual shop premises with staff, not just at national or regional headquarters. Small retailers could talk to other retailers and similar businesses about incidents in their area.

29 The initial investigation should cover the whole range of violent incidents (from minor verbal abuse to serious physical injury) where staff have felt threatened or experienced undue stress. Find solutions by allowing staff to contribute their own experiences. This will help to ensure their support for any action that may be needed as a result of the findings.

30 Investigation throughout your workplace may reveal particularly vulnerable jobs or tasks. Target resources and action to those areas that need the most effort. It is

important for large retailers to co-ordinate efforts between departments and share experiences.

Building up the picture

31 There are a number of methods that you could use to build up a picture of incidents. These may include a mixture of the following:

- small staff discussion groups;
- interviews with individual staff;
- employee questionnaires (which could be anonymous);
- existing reporting and information systems (both health and safety and security ones);
- staff meetings;
- trade union safety representatives and health and safety committees;
- workshops and/or training courses;
- information from police or local Business Watch schemes, retail networks etc.

32 It will often be helpful to give the overall responsibility for the task to one person. You will need to set objectives for the exercise to help staff identify the priorities for action.

33 When using interviews to find out the scale of the problem, it is important that questioning techniques are carefully considered and the interview properly carried out. The issue of violence, especially if it relates to a personal incident, may be particularly upsetting for staff. They will need to feel that they are in a secure environment in which they are able to talk about their experience and feelings and do not feel threatened. Staff carrying out this particular exercise will need appropriate training.

Reporting procedures

34 The next stage is to consider setting up formal procedures for reporting incidents. Collecting and analysing data will help you to establish whether there is a pattern of incidents, and identify particular targets or practices at risk. It will also help you to review and monitor the policy and measures. Even if you find very little evidence of a problem, it will be good practice to set up a reporting system. Then staff will know what to do if an incident occurs. You will also wish to review the situation regularly to ensure that the position has not changed.

35 You should be already keeping records of serious incidents and accidents where staff are injured as part of your legal duties under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985. You will need to decide whether this system could also be used to record incidents of violence. An example of a form that can be used to collect information is given in Appendix 3. This can be adapted to suit your particular needs. Whatever form you use will need revising as more information on the types of incident become available.

36 Reporting systems and forms need to be clear and easy to follow. Staff should be encouraged to report confidentially any incident which causes them harm or anxiety. You may find that some staff do not report because they are concerned that they may be held responsible for the incident, or that they believe that they contributed to the cause. They may also assume that such incidents are part of the job and therefore acceptable. Some may even be unaware that a reporting system exists. Circulating information on the system and its importance in ensuring health and safety at work, may help to ease fears and concerns.

Classifying

37 Once the data are collected, you will want to know what kinds of incident are happening and why. One way to achieve this would be to classify the information into various categories. These could include:

- the situation: location, environment, possible motive, regularity, timing;
- the victim: job, sex, age, experience, training;
- the assailant: sex, age, behaviour, appearance, whether previously involved in similar incidents;
- the outcome: emotional disturbance, physical injury, fatal, other long-term emotional/disabling impact (absence from work) and reporting as necessary to outside authorities, including the police and health and safety inspectors.

38 To analyse the reported data, you will need to group all similar incidents and try and identify common features. For example, particular departments/ areas/ tasks/ times of day/ frequency of occurrence.

39 Whenever there are groups of similar incidents, it should be possible to build up a fairly precise picture of common causes, areas, times etc. This will help you to target resources and measures to those areas of greater risk.

What influences the issue?

40 Before you can decide what preventative systems and measures might be necessary, you will need to take into account factors in the environment or procedures which themselves could be making the situation worse. Using the reporting data and matching the information to certain areas or activities of the organisation may highlight the need for changes.

Environment

41 There are many aspects of the working environment which might affect the risk of violence. These include:

- geographical location, whether urban or rural, local crime rate and risk;
- shop/office design such as lighting, entrances and exits, position and height of furniture and goods, screens;
- poor quality of service/goods;
- current security precautions and arrangements.

42 You may not be able to change some factors, for example the location. However, if you are aware of the risk you may be able to concentrate on other measures such as workplace design or work patterns.

Procedures

43 You may need to revise or change some of your procedures. These might include:

- timings of opening/closing/deliveries; do they allow for certain incidents to be planned?
- cash vulnerability; how much is held, how often is it removed to a safe area, what is the method for transferring it to a safe area?
- effective visible cash management procedures in place at all times;
- queue management; is it clear and well organised, or does it create uncertainty, delay?
- complaints policy; do you have a fair procedure that allows customers to discuss their concerns/problems, do you provide adequate information, are staff trained/helped to deal with complaints?

- banking and delivery methods; avoiding easily recognisable routes/patterns which could be identified by a criminal?

Checking that measures work

44 Your measures will need regular and continual monitoring to see if they are effective, and revision if not applicable or unsuccessful. This will ensure that your efforts and resources are being directed at the measures most effective at dealing with the issue. Everyone will need to be aware of the monitoring exercise and its importance, and where possible involved in the process. Large retailers may wish to nominate a senior manager to carry out a periodic review.

45 Large retailers may wish to set up a small working group including staff, managers and trade union safety representatives. Another option would be to issue a staff questionnaire/survey to gauge opinion on the measures.

46 Small retailers may not always need a formal approach because they will be working closely with all their staff on a regular basis. Simply making a note in a diary to remind you to keep the situation under review could be all that is needed if communication is good.

47 If you record incidents you will be able to see whether they have decreased or increased. This could point to the need for better targeting of resources.

48 The monitoring and review process will probably need to cover all the measures introduced, such as the policy, systems and training. When monitoring the policy, issues to consider include:

- is everyone aware of its existence?
- has it provided for all the measures to be put successfully into effect?
- does it cover the appropriate elements?
- are more/less or refined ones required?

Systems such as preventative measures (environment, procedures and security) will need to be analysed for their success, for example whether they have prevented or controlled the risk, or whether they have had any adverse effect. Training should be monitored and reviewed to see whether it is appropriate and effective. Successful actions can help to persuade staff that the policy is effective.

49 If monitoring has shown that a measure has no obvious benefit, you will need to reassess the problem and try other measures. There are likely to be occasions when a number of measures may need to be tested before a final solution is found. If a measure is unsuccessful it may not be necessary to remove it completely. Sometimes a simple modification may be all that is required to enable it to be effective.

50 For large retailers, if a particular pilot exercise has been introduced in a department, monitoring against another department that has not been involved may allow you to compare the effectiveness of the exercise.

Prevention

Preventative measures

51 It is likely that you will need a mixture of preventative measures to achieve control and manage the problem effectively. It is important that they are appropriate and adequate for the task and cost-effective. Staff need to be aware of them and trained where appropriate. Installing expensive security hardware, without changing inadequate systems and procedures, is not likely to be sufficient. You will also need to consider whether your preventative measures increase the possibility of violence.

Environment

52 The way your workplace is designed and laid out might help to prevent incidents of violence. A number of retailers have found the following measures beneficial:

- providing clear visibility and lighting for staff so that they can either leave quickly or they can raise help. This might also help to identify suspicious assailants;
- siting cash tills away from customers, or providing physical security at cash tills;
- ensuring that the minimum necessary cash is kept in tills by adopting procedures to move cash quickly and safely to more secure zones;
- preventing the build-up of cash in tills;
- placing high value goods out of easy reach;
- widening counters and/or raising counter heights;
- ensuring adequate queue management by using clear and ample signs and, where appropriate, ensuring easy access;
- arranging for staff to have access to a secure location;
- changing the layout of any public waiting areas by providing better seating, lighting, decor;
- providing bright lighting around the building and removing possible cover for assailants;
- ensuring good quality control on service and products;
- installing screens or similar protective devices for areas where staff are most at risk;
- monitoring high risk entrances, exits and delivery points.

Before you undertake an expensive redesign of the store, make sure that it is appropriate to the risk and is relevant to the needs of your business.

Procedures

53 Revising your working procedures or introducing new methods might help to prevent incidents of violence to staff. Again, a number of retailers have found the following measures beneficial. These include:

- ensuring that staffing levels are appropriate to the particular task and the time of day, and if there is a high risk - is the level adequate?
- providing adequate and appropriate information to staff on procedures and systems;
- ensuring that customer care programmes are adequately designed and managed. This will be particularly appropriate for dealing with complaints;
- including specific training on violence to staff as part of the health and safety management training programme;
- establishing clear emergency procedures, for example effective planning for staff on what to do and where to go in the event of an incident, emergency

- telephone numbers etc;
- varying the times when cash is taken to the bank, such as changing the route. Consideration could be given to using professional cash collection services;
- paying staff by cheque or direct credit rather than cash whenever possible;
- using, where possible, cashless purchasing;
- ensuring that experienced or less vulnerable staff are used for high risk tasks;
- for large retailers, liaison with other departments such as security and health and safety;
- rotating high risk jobs so that the same person is not always at risk, or doubling up for particularly high risk tasks;
- providing additional staff for high risk mobile activities or providing communication links to base;
- ensuring that details of staff's planned schedules are held by the base;
- providing transport for staff who work alone;
- providing personal alarms for high risk staff;
- putting up clear signs asking those wearing crash helmets to remove them on entering the shop, checking identification of callers seeking access to restricted parts of the store;
- providing solution training on recognising and dealing with violence, and the potential for violence.

Security systems

54 These will generally include security equipment specifically designed to prevent or deter violent crime. Before you decide to install such equipment, consider whether it is appropriate to the risk. It is pointless to buy expensive and sophisticated CCTV systems if the risk is minimal. You should also avoid creating an environment where security is excessive and impractical.

55 The level and design of equipment will need to take into account:

- ease of use by staff;
- the pattern and type of business;
- the way the building is used, for example when occupied/unoccupied;
- whether the geographical location is urban or rural: this may affect the local crime rate; find out what the experience is of other businesses in the area;
- the need for emergency access/control.

If you do not have in-house security expertise, you may wish to contact your local Police Crime Prevention Officer for advice.

56 Staff will need practical training on how to operate and maintain the security equipment. The equipment will only be as effective as the staff trained to use it. Staff with specific security duties will need to practice skills before having to deal with a real event, this will help them to build up confidence in the system.

57 Certain aspects of security procedures should be treated as highly confidential. These details should be given out on a 'need to know basis' only. This will help to contain the risk of violence. However, all staff, including part-time or casual workers, will need training in some aspects of security. It may also be useful to display notices so that the public are aware that certain security devices are used in the store.

58 Items of equipment such as alarms will need regular maintenance checks to ensure that they are reliable and effective. You will also wish to monitor and evaluate systems to confirm that they are still appropriate. Before installing new security equipment to deal with a new threat, consider how it relates to your old security systems.

The role of the Crime Prevention Officer

59 When assessing the scale of the problem in your workplace, you will need to take account of the level of crime in your area. The local Crime Prevention Officer (CPO) or area beat officer will be able to help you with this part of your assessment. The CPO will also be able to advise you on how to reduce the risk of violence by layout of the workplace, surveillance, and other means.

60 Some CPOs have specialist knowledge in designing out crime at the 'drawing board' stage and are known as Architectural Liaison Officers (ALO). If you intend to build new premises or refurbish existing buildings it would be well worthwhile contacting the ALO before you start. It may also save you money later.

61 In some areas, retailers have established 'Shop Watch' or other similar schemes. By pooling information and action, retailers may improve their protection jointly rather than suffering the problems alone. The CPO will be able to assist you in setting up such schemes.

62 Where does crime prevention and reducing the risk of violence come into your staff training? This is another area in which the CPO will be able to advise you.

63 Both the CPO and the Architectural Liaison Officer may be contacted at your local police station.

Training

64 Training will be an important element in managing and preventing the risk of violence to staff. It can be used to brief everyone on your policy and procedures; to deliver advice, information and skills on prevention; to involve staff in sharing experiences and thoughts on the subject; and as a catalyst to bring about change within your workplace.

65 Training on prevention might include:

- the policy and systems in dealing with the issue;
- recognising and dealing with abusive and aggressive customers - irrational behaviour, avoiding eye contact, nervousness, hostility, aggressive stance;
- exploring the causes of violence and aggression; anger, frustration, unhelpfulness;
- explaining to staff what to do and what is expected of them in the event of a robbery or shop theft, for example how to raise the alarm, where to go for safety, not to resist or follow violent offenders;
- managing confrontation by using positive interpersonal skills; listening, remaining calm and confident, being assertive rather than aggressive; defusing situations before they escalate by being non-confrontational and offering a compromise; attracting the attention of colleagues and if all else fails ensuring an escape route;
- effective handling of incidents; letting staff know what to do, who to tell, advice on the degree of risk and using role playing to help staff feel comfortable and confident about security equipment eg panic alarms;
- effective customer care; being polite, calm and helpful, recognise the other person's point of view;
- safe working practices; if staff are mobile ensuring that someone at the fixed workplace is aware of their exact movements; avoiding where possible working alone or in isolation;
- after incident support and care including the impact it can have on staff (this will be particularly appropriate for managers and supervisors); and the arrangements for support.

66 Managers of each store/branch will have a key role in identifying the training needs of staff. In particular they themselves will have a management task in controlling and preventing risk. It is therefore important that they are provided with sufficient training on the issue to help them be competent in their management role (this could be part of their general management training). You may need to consider providing specific training for managers moving from low risk to high risk tasks. They will need to be thoroughly briefed on areas of concern to help them reduce any foreseeable risk. Where safety representatives are appointed, these should be consulted on training issues.

67 Small retailers may be able to seek assistance and help on training in risk management from their local Crime Prevention Officer. Victim Support will be able to assist with training and providing help and information to staff. Further information on Victim Support is given in paragraph 92.

68 Training needs should be monitored and reviewed regularly and training courses evaluated for their effectiveness. Remember to include part-time staff in your plans.

69 Your staff will need to be aware of any risk which they could face in their job, for example during shift working, mobile work etc. Being aware and able to recognise the potential for danger will help staff to be prepared. It also ensures that they react to a situation in a positive way, they know what could happen and what would be the best way to deal with it. Training in awareness will include examples of good practice in recognition and effective response. It will also provide staff with practical knowledge and information on your preventative measures such as systems, procedures and equipment. Awareness can often help to avoid incidents, although it will not always guarantee prevention. Violent incidents will and do happen.

70 If you have a policy on apprehending criminals, staff will need adequate training and information to ensure that they always act within the law.

Networking

71 Networking with other businesses in your area will help you to pool knowledge and experience and share information on best practice. It will also help to build a safer working community. Specific sectors such as off-licences and petrol stations may find that by networking with similar retailers in their area, they are able to set up crime prevention initiatives (such as Forecourt Watch Schemes). Links could also include local Commerce and Trade Associations.

72 Lessons can be learned from sharing information on styles of management, strategies, systems and the skills required to underpin them. Violence to staff should be a concern to all retailers in the area - it could affect you. Depending on the size of your business, networking can also be useful at regional and national level. It will however be important to agree ground rules for sharing information when it relates to particular security measures used by local retailers.

73 Networking could also provide a means of support for small retailers who are victims of serious violent incidents. It helps to prevent isolation and encourages the network to work together in improving the crime rate. Large retailers will also be in a good position to set standards and help those businesses which may have fewer resources and less information available to them. Crime and violent incidents against small businesses become rapidly known around the locality, and are often used to judge what the area is like to live and work in. Such factors can have an effect on your profitability, whether you are large or small. Positive efforts for the

community could lead to an improved and safer working environment for local businesses and increased profits.

74 The Crime Prevention Officer and the local authority Environmental Health Department may be able to provide you with further information on local crime prevention initiatives and security measures. Some local authorities have crime prevention working groups with councillor representation and involvement. Local Victim Support Schemes will be able to offer their service of support and information to staff.

Support

Post incident support

75 Responding to staff after an incident should not be seen as a separate issue. Providing support for staff should be part of the overall policy on preventing and controlling violence at work. Support measures will help to minimise and control any impact on staff and ensure that they recover from the incident as soon as possible. The policy will need to identify the staff with principal responsibilities at each stage so that everyone is informed of their role and what they are expected to do.

Impact of an incident

76 A violent incident is always a sudden, frightening experience. It will invariably be unpredictable. The impact on your employees' physical and mental health can be long lasting and may sometimes not be obvious. They may require support and care from you to help them recover and in some cases specialist counselling.

77 During and immediately following an incident staff are likely to suffer a number of impacts which, if not acknowledged and dealt with, can lead to low staff morale and inefficiency. They may also not be evident until quite a time after the incident.

78 Impacts are likely to include:

- anger;
- general mistrust of strangers and wariness of customers;
- fear and anxiety attacks, largely connected to a fear that the incident could recur. Fear of returning to work is a common reaction. Some may feel uneasy or anxious about dealing with customers. There may also be the fear of recognition or of being followed by the assailant;
- feelings of helplessness, isolation, frustration, vulnerability;
- guilt that they somehow contributed to the incident and are therefore partly responsible;
- loss of confidence, loss of concentration and sometimes loss of memory. Despite this, recall of the event will generally be vivid, and staff are likely to show signs of a need to talk about the experience;
- physical symptoms might include sleeping difficulties, loss of appetite, trembling or outbursts of crying.

79 The following statements illustrate the impact of violence.

'I panic each time I see someone who looks like the attacker.'

'I can't face going back to work, I feel physically sick.'

'I could not stop shaking and crying after the robbery.'

'I still have nightmares about the attack.'

80 Some staff are so badly affected that the reactions persist, affecting both their personal and professional lives. Training can be helpful in lessening shock - preparation can reduce its impact. Managers will need basic training in dealing with staff during and immediately after an incident. Support and understanding are the key factors in helping staff to recover from a traumatic event. Managers will need to know and understand about the impact of shock and how to handle it. They will need the support of their own senior managers on site, and they will need practical

operational help if they are expected to keep the business running.

Initial response

81 This should be done as soon as possible after the incident has happened. It can take the form of an informal group meeting (all those involved or affected by the incident) or individual conversations with an appointed member of staff. This type of support does not have to be a sophisticated response. A simple chat and an assessment made that nothing further is needed may be all that you have to do. The idea should be to respond to immediate needs and help staff to feel that what they are going through is a normal reaction and that this need for support is not seen as a failure on their part. It will be important that there is a key person involved who is supportive and has an understanding of the likely impact on the individual.

82 An effective, sensitive initial response is crucial to people's ability to cope in the longer term. It can help to avoid a situation where staff suffer a loss of self-esteem and are unable to undertake certain tasks or duties.

83 As well as giving staff the opportunity to express their feelings the response can also cover practical issues such as:

- an outline of your incident reporting;
- a report on the progress of any investigation or action taken by yourselves or the police, including what is likely to happen next, to assist staff in dealing with the police and their procedures;
- what further support is available to the victim and how they might contact that support;
- whether special leave to allow victims to recover from the incident is needed (this may need to be balanced with encouraging staff to return to 'normality');
- legal advice and help in taking proceedings against the assailant.

84 Group discussions can be particularly effective as a means of sharing experience, concerns and feelings. They can help to ensure that staff do not feel isolated and are aware that there are others with similar reactions and fears. Group discussions can involve those who are directly or indirectly affected. However, their success depends on the willingness of everyone to take part.

85 Whatever help is given, it needs to be a combination of emotional support and practical information and help. Staff should be reassured that this is not being used as an information gathering/investigation process. They must also feel that they are able to express anxiety and stress, without fears of any 'comeback' on their future progress within the company.

86 Learning from the feedback on the experiences of staff is often helpful in avoiding a recurrence.

87 Follow-up action should be taken after a period of time (probably around a month after the incident) to ensure that staff have recovered and do not require additional help. Information and further guidance could also be given on any police action taken, and staff prepared for an eventual court case.

Long-term support

88 Some staff may require extra help and time to overcome their fear, anger and stress, which cannot be provided in the initial response. This should be assessed at any follow-up sessions.

89 If you are a large retailer this service might be available 'in-house'. However, many retailers are unlikely to have the resources to provide such a service. Small

retailers in particular may need help from outside organisations such as Victim Support and local community groups.

90 If the counselling is undertaken 'in-house' it will be important that it is seen to provide an independent and confidential service, tailored to the individual circumstances and staff. Otherwise the victim will not feel confident in discussing highly personal and possibly distressing experiences.

91 Counsellors will need 'highly tuned' interpersonal skills - communicating, listening, empathising, objectivity, tolerance and recognition. You should not assume that every member of staff has these qualities.

Victim support

92 Victim Support is the national charity which provides, through a network of 370 local schemes, support, practical help and information, particularly on the criminal justice system, to victims of crime in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. (See Appendix 4 for how to contact Victim Support.) There is a separate organisation for Scotland. The service is confidential and free. Victim Support can also provide information on court procedures and someone to accompany the victim/witness to court if requested. This service is being developed through court-based services in Crown Court centres in England and Wales. The Witness Service offers information and support before, during and after the trial and works in close liaison with local Victim Support schemes and criminal justice agencies.

Police liaison and court procedures

93 If the incident involves a criminal act, a nominated member of staff should take control and immediately contact the police, and medical help if necessary. Information to gather will include:

- a full description of the event and offender,
- whether someone was injured,
- what happened afterwards - did the offender escape?
- how and where the offender escaped.

94 In cases where criminal proceedings are likely, staff may need particular care and support. Many will not have any experience of the court and criminal system and will be worried about dealing with the police and giving evidence. Help and advice will start at the initial response stage and will be followed through with support for the police investigation and the court hearing. Issues to consider will include additional support for staff called as witnesses or involved in identification parades. These can often reawaken memories of the incident itself.

Specific issues to consider

Small businesses

95 If you are a small retail business you may not have the resources in staff or money to implement sophisticated management systems aimed at reducing violence. The length of time open, the unsociable and long hours worked, the small numbers of staff and the fact that staff will not necessarily all be present at any particular time in the shop, will all pose problems for the prevention and control of violence.

96 Physical security measures such as CCTV, screens etc, may be costly and inappropriate. However, concealing tills and providing good visibility (by using mirrors and raising the floor behind the counter) in the working area are practical and relatively easy to achieve preventative measures. Simple changes to procedures can also be effective, such as keeping the amount of cash available at a low level, changing the method of banking cash, for example varying the mode of transport, the route or the person carrying the cash etc.

97 Small retailers should keep a simple log, containing information on the nature of incidents, the timing, method etc. This may help to establish over a period of time where particular action or measures are needed, or where further advice is required.

98 Your local Crime Prevention Officer can provide advice on basic measures which are tailored for small business needs. They might also be able to bring together small local self-help groups. These groups could help identify particular local problems, develop and implement ways of preventing them, and act as a means of mutual support, including circulating newsletters for those retailers who are unable to attend meetings.

99 There may be the potential to set up and maintain local co-operative crime prevention schemes with some of the larger retailers in your area. Such schemes can help to circulate practical advice on well-established strategies and successful measures.

Working alone

100 There may be situations when it is not possible or practical to work with other members of staff, for instance in petrol filling stations or in delivery services. Particular attention will be needed to ensure that working alone does not make staff more vulnerable.

101 Safe working arrangements would include:

- ensuring that the person is capable of working alone. You will need to consider both routine work and foreseeable emergencies which may pose additional physical and mental burdens on the individual.
- providing training to control, guide and help in situations of uncertainty. It will be important to avoid panic reactions to unusual and risky situations;
- ensuring that solitary staff fully understand the risks involved in their task, and also what safety precautions will need to be taken. Some examples for mobile staff would include ensuring that they are contactable; portable phone/radio; varying the route and pattern of work; pre-arranged calls;
- providing training for lone staff which outlines the specific risks involved

- and how they can play a role in deflecting or minimising the risk;
- establishing emergency procedures in the event of an incident, including quick access to a safe area, or exit from an unsafe location, evacuating other staff and informing the appropriate authorities, police etc.
- providing devices which raise the alarm in the event of an emergency.

102 Where possible lone staff should be regularly visited by a supervisor to monitor their safety. If this is not practicable, then regular contact via a telephone or radio should be maintained. Solitary staff will feel more secure and confident if they know that help or support is available if and when needed.

Appendix 1 Know the law

The **Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974** (HSW Act) puts broad general duties on you as an employer and others to protect the health and safety of staff. In particular, section 2 of the HSW Act gives employers a duty to safeguard, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of their staff.

Employers also have a common law general duty of care towards their staff, which extends to the risk of violence at work. Legal precedents (see *West Bromwich Building Society v Townsend* [1983] IRLR 147 and *Charlton v Forrest Printing Ink Company Limited* [1980] IRLR 331) show that employers have a duty to take reasonable care to see that their staff are not exposed to unnecessary risks at work including the risk of injury by criminals. In carrying out their duty to provide a safe system of work and a safe working place, employers should, therefore, have regard to, and safeguard their staff against, the risk of injury from violent criminals.

The **Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992** require employers to assess the risks to the health and safety of their staff and of anyone else who may be affected by their work activity. This is so that the necessary preventive and protective measures can be identified. Employers must also make arrangements for putting into practice the health and safety measures that follow from their risk assessment. These measures will have to cover planning, organisation, control, monitoring and review, in other words, the management of health and safety. Guidance on risk assessment is given in Appendix 2.

The **Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations (SRSC) 1977** provide that a recognised independent trade union may appoint safety representatives to represent employees in consultation with employers on promoting, developing and monitoring measures to ensure health and safety at work. The Schedule within the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992 amended the SRSC Regulations to require employers to consult safety representatives 'in good time' over a range of health and safety issues.

Responsibility for enforcing the HSW Act is split between the Health and Safety Executive and local authorities. Local authority inspectors have responsibility for enforcing health and safety law in retail premises.

Inspectors have a wide range of powers which include the right to enter workplaces without prior notice and carry out inspections and investigations. They can also serve notices which require remedial action within a specified period of time (an 'Improvement Notice'), or which prohibit activities that involve a risk of serious personal injury (a 'Prohibition Notice'). Failure to comply with health and safety law can result in a criminal prosecution.

Further advice and guidance on employers' responsibilities under health and safety law is available from local authority environmental health departments.

Appendix 2 Risk assessment

It is a legal requirement for employers to assess risks in the workplace. An assessment of risks will involve a careful examination of what, in your work, could cause harm to people, so that you can weigh up whether you have taken enough precautions or should do more to prevent harm.

A risk assessment does not need to be complicated. It will involve checking hazards from the work itself (machinery, layout of the workplace) or from working practices and procedures (banking methods). A hazard is anything which can cause harm. A risk is the chance, whether great or small, that someone will be harmed by the hazard.

The following five steps set out what you will need to consider in assessing the risk of violence in your workplace:

Look for hazards: you should look for instances or situations where your staff could be harmed: taking cash to the bank, delivering goods, is their task likely to cause them harm? Talk to staff, they may have noticed things which are not immediately obvious. You could also look through accident and incident report forms for information on attacks on staff.

Decide who might be harmed, and how: think about people who may not be in the workplace all the time, for example maintenance staff. Do you have new staff who may be at greater risk because they do not know what to do in difficult situations? Do you have staff who work alone in a vulnerable area? Could any of your staff be harmed, for example in an attack late at night?

Evaluate the risks arising from the hazards and decide whether existing precautions are adequate or more should be done: decide whether the hazard is significant and if so whether you have taken precautions/measures to reduce the risk or control it so that harm is unlikely. For example, installing protective screens for staff at most risk, or arranging extra cover or security late at night. Precautions can include providing staff with adequate information, instruction and training or organising the work so that exposure to the hazard is removed or significantly reduced. Whatever you do you will need to decide whether the precautions meet the standards set by the legal requirement, represent good practice and reduce the risk as far as reasonably practicable.

Record your findings: You do not need to write down your findings if you have fewer than five staff. If you have five or more staff you need to record the risk assessment only if the findings are significant or special measures are needed. For significant findings you should write down those hazards which could cause significant harm and then record the most important conclusions, for example high risk delivery staff asked to report in at certain times.

Review your assessment from time to time and revise it if necessary: if you bring in new procedures which could lead to a new and significant hazards you will need to review and revise your assessment to take this into account. It is good practice to review your assessment from time to time anyway.

Further information on risk assessment is given in the free HSE publication 5 STEPS TO RISK ASSESSMENT This is available from HSE Books (see back cover for details).

Appendix 3 Sample Incident Report Form

LOCATION		
date of incident	day of week	time
EMPLOYEE		
name	address	
job/grade		
department		
what activity were you engaged in at the time of the incident?		
DETAILS OF ASSAILANT(S)		WITNESS(ES)
name(s)		name(s)
address(es)		address(es)
age		age
male/female		male/female
other details		other details
WHAT HAPPENED		
give an account of the incident, including any relevant events leading to the incident		
OUTCOME		
Injury? Verbal abuse? Anti-social behaviour? Damage to personal/other property?		
		time lost
		legal action?
DETAILS OF LOCATION OF INCIDENT		
provide sketch if possible		
any other relevant information		

Appendix 4 References and further advice

Burrows J *Making crime prevention pay: initiatives for business*. Home Office Crime Prevention Unit Paper 27 1991 ISBN 0 86252 629 9

Burrows J *Retail crime: prevention through analysis*. Home Office Crime Prevention Unit Paper 11 1988 ISBN 0 86252 313 3

CBI *CBI and Crime Concern - Crime - Managing the business risk*. 1990 ISBN 085201 346 9

Poyner B and Warner C (The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations) *Preventing violence to staff*. HSE Books ISBN 0 11 885467 4

Violence to staff - An USDAW Guide Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers 1990.

You can obtain free advice by contacting the health and safety inspector at the local council, usually located in the Environmental Health Department.

Your local police station will be able to put you in contact with the Crime Prevention Officer or the Architectural Liaison Officer. They can also direct you to your local Victim Support Scheme. Alternatively you can contact them yourself at the address below:

Victim Support
National Office
Cranmer House
39 Brixton Road
London SW9 6DZ
Tel: 0171 735 9166

In Scotland:

Victim Support Scotland
14 Frederick Street
Edinburgh
Tel: 0131 225 8233

Further information

For information about health and safety ring HSE's Infoline Tel: 0845 345 0055
Fax: 0845 408 9566 Textphone: 0845 408 9577 e-mail: hse.infoline@natbrit.com or
write to HSE Information Services, Caerphilly Business Park, Caerphilly CF83 3GG.

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