

# Human Resources

## Violence at Work

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South Yorkshire  
Fire & Rescue  
WORKING FOR A SAFER  
SOUTH YORKSHIRE

# VIOLENCE AT WORK POLICY

## INTRODUCTION

1. The following Violence at Work Policy applies to all SYFR employees and has been developed in line with, and taking into account, The Emergency Workers (Obstruction) Act 2006, the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.

2. Violence at Work is defined as:

‘Any occurrence in which a member of staff is abused, threatened or assaulted by a member of the public in circumstances arising out of or in the course of their employment.’

Such occurrences can include:

- Physical assault
- Threatening Behaviour
- Serious or Persistent Harassment
- Verbal Abuse
- Threat/Assault by a third party acting on behalf of the client
- Threat of violence to an employees family
- Use of dogs/animals in a threatening manner
- Damage to property

3. The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 states:

“It shall be the duty of every employer to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all their staff.”

4. For further information on individuals rights and legislation relating to violence at work please see the following:

- Health and Safety at Work Act (1974)
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1999)
- Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (1995)
- Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations (1977) (a) and The Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations (1996)
- Employment Rights Act (1996) (b)
- The Crime and Disorder Act (1998)

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- The Emergency Workers Act Obstruction Act (2006)
5. The Emergency Workers (Obstruction) Act 2006 makes it an offence for any person to hinder or obstruct an emergency worker who is responding to an emergency incident. For further information please see Appendix 1 of Standard Operating Procedure – ‘Civil Disturbances and Attacks on Crews’.
  6. This policy is designed to primarily avoid situations which could lead to violence at work and where it has not been possible to avoid such a situation, deal with it in the best possible manner.
  7. South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue recognise that the nature of the service it provides can place particular groups of employees at risk of both verbal and physical violence from members of the public, and appreciates the potential effects on the well being of employees who are faced with violence in any form.
  8. Whilst accepting the need to continue to improve services to all sections of the community, the organisation agrees that all reasonable practicable steps will be taken to identify and minimise the risk of violence and abuse.
  9. Violence at Work against Fire and Rescue Staff is either:
    - a. anticipated i.e. it can be an incident involving prior information from Police regarding a public disorder, *or*
    - b. unknown i.e. it develops immediately prior to and/or during the attendance of or engagement with Fire and Rescue Staff i.e. an unanticipated occurrence.

These incidents are defined as:

- **Individual Disturbances** – A lone individual subjecting an individual to threats or abuse etc. It can be pre-planned, but is generally unplanned and unforeseen.
  - **Local Disturbances** – Typically spontaneous, generally not pre-planned and often occur when there is an increase in tension within the community
  - **Civil Disturbances** – May be the escalation of a local disturbance and described as ‘the serious breakdown of law and order within the community’. These can be spontaneous or pre-planned.
  - **Other Occurrences**
10. It is important to note that although it is evident that the most at risk group of staff are operational firefighters, the increasing frequency and span of SYFR activities mean that this policy is not exclusive to operational incidents and should be adopted for all employees and all activities.
  11. This policy does not deal with issues which arise from internal violence at work, e.g. bullying and harassment and employees should consult the Dignity at Work Policy and/or Procedural Issues manual.

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### PREVENTION

12. All employees who are working away from their usual base must observe safe practices and not put themselves at risk from a violent attack. Please refer to the Lone Working policy / procedure where appropriate.
13. Dynamic Risk Assessments should be undertaken where situations arise where it is obvious that some form of aggression/violence may be directed towards employees and the following should be taken into account:
  - The nature and level of threat
  - The type and severity of the incident
  - The need to withdraw from the incident or discontinue the activity
  - The need for additional staff resource
  - The need for urgency
  - Police availability
14. SYFR in partnership with the Police and other Local Government organisations will provide information on geographical areas where there is a heightened possibility of violence at work.
15. Where there is evidence of community tension or spontaneous events occur, which relate to the safety of employees, it is essential that all relevant staff members are kept informed and that sufficient communication procedures are in place. This will enable suitable preparation to take place for members of staff who may need to enter the area of heightened risk.
16. Training and familiarisation of the role may be requested from employees who are deemed to be at risk from violence at work.
17. It is essential that employees maintain a neutral stance and do not get involved in activities that are usually undertaken by the police and where there is a threat of violence to staff e.g. crowd control. In circumstances where this is not possible, appropriate control measures should be put in place i.e. risk assessments.
18. Sufficient pre-planning should be undertaken at certain times of the year where seasonal activities may have an increased chance of leading to violence against employees e.g. bonfire night or annual events where large crowds are brought together.
19. Where possible and appropriate, CCTV will be installed in areas where staff may be exposed to a heightened risk of violence at work e.g. on appliances. CCTV acts as a deterrent and assists with evidence relating to the identification of perpetrators.
20. All managers responsible for employees who work alone must ensure that appropriate procedures are in place. Please refer to the Lone Workers Policy for further information.
21. It is recognised that employees may wear their uniforms outside of work hours e.g. when travelling to work and that in these circumstances, especially with Wholetime

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Operational employees, there may be an increased likelihood of acts of violence at work. To limit the possibility of these occurrences, Wholetime operational employees are advised to wear 'civilian' clothing when travelling to and from work and use the changing facilities provided at the various locations.

22. When travelling for business purposes, employees should ensure that they do not carry more cash than is necessary.
23. Audible and visual warning devices have the potential to incite and aggravate a situation where SYFR staff are engaged in activities and should be used in accordance with the Standard Operating Procedure – 'Civil Disturbances and Attacks on Crews'. The inappropriate use of audible and visual warning devices must be refrained from at all times.
24. Employees should not hesitate to call the police to a violent incident or to consult them if they are worried about the possibility of attack.
25. If an employee does face a situation where they are under threat from violence, they are advised where possible to retreat from the situation and avoid it at all costs. Where this is not possible, Common Law has determined that individuals do have the right to defend themselves from attack or prevent another person from attack using 'reasonable force'.

The basic principles of self-defence are set out in **(Palmer v R, [1971] A.C 814)**;

*"It is both good law and good sense that a man who is attacked may defend himself. It is both good law and good sense that he may do, but only do, what is reasonably necessary." (Taken from the Crown Prosecution Service website)*

26. For Operational Personnel who are involved in an incident of violence at work, the Standard Operating Procedure – 'Civil Disturbances and Attacks on Crews' will need to be followed.

### REPORTING THE INCIDENT

27. It is essential that all staff recognise that violence at work is unacceptable and that any incidents or potential incidents of violence at work are reported and recorded in the appropriate manner.
28. Operational employees who have been subject to an incident or potential incident of violence at work must follow the 'Reporting and Recording Procedure' at Appendix II of the Standard Operating Procedure – 'Civil Disturbances and Attacks on Crews'.
29. For all other employees who have been subject to an incident or potential incident of violence at work, their line manager must be informed at the earliest convenience and an FS CDR form (available on the intranet - Admin and Information>Forms>Fire Service Forms) will need to be completed and faxed to Control and Health and Safety.
30. If it is considered appropriate, the individual should report the matter to the police.

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31. Employees are assured that incidents will not reflect upon their professional conduct or whether they have handled the situation correctly.
32. It is understandable that employees that have been subject to an act of violence at work may display resulting symptoms such as stress or anxiety. The manager of the employee in liaison with the Occupational Health Unit will be responsible for recognising these symptoms and referring the employee if appropriate.
33. Employees that have been subject to an incident of violence at work are reminded that they can refer themselves to Occupational Health at any time for any assistance required e.g. counselling.

### MISCELLANEOUS

34. For Operational Employees, this policy should be read in conjunction with the Standard Operating Procedure – 'Civil Disturbances and Attacks on Crews'
35. Further information on this policy can be obtained from the Human Resources Directorate at Command Headquarters.

***If you require any further guidance on this policy please contact the Human Resources Directorate.***