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**2589.1 Introduction**

- a. Violence in the workplace has received national attention through the media and reports published by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health. Violence in the workplace is an escalating problem and is recognized as one of the leading causes of occupational fatalities. San Joaquin County is committed to providing a safe work environment that is free from fear of violence, aggression, intimidation, harassment, or offensive verbal or physical acts. For this reason, this Workplace Violence Prevention Policy has been developed.
- b. Title 8, Section 3203 of the California Code of Regulations mandates employers to maintain an effective Injury and Illness Prevention Program which stipulates that responsible persons perform worksite analyses, identify hazards, and establish controls and training programs to reduce or eliminate hazards to worker health and safety. Accordingly, the County has proactively chosen to address the issue of workplace violence by developing a protocol for handling violent or potentially violent situations.
- c. It is San Joaquin County’s commitment to provide quality service to the public without compromising the safety of the public and its employees. It is management’s responsibility to provide a safe workplace by identifying hazards and correcting them. San Joaquin County department heads shall be responsible for implementing these guidelines for security and safety of County employees.
- d. Workplace violence may happen to any employee, at any time. Although acts of workplace violence may not be precisely predicted, knowledge of how to respond to threats and acts of violence can help the County and its employees minimize the risk of violence and injury. This policy has been developed to assist County departments in preventing, preparing for, and responding appropriately to workplace violence issues.

### **2589.3 Reporting of Violence or Potential Violence**

- a. Departments shall develop procedures for employees to report actual or potential threats of violence in the workplace. Departments should develop their reporting procedures taking into account the immediacy of each event (i.e. dial 9-911 if there is an imminent threat of physical violence, such as someone brandishing a firearm).
- b. All threats of violence must be taken seriously and reported by employees to their supervisors immediately. It is imperative that the threat level of the situation be assessed by the initial supervisor and immediate steps taken to deal with the threat effectively.
- c. Based upon the circumstances of the threat, the department head may contact the Director – Human Resources to initiate the involvement of the San Joaquin Threat Assessment Team to assist the department head in dealing with the threat. Whenever a department head or assistant department head is unavailable to make a determination, the supervisor or person in charge, shall contact the Director of Human Resources.
- d. All incidents involving workplace violence shall be reported to the Director of Human Resources within 24 hours, via fax or e-mail on a Workplace Violence Incident Report Form. This form is available on the Human Resources Website.

### **2589.5 Immediate Threats**

- a. All immediate threats of violence, whether to employees or the public, must be reported to local law enforcement by calling 9-911. The circumstances for involving law enforcement may differ in most cases, but a short checklist is provided to ensure prompt and immediate action is taken in the event any of the following questions are answered yes:
  1. Was someone physically assaulted?
  2. Was someone threatened with a weapon or other object that could cause injury?
  3. Was someone threatened orally or in writing in a manner that demonstrates a reasonable likelihood of actual bodily harm?

## 2589.7 Warning Signs

- a. Potentially violent behavior on the part of an employee may be controlled if early warning signs are recognized and handled concurrently. No definite profile exists that can accurately determine whether an individual will be more prone to violence in the workplace than another. However, employees that turn violent generally exhibit a number of signs. The most commonly mentioned warning signals listed in the Appendix A are taken from The National Employer, Chapter 9: “Terror and Violence in the Workplace.” The following is an abstract of the more detailed list in Appendix A:
  1. **Ominous threats** – such as, “bad things are going to happen to so-and-so” or “that propane tank in the back could blow up easily...”
  2. **Threatening actions** – such as intimidation of others or attempts to instill fear in co-workers. Menacing gestures and flashing of concealed weapons in the workplace could be ways of testing reactions to their conduct.
  3. **Bizarre thoughts** – such as perceiving that the world is falling apart or expressing a highly overstated sense of entitlement to a promotion, which was denied.
  4. **Obsession** – which is likely to be expressed by holding a grudge against a co-worker or supervisor or, in some cases, a fascination with an unrequited romantic interest. County supervisory and managerial staff must be cognizant of these early warning signs and evaluate each situation on its own merits.
- b. The Director of Human Resources shall be notified whenever employees exhibit the afore-mentioned warning signs and present a potential hazard. Should the situation rise to a level of imminent danger where safety is at immediate risk, the supervisor or department head must immediately act to notify 911 of the situation.

**2589.9 San Joaquin Threat Assessment Team (STAT)**

- a. The Director of Human Resources shall contact members of the San Joaquin Threat Assessment Team (STAT), as necessary in the judgment of the Director, in order to use their expertise to assess the seriousness of any situation reported by a department and to make recommendations to the department head concerning how to handle the situation.
  
- b. The STAT will consist of the following individuals:
  - 1. Department directly affected by report of violence: Department head or designee
  
  - 2. Administration: County Administrator or designee
  
  - 3. Law Enforcement: District Attorney or designee  
Sheriff or designee
  
  - 4. Legal: County Counsel or designee
  
  - 5. Psychological: Behavioral Health Officer or designee
  
  - 6. Safety: Safety Officer or designee
  
- c. The STAT shall review the information available concerning the threat, and if needed, recommend that the appropriate department gather additional information in order to determine appropriate steps that should be taken to eliminate or mitigate the threat of violence in the workplace. The STAT may be required to review a variety of issues, including but not limited to:
  - 1. Responding to employee concerns about building security;
  - 2. Determining what actions to take against employees that threaten the safety of other employees or the public;
  - 3. Determining what actions to take against the public that threaten employees;
  - 4. Assisting departments to facilitate re-opening an office following a crisis that prompted its closure.

## 2589.11 Training

- a. In coordination with the County Safety Officer, each department shall provide training to supervisory personnel with emphasis on leadership skills to properly handle a workplace violence incident and to respond appropriately when confronted with a workplace violence situation. Each employee shall receive a copy of the policy and read and understand its contents. The training program shall include the following elements:
  1. Employees shall be informed about increasing violence in the workplace and the fact that homicide is one of the leading causes of occupational fatalities.
  2. Employees shall be trained in the identification of aggressive and violent predicting factors.
  3. Employees shall be trained to recognize signs generally exhibited by employees that turn violent.
  4. Employees shall be trained in effective methods and techniques to diffuse a potentially hostile situation that, if ignored or instigated, could escalate into violence against the affected employees.
  5. Employees shall be trained to activate any alarm systems employed to warn or notify employees about impending danger.
  6. Employees shall be trained to report violent or potentially violent incidents as described in these guidelines.
  7. Employees shall be made aware of all available exits in the event a situation warrants immediate evacuation of a building.
  8. Employees shall be instructed to avoid physical contact with the public unless department policy dictates measures employees must take to restrain clients or patients.
  9. Employees shall be trained in the rudiments of documenting and reporting crimes, including, by way of example, not disturbing a crime scene.
  10. Employees shall be informed of the counseling services provided for them through the Employee Assistance Program. All employees and eligible family members are encouraged to use these services to obtain professional assistance in coping with personal problems at home and at work.

**2589.13 Employee Counseling**

- a. Violence or the threat of violence in the workplace can be damaging to the employee physically and mentally. Counseling for victims of violence or threats shall be made available for the employee at no cost to the employee. Counseling is currently available for employees through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The EAP is an assessment and referral-counseling program provided by Mental Health Services. San Joaquin County employees and eligible family members covered by the program are entitled and encouraged to use the confidential counseling services.

**2589.15 Early Warning Signals of a Potential for Violence in the Workplace**

- a. Experts caution that there is no definite profile from which an employer can determine whether an individual will be more prone to violence in the workplace than another. However, there is a definite pattern of escalation leading to violent behavior and individuals give clues, which they use to test their boundaries. Having one or even several of these signs does not mean that the employee will be violent but should be used to heighten concern. The most commonly mentioned warning signals are the following:
  1. Any history of violent behavior before or after employment with the current employer.
  2. An extreme interest in or obsession with weapons, e.g., paramilitary training, weapons collections (often including semiautomatic weapons), and compulsive reading and collecting of gun magazines. If this behavior starts spontaneously or is out of character for the employee, it should be considered.
  3. Excessive discussion of weapons at work, carrying a concealed weapon, or flashing a weapon to test reactions.
  4. Making either direct or veiled verbal threats of harm (i.e., predicting that bad things are going to happen to a co-employee or supervisor).
  5. Intimidating others or instilling fear in co-employees or supervisors in either a physical or verbal manner. Harassing phone calls and stalking are obvious examples.

6. Having an obsessive involvement with the job often with no apparent outside interests (usually outside relationships fail or are strained). The workplace becomes the person's sole source of identity. Of course, this characteristic may apply to many of even the very best employees, including those who would never commit a violent act.
7. Being a loner with little involvement with co-employees, with the possible exception of a romantic interest in a co-employee. This interest will often be so intense that the co-employee will feel threaten and may report the unwanted attention under a sexual harassment policy.
8. Being paranoid, panicking easily, and often perceiving that the whole world is against the employee.
9. Does not take criticism well, holds a grudge, especially against a supervisor, and will often verbalize a hope for something to happen to the person against whom the employee has the grudge. A classic example is to hold a grudge over being denied a promotion.
10. Expressing extreme desperation over recent family financial or personal problems.
11. Fascination with other recent incidents of workplace violence and approval of the use of violence under similar circumstances.
12. An escalating propensity to push the limits of normal conduct, with a disregard for the safety of co-employees.
13. Management's failure to take consistent disciplinary measures against threats of violence or minor incidents of violence (e.g., pushing or touching which may or may not be associated with a sexual harassment complaint).
14. Workplace events generating great stress such as layoffs, terminations, labor disputes, or plant closures.
15. Workplace locations and activities, which expose employees to the threat of violent behavior from non-employees entering the workplace.