Violence in the Workplace Prevention Guide – Insights into an Essential Resource

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- First, I would like to thank you for inviting me here to speak today.
- I have been asked to talk about the development of and philosophies behind the CCOHS Violence in the Workplace Prevention Guide, a publication that will soon be entering its 10th year in print.

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- By way of background, CCOHS is a federal departmental corporation reporting to Parliament through the federal Minister of Labour
- We are governed by a tripartite Council of Governors with representation from government (federal, provincial, and territorial), labour and industry
- As an organization, we support the vision of eliminating all Canadian workplace injuries and illness
- One of the ways we do this by providing Canadians with unbiased, relevant information and advice that supports work-related injury and illness prevention initiatives and promotes safe and healthy working environments.

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- I can't talk about our work on workplace violence without mentioning the CCOHS Inquiries Service
- Simply put, the Inquiries Service answers questions on the health and safety concerns that people have about the work they do.
- The Inquiries Service has been available to the Canadian public for almost 30 years.

- This service allows us, as an organization, to put our finger on the pulse of occupational health and safety concerns of Canadians
- This is exactly what happened in 1995-1998 when we started to see an increase in the number of inquiries related to workplace violence.
- In 1998, the number of inquiries we received on this topic essentially tripled over what had previously been received.
- What further compounded the problem – for us – as an information organization – was the fact that there was a significant lack of resources to respond to the types of questions we were being asked

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- The decision was made to acquire, review, organize, and summarize information on workplace violence into a convenient "pocket guide" format
- These publications are compact, easy-to-understand guides that, yes, fit into your pocket.
- It never ceases to amaze me how our graphics department manages to squeeze so much information into such a small format.
- These guides focus on specific topics (for example. health and safety committees) and occupations (such as custodial workers)
- They are jam-packed with graphics, checklists, safety tips and a summary of regulatory requirements.
- They are designed to be used on the job as a reference to safe work practices.

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- When we embarked on dealing with workplace violence in a pocket guide format we had to ask ourselves - how do you define this topic?

- The first thing we did was to examine the types of inquiries we receive – we found that questions came from everywhere – retail, real estate, social services, health care, teaching, taxi driving – you name it.

- At the same time, there was a lot of attention being given to workplace violence in the media – I am sure you all remember the headlines about "road rage" and "air rage" – I even saw "IT rage – computers take a beating as IT rage grips offices – rage over technology sends keyboards flying" – perhaps an article we could all relate to.

- Coincidentally (or not so coincidentally), the International Labour Organization report on workplace violence was released with the somewhat surprising finding that Canada was one of the highest ranked countries in the world in terms of workplace violence.

- Finally, when I started telling people that I was going to be working on this topic, I started hearing a lot of personal experiences from friends and acquaintances – whose jobs were equally diverse as those identified through our inquiries service.

- My friend, Al, a burly construction foreman, related one story that really struck home with me. He builds agricultural buildings. One day his client – a farmer – was not happy with the appearance of his brand new, million-dollar barn. After a heated exchange, the client asked Al to go for a ride with him to the end of the laneway and look at the barn from a distance. Al got in the truck and before he could get his seatbelt on, the farmer aggressively drove out the laneway and slammed on his brakes, spinning the

truck around and practically putting Al through the windshield. This time when the farmer demanded the unnecessary modification, Al simply said "I'll do it".

- What this, and many similar stories told me, is that, clearly, workplace violence was (and continues to be) an issue that transverses all business sectors. It does not matter if you wear a white collar, a blue collar or no collar. It seems like if you have a job, you could – in some way, shape or form – encounter workplace violence.

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- With this principle in mind – we started our research.
- The challenge was to try to find good quality information that could meet the very broad needs of the very diverse target audience we had identified.
- We scoured bibliographic databases and the internet for relevant information from any corner of the world.
- With respect to Canada – the most relevant piece available at the time was probably BC's "Surviving the Workplace Jungle".
- As for the US, OSHA had constructed guides for retail and for health care.
- We then started finding considerable information from the UK and Australia – and I would have to say, they were probably 10 years ahead of us on this topic.
- For the most part, the information we found was summarized by business sector (as in the US, where the focus was on retail and health care).
- The bottom line was that our searches revealed very little empirical research but LOTS of good or best practices – almost always presented by sector.
- But, we had decided that we wanted this publication to try to be all things to all people and not to narrowly look at

violence prevention by business sector. I wanted to develop something that my friend, the construction foreman, AND my other friend, the real estate agent could use to help keep them safe at work.

⏱ I was convinced that the lessons learned in dealing with difficult or potentially violent "customers" – could be equally well applied in construction, real estate, retail or anywhere.

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⏱ So, we started dissecting out what was available in the source material that we found so OUR users could rebuild it and customize it to their specific business sector or job.

⏱ We catalogued what we found into topics.

⏱ We filled in gaps and we pulled things together into what we hoped would be a logical and easily applicable format.

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⏱ In general, the topics that we settled on were:
- o What is workplace violence?
- o Who is at risk?
- o What are the elements of a good violence prevention program?
- o How can workplace violence be prevented? AND
- o How can we best respond to an incident of workplace violence? Something I loosely refer to as secondary prevention – how can you keep a bad situation from getting worse?

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- I know that you all realize that the first topic – what is workplace violence – is a "biggie".

- Because of our broad target audience, we believed there was a need to develop a definition that could be customized and made relevant to the specific needs of each workplace – whether it be a school, a hospital, a retail store, or a manufacturing environment.

- We know there are difficulties in grappling with the issue of just "what is workplace violence".

- There are differing legal definitions BETWEEN jurisdictions and even WITHIN a jurisdiction depending on which legal definition you are referring to.

- Beyond that, some **organizations** may find some of the "less serious" forms of behaviour within the realm of workplace violence completely acceptable – come on now – doesn't everyone gossip? And how do you stop rumours?

- And then, of course, some **individuals** find some forms of behaviour completely acceptable.

- In the end, we put forward a broad definition for consideration – that encompassed everything from finger waving and inappropriate comments to the more traditional, widely accepted, and understood forms of physical violence.

- We then encouraged organizations (all stakeholders – including management, employees and client or customer representatives) to sit down and to develop an organizational definition of what is acceptable and what is not acceptable – considering their corporate culture and legal requirements in their jurisdiction.

- We then encouraged them to **operationalize** their definition by putting concrete examples to the types of behaviour that they will not tolerate so that everyone knows and understands which behaviours are unacceptable.

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- As I said, we **do** encourage developing a BROAD definition.
- We believe it is better to nip inappropriate behaviour in the bud when the misdemeanors are small – not large.
- This is because if the lesser forms of violence or inappropriate behaviours are not stopped, the nature of altercation will escalate – that is – what starts small – can get big – and sometimes bigger.
- We see this concept in action, when a major event happens and people are milling around outside and many of the bystanders "know" who did it without any concrete information – because they are aware of the history.
- Most recently, this was observed at Virginia Tech where many people knew who the shooter was before he had been named in the media or apprehended by the police. This is not an isolated occurrence. I have heard many similar reports.

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- With respect to identifying "who is at risk", I know you heard me say earlier that anyone could be at risk. But, there are risk factors that do put certain populations at higher risk.
- Certain occupational groups are at higher risk (for example. health care employees, teachers, retail employees).
- Certain work processes, situations, and interactions can put one at higher risk. A work process is something like "handling cash", an example of a work situation is "working alone" and a work interaction is "working with the public".
- There are also risks associated with time of day, month or year. A high-risk time of day is 2 am. Overdue utility cut-off dates are a risky time of month for some jobs.

Christmas, tax season and report card times are risky times of the year. All because people are under higher stress for various reasons.

- And, of course, there are risks associated with geography (for example working in isolated areas or in high crime areas).

- One would think that being a hairdresser is a fairly low risk job in terms of workplace violence – unless you give a bad hair cut, I suppose. But, my hairdresser works next door to a probation office, on an isolated street. During a recent public service strike in Ontario, she often got very disgruntled and unexpected visitors barging into her shop – looking for her neighbours. As it turned out, she, all of a sudden, had a number of risk factors going on at the same time – a risk of "geography" since her business was on a isolated street – a risk of proximity – to the probation office and a risk of "time" – strike time.

- The guide presents information on all of the risk factors so that users can assess their personal risk in their own job – do I work with the public; do I work late at night; am I a teacher, do I work next door to a probation office, etc.

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- We also knew it was important for everyone concerned about workplace violence to know how to establish a comprehensive prevention program.

- Most of the resources available at the time talked about 4-step, 5-step or 6-step programs – all included a risk- or hazard-assessment step and implementation of prevention and response measures, as well as obtaining senior management commitment to the program.

- The more we looked at the program elements, the more we started to realize that the steps that were being talked

about were essentially the same as any good health and safety program. So, we drew upon our knowledge in this area and added a few elements – for example "incident follow-up" which is based on the accident investigation premise - and we came up with a 9-step program, which you can see here.

- And, of course, the individual program steps can't work without the underlying piece - the Workplace Violence Prevention Policy which brings together the organization's definition of workplace violence and the specifics of the prevention program with the most important element - management commitment to preventing workplace violence.

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- Because we were now working on a standard health and safety model, we started looking at the preventive measures in terms of engineering controls, administrative practices and work practices.
    - o Examples of engineering controls or "workplace design" include putting up barriers, installing cameras, and reviewing your parking lot design
    - o Administrative practices could include reducing or changing your hours of operation or reviewing staffing levels
    - o Lastly certain work practices can reduce your risk - such as leaving your door open during high risk meetings or using the buddy system when necessary
- As, of course, the best preventive measures generally use a combination of these methods to achieve the best results.

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- We applied these prevention techniques to as many different prevention topics as we could parse out of the

literature or think of ourselves when brainstorming about the different aspects of a multitude of different jobs.

🕐 Basically, we looked at the risk factors – work processes, situations, and interactions, time, geography and occupation and came up with a list of prevention topics.

🕐 Topics falling under the major heading of "work processes, situations and interactions" include robbery prevention, working alone or working late.

🕐 Topics included in "workplace design" include how to set up a waiting room or layout a parking lot.

🕐 Work-related travel encompassed topics such as hotel safety and driving safety.

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🕐 So, in practice, our advice for "working offsite" includes administrative practices and work practices that can be used to prevent violence whether you are a traveling nurse, a municipal inspector – or, yes, even a telephone line repairperson.

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🕐 We still did consider some specific "sector-related" issues like "Working with Patients", which is naturally more applicable to health care situations, or "Working with Students", which can be applied in schools, of course, or at summer camps or recreational activities involving students.

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🕐 But, an office manager, a store manager or a social worker can apply the workplace design, administrative practices and work practices recommended in "Preparing for a Potentially Violent Meeting" to reduce their risk of workplace violence.

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- The same thing was done with respect to a series of "response" topics – which provide advice on how to lessen the impact of or turn around a bad situation.

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- Responding to an Abusive Telephone Call provides step-by-step advice on how to control and de-escalate a negative situation with the objective of keeping it from getting worse once you realize it is not going well. We also provide advice on what actions to take once the incident has ended (for example reporting it to the correct person in your organization and to the police, if appropriate).
- Coincidentally, this advice has been used and applied in our own Inquiries Service. Unfortunately, even our own employees encounter abusive callers from time-to-time.

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- Responding to a Robbery provides advice on what to do during the robbery (for example, listen carefully and do what the robber says – don't be a hero). And, what to do once the thief has left the premises. Some time ago, I read a story of a 7-11 employee who was fired for chasing a robber – the company's message was that their employee's lives were of more value than the money and they wanted to drive that message home.
- Robbery prevention is one of the few areas of workplace violence prevention that has been the focus of systematic research. One of the leaders in this area has, in fact, been the 7-11 chain of stores.
- In 1975, 7-11 commissioned the first of several studies designed to try to understand why certain stores were targeted for robbery more than others. Researchers took

robbery deterrence advice from former convicted felons. What they learned is that robbers steal for cash and that if they made their cash less available, they could, in fact, deter robberies.

- The robbery rate at 7-11 stores has decreased by 71% since the robbery prevention program was implemented in 1976. The positive impact of implementing a multi-component robbery prevention program has been confirmed by independent research.
- Before we move on, I would like to reiterate that many of the other violence prevention strategies in the literature have not been "proven" through empirical research and that is why we refer to them as "good" or "best" practices. This is an area that should be the focus of more research so that we know what works best and why – so we can further hone our prevention strategies.

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- The Violence in the Workplace Guide also contains tools such as a hazard assessment questionnaire, a detailed workplace inspection form and an incident reporting form.
- What you will NOT find in the guide is a sample workplace violence prevention policy. It was, and still is, our thinking that developing a workplace violence prevention program is NOT a "fill-in-the-blank" exercise. It requires detailed thought and discussions between all of the stakeholders (management and employees) and it should be as unique as the organization.

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- So, this is basically what we ended up with. You will see that we divided the prevention topics covered in the guide into the major categories of workplace design, workplace situations and interactions and work-related travel.
- Based on the results of the organization's hazard assessment, which we provide advice, guidance and tools for conducting, the user will have a priority list of situations or circumstances that they know put them most at risk.
- Using the advice provided on the topics in the guide, we believe that any organization, no matter how unique, or for that matter any individual, will be able to develop preventive practices tailored to their specific situations.
- We encourage users to select the measures they believe will be most effective for their own situations using their knowledge of the jobs in their organization and their workplace.
- As you can see here, we have given diverse examples of how to apply the guide if you are a convenience store employee, a homecare provider or a real estate agent.

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- You will have heard me say at the beginning that the guide is on the verge of entering its 10th year of publication. Since it was released, thousands of copies of this little guide have been sold – it has frequently been our annual best seller.
- With every reprinting, we, of course, update legislation. This is what the regulatory scene looks like now – and this is what it looked like when the guide was first released – you guys have really been keeping us on our toes….but in a good way – that is for sure.

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- In 2001, we issued a completely updated and enhanced 2nd edition with these new topics added:
    - Resolving Problem Workplace Behaviours
    - Preparing for a Potentially Violent Meeting
    - Managing Workplace Terminations
    - Cyberstalking (internet harassment)
    - Responding to Personal Harassment
    - Responding to Cyberstalking
- One observation that I have to make is that the guide format is very amendable to updating because new topics – for our ever-changing world – can be easily slotted into the existing format.

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- We are now on the verge of issuing our 3rd edition this year, with these new topics:
    - Domestic Violence (which spills over into the workplace)
    - Harassment, bullying and mobbing
    - Home Office Safety (for the ever increasing telework population)
    - Managing Order During a Job Action
- I should note that new topics are identified in very much the same way that the original ones were – we monitor our own Inquiries Service, the media and what people are saying about situations they are encountering in their workplaces. We then thoroughly research the literature to identify as much prevention or response information that we can and slot the topic into the guide.

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- So, as I stated at the beginning – our goals were
  - to make this guide a tool for everyone – white collar, blue collar or no collar – from any business sector, and
  - to provide, in a clear, understandable format the advice, tools and guidance needed to prevent workplace violence – in any form.
- I hope that we have accomplished that goal.
- Now I want to shift gears a bit and share some information with you on how the content of the Violence in the Workplace Prevention Guide has been used in other ways to reach even more people.

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- OSHAnswers is CCOHS's free web information service.
- The information is presented in a Question-and-Answer format and the topics are based on questions that our Inquiries Service has received.
- We have developed OSHAnswers on a number of violence topics.
- The violence pages are always in our top 10-15 pages for "hits" – meaning people have gone and looked at these pages. Our monthly access to these pages average over 2000 hits/month.
- We provide similar content for the Canadian Health Network website. The Canadian Health Network is the Public Health Agency of Canada website and CCOHS is the workplace health and safety partner. Use of this important vehicle provides workplace violence prevention information to even more Canadians.

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- We have also recently developed 3 e-learning or web-based educational programs on workplace violence prevention.
- The Awareness program is offered free of charge and is designed to encourage broad thinking about what workplace violence is – you can't take preventive measures if you don't recognize that you have a problem
- Recognize the Risk and Take Action is aimed at employees – providing them with essential information on how to recognize and respond to workplace violence, and
- Establish a Prevention Program is a step-by-step guide on how to develop a prevention program aimed at all of the key stakeholders
- These e-learning modules have only recently been released, but are already proving to be very popular.

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- E-learning has the advantage in that it can use case studies to walk users through a scenario and resolution of the situation

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- E-learning also uses quizzes, exercises, and other interactive strategies to test and solidify knowledge and understanding.

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- E-learning can provide link-outs to other resources on the internet – providing access to even more information – and support – as the learner has access to the instructor to answer specific questions that they may have
- With e-learning, individuals can learn at their own pace and research shows that learning times can be reduced by 40-

60% over classroom learning. In addition, countless studies have shown increased retention rates of 25% or more. So, learners learn faster and remember longer.

- From an organizational point of view, e-learning is a very inexpensive way of making sure employees get the same information. There are minimal to no costs for travel to a central point to take a course and learning can be scheduled when convenient. We have had one company in Manitoba purchase seats for Recognize the Risk and Take Action for ALL of their employees – at a very affordable cost for them.

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- The Violence in the Workplace Prevention Guide has also been customized. For example, the Ontario Service Safety Alliance developed their own version of the guide called Inter-Action – Preventing Work-Related Violence and Aggression
- The specific audience in this case was retail and wholesale sales, tourism and hospitality, and restaurants and food services.
- Other organizations have also tailored and customized the content of the guide to their situations and mounted the information on their company intranets

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- Other organizations, like the Retail Council of Canada and the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, have mounted selected information from the pocket guide onto their websites providing access to their membership.

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- One of the more exciting initiatives we were involved in was developing a prototype multimedia interactive training program called "Preventing Workplace Violence" or PWV.
- Based on our guide content, this training program was to use a combination of audio, full-motion video, text and graphics to inform, educate and motivate on the topic of workplace violence. It was eventually hoped that we would not only build a resource, but establish an on-line "violence prevention community"
- The project represented a 3-way collaboration between CCOHS, Triune Productions and Random Access Multimedia, privately owned partners.
- We received a grant from the National Crime Prevention Centre - Business Action Program to develop the prototype, which went very well and garnered a lot of positive interest. Unfortunately, the full development costs were substantial and to date we have been unsuccessful in moving to stage 2, which entails full development of the training program.

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- I have shown you the kinds of projects that we have been involved in based on the guide content to let you know that we encourage the use of this content in any way that it can be used. We are always interested in working with partners to customize or make the guide content more accessible or applicable to particular audiences in any formats.
- So with that, I would like to thank-you for having me here today – and invite anyone who is interested in using the guide content to please contact me so we can explore the idea.
- And, now I will take your questions.