

SSOW 11 - Safe System Of Work: Dealing with Confrontational Situations

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1. Activity

Employees and agency staff have to interact with members of the public who may be feeling irate, argumentative, etc. This Safe System of Work covers situations when waste disposal staff have to deal with confrontational people face to face, or on the telephone. Aggression to staff is defined by the Health and Safety Executive 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 or her employment".

2. Persons at Risk

Management, technical and administrative staff
Drivers
Recycling Centre Staff
Public versus Public

3. Hazards

Physical and verbal abuse (see details below)
Stress

In this SSOW the following definitions will be used as forms of aggression to which staff might be exposed.

- **Verbal abuse:** Threatening or obscene language to the person, face-to-face or over the telephone
- **Racial abuse:** Racial harassment or abuse to the individual, verbally or physically
- **Threat:** verbal or written, to the person or to property, or both
- **Property damage or theft:** of the property of the member of staff, or the Council, including vehicles, plant and cars
- **Physical abuse:** Attempted assault, with or without a weapon, which does not result in actual physical harm to the member of staff
- **Physical assault:** with or without a weapon, resulting in actual physical harm to the member of staff at the level of bruising/cuts/lacerations/hair pulling or more serious injury

- **Sexual abuse:** Sexual harassment or other forms of inappropriate sexual behaviour, which does not result in actual physical harm to the member of staff
- **Sexual assault:** Sexual assault resulting in actual physical harm to the member of staff at the level of bruising/cuts/lacerations or more serious injury
- **Other:** Any form of physical (including sexual) assault, or psychological abuse, or threats, harassment or unpleasant behaviour not contained in the above, which the member of staff considers to have been sufficiently serious to warrant concern.

4. Procedures

a) Recognising Aggressive Behaviour

The following signs may indicate the onset of violence:

- Agitation & threatening statements or gestures
- Clenched fists
- Gritting of teeth
- Obvious muscle tension in face, hands and limbs
- Pounding of fists or other objects on the table
- Change in speech patterns - may be loud to quiet or slow to fast
- Change of language or increase in accents.
- High level of activity such as walking, wringing hands, or frequently shifting position
- Raised eyebrows
- Pallor draining from face
- Chin pushed out
- Staring or avoidance of eye contact
- Standing up to full height
- Offensive weapon carried or available
- Forward movement

b) Defusing a Situation

Having recognised such signs and assessed the potential of violence occurring, it may be possible to defuse the situation by using some of the following behaviors:

- Adopt a sympathetic, empathic, understanding approach, and attempt to show some affinity with the other person's position
- Try to identify the source of concern in most cases at a recycling centre the issue will relate to trade waste abuse.
- Avoid confrontation and do not argue, do not disagree where it is not necessary
- Speak and stand calmly with an open posture, but always remain balanced and ready to move away
- Try to distract the person from the immediate cause of concern by changing the course of the conversation – buy time to think, to plan, to obtain assistance
- Speak clearly and slowly and do not necessarily stop talking because the other person does not answer
- Do not give orders or use status or authority as a threat
- Do not offer things e.g. make promises which cannot be kept
- Control behaviour in body language, feeling and expressions

- Be alert and send for assistance where necessary
- Be prepared to leave the situation if necessary to avoid injury

c) Face to face confrontation

- Employees and agency staff should speak politely to members of the public even if they use bad language to them. Responding in kind is likely to escalate a situation whereas a thoughtful, polite response may defuse a situation.
- If an employee is working as part of a team and is unable to calm the situation or appease the person he / she should refer them to the Site Manager/Supervisor.
- If unable to provide the information, or service, which the person is requesting, contact details should be requested so that a Site Manager/Supervisor, or other member of office staff can contact the person.
- If the situation becomes unmanageable and likely to lead to violence, leave and retire to the site office immediately and call the Police if this is necessary e.g. physical assault, threatening assault, possession of an offensive weapon
- Once the situation has been diffused notes should be written down by the Site Manager/Supervisor recording what happened. An online incident form must be completed for every incident, except minor verbal abuse (Site Manager/Supervisor and Employee should use their discretion).

d) Follow-up Action

- Where, despite reasonable precautions by the Council and its staff, it has not been possible to prevent instances of aggression, the Council will investigate every reported incident
- The Council will provide appropriate support to employees, and where necessary, their family. The key however is to report such incidents.
- The Council may take action against the aggressor, possible action that the Council may take can include:
 - Writing to an aggressor
 - Advising aggressors that they cannot just attend Council Offices - they will only be dealt with by telephone or by structured appointments - in a more controlled environment, such as interview rooms with back-up facilities
 - Advising aggressors that certain services they receive may be withdrawn
 - Supporting staff to initiate or itself initiate police criminal investigation of incidents
 - Taking civil action to obtain a legal injunction to exclude aggressors from any Council property

5. General Guidance

- Nobody should have to accept that the threat of aggression is part of their job however there is potential for flash points e.g. a member of the public may not agree with the Council's policy on an aspect of waste disposal.
- The Council as a caring employer strives to support and protect its staff against incidents of violence or threatening behaviour. Fortunately, such incidents are few and far between, but whenever they do occur, they are unpleasant and upsetting for the employees concerned

6. Medical Requirements

- A First Aid box is held in the site office
- If an employee is injured the Site manager should be contacted immediately and the employee taken to hospital if necessary, except in the case of serious injury when a colleague should phone the Emergency Services direct.

7. Training

- Induction training will include awareness of this SSOW.
- Employees will be reminded of this SSOW at Team Briefings at intervals.

Related Documents	
	Reference:
Safe Systems of Work	
HW&RC Operations	SSOW WD03
First Aid	SSOW WD10
Risk Assessments	
Check for suspect trade waste	WD34
Proforma	
Online incident report	http://hsonestop.bathnes.gov.uk/a/healthandsafety/
Cautionary Contacts Database	http://hsonestop.bathnes.gov.uk/CCD/E.aspx
Handbooks	
Waste Disposal Staff Guidance and Information Pocketbook	June 2015

