

Violence and threats

More and more people are being exposed to violence and threats in their work. Much suffering can be prevented by proactive measures. Good care and good routines are important to anyone who has been the target of violence or threats.



Violence and threats at work

Violence and threats of violence in the workplace are a serious work environment problem. The people encountering them are often subjected to some form of physical injury and/or prolonged mental problems.

Many employees are every day apprehensive of being exposed to violence or threats of violence in their workplaces, and this is a cause of severe mental stress.

It is important that the employer and employees together should carry out regular risk inventories concerning violence and threats and should then lose no time in dealing with the work environment problems involved.

An employee subjected to violence and threats must have access to rapid help and support so as to alleviate the harmful effects.

This page describes the rules applying on the subject of violence and threats in the work environment, as well as presenting current reports, statistics and books on the subject.

Responsibility

As a rule it is the manager who has to clearly allocate responsibilities for the various tasks relating to the work environment. Ultimate responsibility for ensuring that this allocation takes place rests with the employer.

It is important that the persons responsible for a task should also have sufficient powers, resources and knowledge to live up to their responsibilities. Particularly hazardous duties may demand specially adapted education or training. When work environment duties are allotted among the personnel, it must be clear what each task involves and what resources – e.g. equipment, funding and manpower – are available for its performance.

All associates need to know who is responsible for work environment issues and to whom they should turn if they have any questions.

The employer's responsibility

The employer has a carefully regulated responsibility for safety in the workplace. This implies a responsibility for charting hazards and, as far as possible, averting them. The employer's responsibilities are partly defined in the Provisions of the Work Environment Authority on Violence and Menaces in the Working Environment, AFS 1993:2. Section 4 of those Provisions lays down that "Employees shall have sufficient training and information and receive sufficient instructions to be able to do their work safely and with adequate security." The accompanying texts lay down that shop staff working in exposed positions must have received specially adapted training and information. Every employee needs to be informed about hazards of the workplace and the appropriate procedure to follow in a contingency. The employee must know the best way of avoiding threats and violence.

Employees whose work involves a risk of recurrent threats or violence must be given special support and guidance. It is important that employees exposed to repeated occurrences of violence and threats should receive regular support and guidance.

Serious accidents and incidents are notifiable to the Work Environment Authority. This stipulation is contained in Section 2 of the Work Environment Ordinance. Work injuries have to be reported to the Social Insurance Office.

Risks

Make sure you know where and what the risks are

All risks in the workplace have to be inventoried. It is an advantage if the employees take part in this, but responsibility for the inventory rests with the employer, usually the head of the undertaking. Next it has to be decided what must be done and in what order. At the same time it has to be made clear who will be responsible for taking the various actions.

Make sure of knowing the safety routines

To minimise the risks and feel secure at work, you must have a close knowledge of the situations in which the risks of violence and threats are greatest.

Among other things, the person who is to do the work must be adequately instructed so as to be able to do it safely.

Some jobs are riskier than others

Examples of industries and occupations with a heightened risk of violence and threats:

Retail, restaurant and banking staff handling money, goods or other valuables.

Police, hospital and security personnel, many of whom hold positions of power or authority.

Personnel in shopping centres, casualty wards and public transport, who risk encountering provocative, aggressive persons.

Prevent violence and threats in the work environment

- It is possible to protect oneself against violence and threats in the workplace.
- This information is based on the Work Environment Authority's Provisions on Violence and Menaces in the Working Environment, AFS 1993:2. Those rules require the employer to investigate the risks of violence and threats and to take such action as may be necessary.
- Work must be arranged in such a way that risks of violence and threats are averted as far as is possible.
- Employees must be able to summon rapid assistance.
- All incidents and occurrences must be investigated and documented.
- Employees exposed to violence or threats must be given help and support as quickly as possible.

These rules apply to all workplaces where there is a risk of violence and threats.

Help afterwards

Help must arrive quickly.

There must be special routines enabling the employee to rapidly summon assistance. The employees must be familiar with these routines. In cases where an electronic alarm is needed for the maintenance of security, the employer must have routines for testing the alarm and for training the personnel in what to do when the alarm goes off.

Routines for help and support when something has happened

After a situation involving violence or threats, it is often important for an employee who has been exposed to them to have access to crisis support in order to recover his or her mental and physical equilibrium. It may be necessary for the employer to make a renewed offer of crisis support some time after the occurrence, by which time the person affected is often in a position to size up his or her situation. The occupational health service can offer crisis support as a rule. Employers can also sign contracts with insurance companies giving access to crisis support.

Serious accidents and incidents must be reported to the Work Environment Authority's district offices:

Falun	023-457 00
Göteborg	031-743 72 00
Härnösand	0611-885 00
Linköping	013-37 08 00
Luleå	0920-24 22 60
Malmö	040-38 62 00
Stockholm	08-475 01 00
Umeå	090-17 07 00
Växjö	0470-74 80 00
Örebro	019-21 95 00



Have you been subjected to threats or violence at work? If so, contact the Crime Victim Compensation and Support Authority, because you may be entitled to financial compensation (termed "compensation for criminal injuries", *brottsskadeersättning*).

Statistics

Swedish work injury and work environment statistics are the administrative responsibility of the Work Environment Authority. In addition, specially adapted work injury statistics, including fact sheets of various kinds, are produced on a demand-driven basis.

Among other things, our statistics show the outcomes of work injury reports and work environment investigations.

<http://www.av.se/inenglish/statistics/>

This information is also available in Swedish: <http://www.av.se/teman/Valdochhot/>

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