



## SMITHSONIAN DIRECTIVE 217

April 2, 1996

### POLICY ON VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE

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#### IF VIOLENCE OCCURS

You should secure your own safety and then call 911, as well as the security office of your facility or the Office of Protection Services (OPS) at 357-2884 for the assistance of medical personnel and/or law enforcement. Be prepared to provide a description of the circumstances, the behavior of the violent or threatening individual, and the exact location of the person who will meet emergency personnel.

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#### Background

As a nationwide problem, violence in the workplace has increased and is a leading cause of fatal injuries on the job. To fulfill its responsibility for a safe working environment, the Smithsonian Institution has developed a policy to prevent violent incidents and established procedures for dealing with conduct that is abusive or threatening in the workplace.

#### Definition

Violence in the workplace is physical or verbal aggression toward others or the verbalization, writing, gestures, or other forms of expression that could be interpreted by a reasonable person as communicating a direct, indirect, or potential threat to oneself or others.

## Policy

Violent, abusive, or threatening behavior directed at staff, visitors, oneself, or property will not be tolerated at the Smithsonian Institution.

While on the premises of the Institution, no person may carry firearms, other dangerous and deadly weapons, or explosives, except those officially authorized to do so.

Employees must assume responsibility for their own safety by being observant of violations of this prohibition and of abusive or threatening behavior on the part of co-workers or visitors. They must report observations to management and/or appropriate personnel in the Office of Protection Services, the National Zoological Park Police (NZZ Police), or the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) of the Office of Human Resources (OHR).

Employees will be held accountable for their own unacceptable conduct.

Supervisors will be held accountable for action to address such conduct, which will be considered grounds for disciplinary action, up to and including removal.

### **Individual Responsibilities** *The employee is expected to*

- be responsible for his or her own behavior
- interact responsibly with fellow employees and supervisors
- report promptly any situation described in the definition of violence in the workplace
- assist management by providing evidence of disruptive behavior personally witnessed or otherwise known

***The immediate supervisor is expected to***

- be alert to undesirable or inexplicable changes in employee behavior that may indicate hostility and warrant further attention
- be willing to intervene and initiate disciplinary action commensurate with the behavior in question
- respond to all incidents that involve violent, abusive, or threatening behavior in the workplace
- report all threats to the appropriate specialists in OPS, the NZP Police, or Labor Relations or EAP in OHR
- document all evidence, including interviews of witnesses, as quickly as possible following an incident of violent, abusive, or threatening behavior

**Office  
Responsibilities**

***Office of Protection Services***

**Security Division**

When an incident has occurred or is anticipated, security unit personnel of the affected facility or OPS headquarters (357-2884) will be dispatched to assess the situation and take appropriate action.

***Office of Environmental Management and Safety***

**Health Services**

In the event of violence in the workplace, health care professionals will provide immediate medical care to injured employees. They will triage

emergencies, determine the need for additional assistance, refer to outside medical facilities, and/or assess the need for other specialized assistance.

### ***Office of Human Resources***

#### **Labor and Employee Relations Branch**

Specialists will advise supervisors and managers regarding appropriate disciplinary action to be taken in response to violent, threatening, and disruptive conduct, with emphasis on early recognition of abusive behavior and progressive disciplinary action to effect a change in that behavior.

#### **Training**

Staff will advise on training requirements and provide assistance in selection and approval of training on preventing and dealing with violence in the workplace.

Counselors are available to assess the threatening employee and make appropriate referrals when necessary, provide support and consultation to victims and supervisors, and participate in debriefing sessions.

### ***Office of General Counsel***

OGC will provide legal advice to supervisors and managers regarding appropriate actions and potential consequences in regard to violent, abusive, or threatening and disruptive behavior in the workplace.

## ***Office of Risk and Asset Management***

ORAM will provide risk management advice and assistance in program development and assessment.

### **Crisis Management Task Force**

A Crisis Management Task Force (CMTF), consisting of specialists from the Office of Protection Services, the Office of Human Resources, the Office of General Counsel, the Office of Risk and Asset Management, and the National Zoological Park Police, will provide advice and service to management.

In the event of an incident, Crisis Management Task Force members will be convened. Members appropriate to the situation will form a Crisis Response Team (CRT), evaluate the incident, and recommend action to management, which will include involvement of the Office of Public Affairs to coordinate media requests and responses.

### **Preventive Measures**

- Management at all levels should identify and address underlying workplace situations that may give rise to stress and violence.
- Supervisory training focusing on proper pre-employment inquiries and how supervisors can best handle abusive, threatening, and violent employee behavior will be provided. Supervisors will be given information and be responsible for educating their subordinates.
- Pre-employment screening by selecting officials must include careful review of applications referred by OHR and interviews of applicants being considered for selection. The selecting official should always contact prior employers to verify work history and inquire about the applicant's performance and conduct. Documentation of information or

of efforts made to obtain it should be reviewed by the second level supervisor prior to return to OHR.

- During the probationary/trial period for new employees, the immediate supervisor must communicate the prohibition against violence, abusive, and threatening behavior and closely monitor the employee's conduct, as well as performance. If despite counseling, the standards of conduct prohibiting abusive or threatening behavior are not met, the supervisor must initiate action, usually no later than the tenth month of employment, to separate the employee.
- Dealing with abusive conduct requires firm, consistent, and progressive action by first and second line supervisors. Guidance from Labor and Employee Relations Specialists should always be obtained. If progressive discipline does not alter the behavior, removal of the employee should be proposed.
- Consulting with the Employee Assistance Program should be considered in all cases of disruptive conduct. Guidance will be provided on how to react to the behavior, how to handle reactions of other employees, and how to encourage the employee to make contact with EAP, which may be contacted by any concerned person.
- When medical problems result from or are suspected to be the cause of the disruptive conduct, the immediate supervisor should consult with the Director of OEMS,

<b>Action in Response to Violence, Abuse or Threatening Behavior</b>	<p>who will provide the assistance of health professionals.</p> <p>An employee observing violence, abusive, or threatening behavior should</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• in an emergency follow the instructions at the beginning of this directive</li> <li>• notify his or her supervisor. If the offending employee is the supervisor, the employee should notify someone else in the supervisory chain or any Crisis Management Task Force representative</li> </ul>
<b>Follow-up Activities</b>	<p>The supervisor of the offending employee should notify his or her supervisor and such other offices of the CMTF as may be appropriate.</p> <p>EAP counselors will be available to provide post-trauma counseling as needed.</p> <p>After an incident ends and has been fully investigated, the pertinent Crisis Response Team members will confer with management regarding any further action to be taken with respect to incident.</p> <p>The Crisis Management Task Force will review application of this policy and recommend changes to procedures as appropriate. In all proceedings the CMTF will comply with laws protecting the privacy of individuals.</p>
<b>CANCELLATION:</b>	None.
<b>INQUIRIES:</b>	Office of Protection Services.
<b>RETENTION:</b>	Indefinite. Subject to review for currency 24 months from date of issuance.
<b>FILING:</b>	File sequentially with other current directives.
<b>COPIES:</b>	Print file or contact OPMB.

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