

Tackling Violence at Work



**Health & Safety Guidance
for Betting Shop Staff**

Tackling Violence in the Workplace

A Short Guide for Betting Shop Staff

Introduction

Violent incidents against shop staff have recently hit the headlines with betting shop staff often featuring as targets of abuse, attacks and robberies.

In the retail sector alone there were over 800,000 incidents of violence, threats or verbal abuse recorded between 1995–2001. This is probably the tip of the iceberg as many incidents go unreported.

Late night opening, single-staffing and problems with some customers present increased risks to staff. Reports of incidents that have happened show that opening and closing the shop are identified as particularly risky times. Some workers feel particularly vulnerable and the stress of worry can often cause problems even if they are not the victim of an attack.

The object of this guide is to provide information on what the law says about violence at work and to give practical guidance on how to tackle the problem in your workplace.

What is a violent incident?

The Health and Safety Commission, when carrying out a survey of violent incidents within the NHS, defined incidents of violence as those:

- Requiring medical assistance (major injury)
- Requiring only first aid (minor injury)
- Involving a threat with a weapon / object but causing no physical injury
- Involving verbal abuse

Legal Standards

Employers have a general duty to control the risk of violence within the workplace under the Health & Safety at Work Act. Under the Act employers must provide:

- Safe systems of work (i.e. safe methods of working)
- Safe workplaces
- A safe working environment
- Information, instruction and training for staff

Management Regs state that employers must provide a “suitable and sufficient” assessment of any risks to the health and safety of employees.

RIDDOR 1995 has introduced a requirement on employers to report any work related assault to the Health & Safety Executive.

Where there is a risk of violence, to meet their legal responsibilities, employers must:

- Identify such hazards to the safety of workers arising from their jobs
- Plan measures to remove hazards and reduce risks
- Train and inform all workers affected

Risk Assessments

Health & Safety law is based on the operation of risk assessments. These should establish what could cause harm to people within the workplace so that companies can make sure that every reasonable step is taken to protect workers from coming to harm.

Employer's risk assessments, required under health and safety law, should cover the issue of violence and, where late working causes particular problems the risk assessment should recognise this.

Where violence towards staff is identified as a problem:

- Employers should ensure that they have a system for reporting all incidents including threats or intimidation and incidents which are work related but happen outside of work (for example, when travelling to or from work).
- Employers should provide well lit access to shops for staff who are opening or closing or who have to enter or leave the shop during the night.
- In high risk areas, arrangements should be made to make sure that individual workers are not expected to open or close shops on their own. Staff who are expected to open/close shops should be trained so they know what to do if they see someone suspicious hanging about.
- Where possible, staff should not be expected to work on their own at high risk times, for example, in late opening shops. If it cannot be avoided then extra precautions will be needed to make sure that they are protected and can call for assistance in an emergency.
- Staff who are key holders should be trained in what to do in a call-out and should not be expected to enter the store on their own.

Reducing Violent Incidents

The HSE highlights successful measures taken by companies to reduce the risk of violence within the work environment. These include:

- Training—including techniques to diffuse situations and spotting early warning signs.
- Contingency Plans—to cope with emergency situations
- Feedback—discussing the problem with staff to identify violence risks and measures to tackle them
- Building a relationship with local police—for example, involvement in community safety initiatives
- Exclusion Orders—to deal with persistent offenders

Tackling Workplace Violence: CHECKLIST


- Check your risk assessment
 - Does it cover workplace violence?
 - Is it up to date?
 - Does it reflect staff experiences of violence?
 - Are all safety measures properly implemented?

- Check your incident reporting procedures
 - Are all violent incidents reported?
 - Are levels of violence properly monitored?
 - Are there any patterns in incidents of violence?

- Check your training records
 - Is there any training in dealing with violence?
 - Have all staff completed relevant training?

REMEMBER: If you believe yourself or others are at risk, report this (in writing) to your line manager and contact Community to discuss the problem.


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