

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

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ISSUED BY:	Mick Wallis, Collections Manager
IN CONSULTATION WITH:	Martin Hellyer, Technical Officer Geoff Dicker, Health & Safety Adviser Mick Wallis, Senior Collections Supervisor Chris Price (GMB H&S Rep), Laura Gibb, Senior Supervisor, Kate Meopham, Technical & Project Officer.
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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 employees 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
Loaders

3. Hazards

Physical and verbal abuse
Stress
Falls
Injury

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:** To the property of the member of staff, or the Council, including vehicles, 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 assault, psychological abuse, threats, harassment or unpleasant behaviour not contained in the above, which the member of staff considers 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 and offer to help if possible
- 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 the MOP uses bad language to them. Responding in kind is likely to escalate a situation whereas a thoughtful, polite response may defuse a situation.
- If unable to provide the information, or service, which the person is requesting, contact details should be requested so that a Supervisor, Manager or other member of office staff can contact the person.
- When working kerbside if a loader is unable to calm the situation or appease the person they should refer them to the Team Leader.
- If the situation becomes unmanageable and likely to lead to violence, leave the area immediately and once out of the danger zone use the radio to call the Supervisor / depot. The person receiving this message will call the Police if this is considered necessary e.g. physical assault, threatening assault, possession of an offensive weapon.
- On return to depot, notes should be made by the Supervisor / Manager recording what happened. An online incident form will be completed for every incident, except minor verbal abuse. In the case of minor verbal abuse, the Manager, Supervisor and Employee will use their discretion.

d) Telephone

- If the member of public is abusive then the employee should ask the person to speak politely and calmly. If the person does not respond to this request then the employee should make it clear that unless the person speaks politely and calmly the telephone call will be terminated.
- If it is necessary to terminate a call an online incident form will be completed.

e) Follow up Action

- Where 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 Council may take action against the aggressor after agreement with affected staff. Possible action that the Council may take against an aggressor can include:
 - Writing to an aggressor
 - Adding names to a **Cautionary Contacts Database** of potentially aggressive persons.
 - Advising aggressors that they cannot 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
- The Council will support staff to initiate police criminal investigation of incidents.
- The Council itself may initiate police criminal investigation of incidents.
- Taking civil action to obtain a legal injunction to exclude aggressors from any Council property

f) Cautionary Contact Database

- The Council's Cautionary Contact Database is a means of fulfilling the Council's duty of care to its employees by identifying and recording properties and individuals who pose, or could possibly pose a risk to members of staff who come into contact with them.
- The Database is designed to store information on any person/s or properties that the Council may be required to have contact with that may pose a hazard to employees or require employees to follow an agreed procedure in order to manage an identified risk. Areas may include potentially violent, threatening or abusive behaviours; dangerous dogs; unstable or damaged property or construction; or those whose contact has been restricted in order to appropriately manage it.
- Supervisors and Managers can input ID numbers, click on them and retrieve the information (hazard and suggested safe systems of work/controls) held on that contact. The Manager / Supervisor must then decide whether it is relevant to share the information with their employee.
- A manager / supervisor can add a new contact. Cautionary Contact reports are and must be based on a specific danger, incident or a clearly identifiable expression of threat rather than general opinions.
- Records will be authorised, managed and regularly reviewed by the Council's Health & Safety Team Manager, at least six monthly, to ensure fairness and accuracy. Records will be removed from the system when no longer valid.

5. General Guidance

- Nobody should have to accept that the threat of aggression is part of their job.
- The Council will support and protect its staff against incidents of violence or threatening behaviour.

6. Personal Protective Equipment

- Not applicable

7. Medical Requirements

- A First Aid box is held at depots and on each vehicle

- If an employee is injured the Supervisor should be contacted immediately. An injured employee must be taken to A + E as soon as is reasonably practicable except in the case of serious injury when the Supervisor should phone the Emergency Services direct.

8. Training

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

Related Documents	
	Reference:
Risk Assessments	
Induction	WC7
Lone Working	WC10
Procedures	
Staff Induction – Waste Collections	P08
Agency Induction	P09
Proforma	
Online incident report	https://cis.bathnes.gov.uk/forms/healthandsafety/
Cautionary Contacts Database	http://hsonestop/CCD/E.aspx
Handbooks	
Waste Collections Staff Guidance and Information Pocketbook	May 2015