



**St Vincent de Paul Society**  
NSW *good works*

## **Work-Related Violence Policy**

**Approved by the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW State Council on 9<sup>th</sup>  
December, 2015**

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## Policy Statement

The Society recognises the significant impact that work related violence (WRV) can have on the health and wellbeing of its workers. Apart from any immediate consequences such as physical injury, the influences of a violent incident may linger, causing a debilitating effect on an individual's resilience, happiness and self-esteem.

The Society strongly endorses this policy and will not tolerate any instances of work-related violence, including verbal abuse, to our workers. All workers have the right to be treated with consideration, dignity and respect and will be given the managerial support and personal authority to protect their wellbeing within the workplace when subjected to unreasonable behaviour that conflicts with these rights.

Managers will adopt a firm and forthright approach to any substantiated instances of work related violence and will take action appropriate to the circumstances at hand.

## Scope

This policy is an overarching document applicable to all Society workplaces. However due to the variety of locations and functions managed by SVdP, it will be effected through the application of a suite of procedures tailored to individual services or Central Councils.

Work related violence in the context of this policy refers to violent acts that affect Society workers (employees, volunteers, Members) but are committed or instigated by individuals or groups other than Society workers, i.e customers, visitors, people that we assist with our services, external assailants and agitants etc.

Violent incidents or acts that are committed by Society workers against one another will be managed according to other policies, including the Code of Conduct, Workplace Concerns (employee) policy and procedure, Workplace Equity policy, Volunteer policy.

## Purpose

The Work Related Violence policy acts to support the Society's Work Health and Safety policy (which outlines our commitment to the safety and wellbeing of workers and our general duty of care obligations).

It aims to address the issue from a risk management perspective, where the primary ambition is to prevent violent incidents wherever possible and therefore eliminate risks that may arise from such incidents.

This policy also provides the framework for worker preparedness, active management, reporting and post incident support for any incidents that may arise.

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## Definitions

**Management:** Management is a collective term that refers to all managers and supervisors.

**Manager:** A manager is a person who occupies a position where the position description specifies management responsibilities.

**Safety officer:** A safety officer is a person who is assigned that role by a Central Council or Support Service. Safety officer roles may be undertaken by appropriately skilled and knowledgeable volunteers, an employee, or a contracted consultant. This position does not refer to any local health and safety representative (HSR), safety committee member or other general consultative role that may be in place.

**Supervisor:** A supervisor is a person who occupies a position where the position description specifies supervisory responsibilities. Volunteers may have supervisory responsibilities and therefore be classified as supervisors (e.g. Centre Presidents).

**Work related violence (WRV):** Any incident in which a worker is abused, threatened, harassed or assaulted by a person or group of people (who are not workers) in circumstances arising out of activities or duties endorsed by the Society. This may include intimidatory acts such as destruction or damage to property.

These may not always be a critical or extreme situation from the outset and may escalate as time proceeds.

**Worker:** As defined by the Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (NSW). Within the Society context, this term means our employees, volunteers and Members.

## Related Policies and Procedures

Work Health and Safety Policy

SVdP Code of Conduct.

WHS Procedure - Hazard and Incident Reporting

WHS Procedure - Notifiable incidents

WHS Procedure – Emergencies: Planning

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# Framework for managing WRV

## General Principles:

The Society commits to using the following general principles as a framework for managing work related violence.

### 1. Risk Management

The Society's safety management system includes a strong and systematic focus on hazard identification, risk assessment and control, with workplaces and work practices managed through mechanisms such as risk registers, safe work method statements and others.

Management will take guidance from their relevant safety officers and be involved in consultation with workers about matters that may impact on or lead to incidents of work related violence.

Appropriate controls will be formulated in accordance with these discussions and reports, and actions will be implemented in a timely fashion.

The Society will also ensure that its emergency protocols account for the possibility of WRV that seeks material gain (robbery, theft etc.)

Law enforcement agencies will be notified where criminal action is confirmed.

### 2. Specific and Relevant Procedures

The operational requirements and methods for managing WRV incidents will vary significantly between workplaces. What may be appropriate actions to take for an event caused by a member of the public for example, may not be appropriate in relation to a person who is being assisted at a hostel or other support service.

For this reason, it is important that managers and supervisors follow formal procedures that were developed for their own organisational channel.

### Volunteers

The Society recognises that within our good works there is a heavy reliance on the contributions of our volunteer workforce. It also therefore acknowledges that these volunteers may not have the qualifications or experience of a trained social worker, counsellor or medical professional when meeting the needs of, and communicating with, the people we assist.

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WRV and emergency procedures will therefore accommodate this reality, especially within workplaces where volunteer participation is high such as our network of Retail Centres.

### 3. Prevention and management measures

Safety by design: Where possible, workplaces will be chosen and designed to anticipate potentially violent incidents. Depending on the site, this may involve:

- layout provisions (such as the use of physical barriers or security systems, the provision of staff only lockable areas, signage, removal or relocation of fittings that may be used as weapons, sightlines between public and private spaces, comfortable and sufficiently sized waiting areas etc.)
- selective leasing (venues with safer locations and facilities chosen as a preference) or,
- the engagement of extra resources (e.g parking arrangements, security staff, duress alarms)

Empowerment/ awareness:

Workers and supervisors will be given authority to directly minimise or control WRV incidents, for example:

- the right to disengage from situations that are deemed threatening or show strong potential to escalate,
- the right to seek assistance from local police or '000' emergency personnel as they judge necessary,
- the wearing of 'volunteer' or 'member' badges
- the right to communicate their own training needs relating to WRV

Training: Training will be provided to assist workers and management to make informed choices in considering options that will help to ensure the safety of colleagues. Training may include:

- Site specific inductions covering relevant Society procedures (WRV, cash handling, reporting systems, emergency preparedness etc) and the use and maintenance of local duress alarms or other security measures.
- Managing conflict and challenging behaviours - recognised as a core skill for all workers.
- Information and strategies around travelling to and from work and covering any necessary time spent working alone.

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- Training specifically for managers/ supervisors on managing work related violence.
- Awareness training of how services interconnect – e.g the role of the conference and how it's function links with that of Retail Centres.

#### Administrative and other work practices

Corporate WHS procedures covering security issues (cash handling, facility design and maintenance, personal safety in a group home) will be adhered to along with safe work procedures that have been tailored and implemented for significant WRV risks identified by the particular Central Council or Support Service.

Rostering practices and the capacity to allocate suitable supervision and back up staff will also be considered within the local context.

#### Networking with other businesses and agencies

Where applicable and practicable, the Society will liaise with other businesses and agencies in the immediate area to pool knowledge and resources that help to manage WRV incidents more effectively.

### **4. Reporting, investigation, recording and evaluation**

Incidents that involve work related violence will be recorded in accordance with the standard corporate hazard and incident reporting procedure and will be referred to the Executive Officer, Central Council President and local safety officer.

Reports should include:

- a description of the incident,
- basic background information on any events or historical matters that led or contributed to the incident (if known),
- comment describing how many people (and who) witnessed or were affected by the confrontation,
- the consequence of the incident and,
- any immediate outcomes (need for medical treatment or counselling, repairs to the facility etc.)

***Detailed reports should be prepared where an incident is significant or involves a criminal act, so as to provide a clear and thorough account to police, SafeWork NSW or other legal investigators. (In such circumstances, contact your safety officer immediately).***

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### Investigation:

The investigation process is key to developing a good understanding of the factors that contribute to violence within Society workplaces.

Significant WRV incidents will be investigated by the manager(s) delegated by the Executive Officer and, if applicable, the Central Council or Service safety officer. The completed investigation report will be copied to relevant senior managers (ie those who have responsibilities related to the incident) and the WHS Coordinator, SSO. (SafeWork NSW 'notifiable' or other critical incidents will also be communicated to the Chief Executive Officer and NSW President).

On receiving the completed investigation, the responsible senior managers will review the details and recommendations, and establish reasonably practicable controls that will then be implemented in a timely manner.

Regular monitoring will be performed by management to evaluate the effectiveness of these controls.

### Notifiable incidents:

A notifiable incident means;

- the death of a person;
- serious work related injury or illness of a person; or
- a dangerous incident eg. electric shock or fall from height.

The Society is legally bound to report such work related incidents to SafeWork NSW and this should be done in accordance with the corporate WHS procedure for notifiable incidents. More information on what is considered a 'serious injury or illness' and 'a dangerous incident' is documented in this procedure and can be obtained from your local safety officer.

(Definitions are as described in the WHS Act 2011 NSW, S35-37).

## **5. Post incident support**

The Society will ensure that all workers exposed to work related violence have access to:

- appropriate first aid or medical treatment
- debriefing and individual support where required, including practical and emotional support (e.g Employee Assistance Program/ 'EAP' or other counselling)
- visible and active managerial support (direct, managerial assistance or extra resourcing to deal with operational pressures that may result from the incident),

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- appropriate rehabilitation and insurance services (workers compensation, personal accident insurance etc.)

The workers will also be able to contribute in general WHS consultation regarding the incident and will be informed of any outcomes or actions to be adopted within the workplace to further minimise the occurrence or impact of future WRV incidents.

Management response:

The Society will take firm and prompt action in relation to work related violence. In accordance with the nature of the incident, this action may involve:

- internal measures as described in procedures specific to the organisational channel. Examples may include warnings, counselling and bans (temporary or otherwise) from accessing a particular service.
- stronger measures as recommended by police or legal advice.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

### **Executive Officers**

Executive Officers are responsible to ensure that the resources and training necessary to manage WRV issues are available. More specifically, they must:

- Ensure that appropriate and specific procedures are in place within their organisational area to anticipate and manage possible WRV incidents.
- Encourage ‘safety by design’ principles when new workplaces are established or existing ones renovated or re-fitted.
- Ensure that thorough reports and records are kept around such incidents.
- Sponsor investigations of WRV incidents and the implementation of any agreed corrective actions.
- Communicate critical and ‘notifiable’ incidents to the Chief Executive Officer and State and local (Central Council) Presidents.
- Ensure that the corporate ‘Notifiable Incidents’ procedure is followed locally and that notifiable incidents are reported promptly to SafeWork NSW.
- Monitor outcomes and trends relating to WRV incidents.
- Ensure that supervisors and managers have been adequately trained in relation to the WRV Policy and any related procedures.
- Liaise with and refer information to the relevant Workplace Relations Advisor at the State Support Office (SSO) if there are industrial implications.
- Coordinate with police or other legal agencies and consultants, where legal action may be required (i.e for criminal acts).

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## Central Council Presidents

In the case of incidents affecting members, the Central Council President is the leading authority and takes on the member equivalent responsibilities described above for Executive Officers.

## Managers

Managers are responsible to provide strong support to the supervisors and operational workers in preparing for and dealing with WRV. This includes:

- Ensuring that local procedures for WRV management are implemented.
- Ensuring that reporting and investigations have been completed in keeping with this policy.
- Communicating WRV incidents and outcomes to the Executive Officer and local safety officer.
- Being involved in identification and support of reasonably practicable risk controls and in the monitoring of their effectiveness.
- Providing visible and prompt support to the affected workplace as required with respect to operational assistance and debriefing/ EAP or other wellbeing support.
- Authorising and coordinating appropriate internal responses to offenders. in keeping with local formalised procedures after consultation with stakeholders. Escalating any legal matters to the Executive Officer for review.

## Supervisors

Each front-line supervisor is responsible for:

- Implementing the relevant procedures regarding Work Related Violence.
- Providing support within their capabilities to workers who have been or may be subjected to WRV.
- Seeking assistance from more experienced or more senior Society managers when individual incidents create demands beyond their own skills and experience.
- Completing incident reports promptly and forwarding them to their manager and the local safety officer.
- Communicating any observed ongoing effects caused by WRV incidents to their manager and safety officer. This may include injuries or conditions sustained by workers.

## Workers

Members, volunteers and employees must cooperate with managers, supervisors and others in following reasonable directions aimed at securing the safety and wellbeing of those in the workplace.

Specifically members, volunteers and employees must:

- Inform their supervisor (and local health and safety representative if relevant) of any hazards or situations that may result in a WRV incident.
- Take action within their skills, authority and resources to correct any unsafe condition.
- Engage in the Society's safety consultation processes.

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- Follow safe work and other procedures that they've been trained in.
- Promptly report any injury or condition sustained as a result of the WRV incident to their supervisor.

## Safety Officers

The role of a safety officer is to *assist* management in effecting their WHS responsibilities. The safety officer will assist by:

- Conducting risk assessments and completing risk registers with a conscious regard to work related violence.
- Consulting with workers and management in relation to WRV hazards and risks.
- Providing recommendations on prevention and risk management strategies including safety by design measures.
- Consulting with the WHS Coordinator (SSO) as required.
- Providing guidance in the reporting of incidents and by taking on a prominent role in the investigation of these incidents.
- Ensuring that notifiable incidents are reported to SafeWork NSW.
- Ensuring that Return to Work Coordinators are made aware of injuries that have arisen or may develop as a result of the WRV incident.

## Society's WHS Coordinator

The Society's WHS Coordinator is located at the Society's State Support Office. Their responsibility is to:

- Monitor WRV incidents and trends across the state.
- Collate this information for reporting to senior executives.
- Provide assistance and guidance to local safety and Executive Officers as required.

## Effectiveness and review

The standard review period for safety documents will be 2 years, but this can be performed more frequently to accommodate legislative changes or if there is an opportunity to significantly improve the utility or strength of the WHSMS by updating the document in question.

## Further advice or assistance

Further advice and information may be obtained from your:

Safety Officer  
 WHS Coordinator (SSO)  
 Service Manager  
 Executive Officer

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## References

WHS Act 2011 (NSW)

WHS Regulation 2011 (NSW)

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