



**Violence against workers
is a criminal offence.**

Physical and verbal abuse against workers is a criminal offence. **Report it.**



**safer
scotland**
SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

The Health & Safety Executive **has defined workplace violence as**

Any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work. This can include verbal abuse or threats as well as physical attacks.

www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg69.pdf

Foreword by Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing

No one should ever have to face violence or abuse as part of their job. Yet it has become apparent that workers in call and contact centres and those who deal with clients or customers on the telephone, are at risk of being verbally attacked at work. Every day, some of these workers are confronted with hostility, aggression and verbal abuse as a matter of course. This cannot be allowed to continue.

Verbal abuse is not always seen by some as a serious issue but any abusive behaviour, even verbal abuse, can have serious long term effects on the health and wellbeing of staff.

Clearly, an effective solution cannot be delivered by government, employers or trades unions working alone. That is why this CD Rom, which is another example of Government working in partnership is so valuable.

You may find the reporting forms below (see the icons) useful in getting the process going.

The message is clear: verbal abuse is never acceptable and will not be tolerated.



Further information on the campaign:
www.infoscotland/violenceatwork

Steering Group website outlining work across all sectors
www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Justice/criminal/protectingPSWs

Protecting Workers Serving the Public – when the customer isn't right
www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2004/09/19899/42674

The Scottish Government partnership and Scottish Trades Union Congress campaign to promote good practice in the workplace and protect staff from verbal and physical abuse.

The Violence at Work campaign is intended to assist employers, managers and staff assess the level of abuse from clients or customers and put in place effective measure to deal with them by encouraging those in relevant sectors to share good practice and benefit from resources and advice which is available in Scotland.



This CD Rom aims to help you implement new and build on existing best practices in dealing with abuse (phone rage) from customers.

INTERESTING FACT

Across the industry from every sector, information gained throughout the campaign has demonstrated that the failure of staff themselves and their managers to recognise the abuse as unacceptable has led to under-reporting of the problem. It is hoped that this document will help to dispel this and enable those involved to tap into campaign materials and other available resources to fulfil the necessary requirements of protecting call handlers from abusive or threatening customers.

In these guidelines, we have used the term 'call handler' to refer to anyone who talks on the phone with the public as part of their job, whether they are paid or voluntary, whether this is their main job or only a small part of it, and whether they work in the voluntary, public or commercial sector. This can include the terms: agent, call handler, adviser, call centre worker, telephone counsellor, befriender, volunteer, helpline worker plus a range of others.

CONTENTS

What is phone rage?	6
Phone rage and its impact on Individuals and Organisations	8
Consequences of ignoring phone rage at work	9
Training to manage phone rage effectively	11
Top 10 triggers of rage	13
Auditing your workplace for the risk of phone rage	15
Setting up reporting procedures	18
Developing a Workplace Policy	19
Legal solutions	20
Downloadable Staff Survey Forms	21

What is phone rage?

The Health and Safety Executive have defined of workplace violence as:

Any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work. This can include verbal abuse or threats as well as physical attacks

www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg69.pdf

- Few callers phone just to abuse, in most cases something happens during the call which leads to this situation

To better understand what creates situations which lead to violent behaviour, consider this:

- There are identifiable causes of violence which can be anticipated and avoided
- There is a difference between **anger** and **rage**

What is the difference between anger and rage?

Anger and violence may be related but they are not the same. On occasions anger may create violence, but while it is unacceptable to be violent, it may be perfectly acceptable to be angry. It depends on how it is expressed and the situation.

Many people today have no methods which allow for purposeful and constructive expressions of anger. We will allow anger to influence us and actually control our behaviour to some level. Unfortunately this can be made worse when a situation is being dealt with over the telephone as the lack of face to face contact can mean that a client may feel they can 'get away with' being ruder or abusive as they cannot see the person at the other end of the call.

Yet, if we are to stop verbal abuse and aggression taking place in our workplace and therefore damaging us, we need to have some alternative ways of dealing with anger. One important way to realise this is first of all be aware of the differences between anger and rage.

Anger is a natural response to threats; it inspires powerful, often aggressive, feelings and conduct, which allow us to fight and to defend ourselves when we are attacked.

- Anger is not a bad emotion. However, when not handled properly, anger can lead to rage.
- It's easy to take anger from others personally. This can make a bad situation escalate.

In most situations when people are angry it is not us personally who is being attacked. Whoever was on the receiving end would be treated in the same way. We are not always in a position to change the aggressor's behaviour immediately, but at least we can stop ourselves being drawn in or feeling a 'victim' by 'counter-attacking'.

By being more in control of our own reactions we are in a better position to influence the aggressor's behaviour for the better.

Rage, which is never acceptable, can be defined in a number of ways as:

- Violent anger
- Fury
- Intense anger expressed by shouting, swearing or belittling language
- Storming
- Anger which is apparently out of control, beyond reason
- Physical or verbal violence which physically or emotionally harms the recipient
- Extreme verbal aggression which makes the recipient feel personally attacked and, in some cases, personally abused
- Behaviour which leaves the recipient outraged
- Threats to the organisation or person

Statistics

Whilst this CD Rom is aimed at anyone who works with clients using the telephone there are no definitive statistics for those staff who handle telephone calls but whose main functions involve carrying out other tasks. However, in the contact centre environment alone it is estimated that:

- 60,000 people are currently involved in the Scottish contact centre industry¹. This compares to 56,000 in 2003 - 46,000 in 2000 - 16,000 in 1997.
- 2.6% of the working population of Scotland are employed in call and contact centres².
- The Customer Contact Association estimates that 26 million calls a day are made to contact centres.
- The Telephone Helplines Association estimates that every year more than 22 million calls are made to non-profit helplines such as Samaritans and Childline.
- Average number of inbound calls (per contact centre): 2,298,000 overall, and 1,965,000 in the UK/Europe³.
- According to www.dti.gov.uk DTI Contact Centre Report (May 2004) 43, 144,000,000 minutes of inbound calls are made per year in the UK.
- A report from the Telework Association in 2001 found that although only four per cent of surveyed call centres employed home workers, 42 per cent of call centre managers expected to do so in the future.

Whilst it is believed that abusive calls are in the minority of the very high volume of calls received, it is only when robust reporting procedures are in place that it is possible to measure them effectively, to manage the problem, and to minimise the effect on staff.

The impact of being on the receiving end of verbal abuse can be significant given the attrition effect of dealing with multiple incidents involving personal insults. Offensive behaviour should not be treated lightly.

¹ An investigation into the offshoring of financial services business processes by Professor Philip Taylor and Peter Bain from the University of Strathclyde

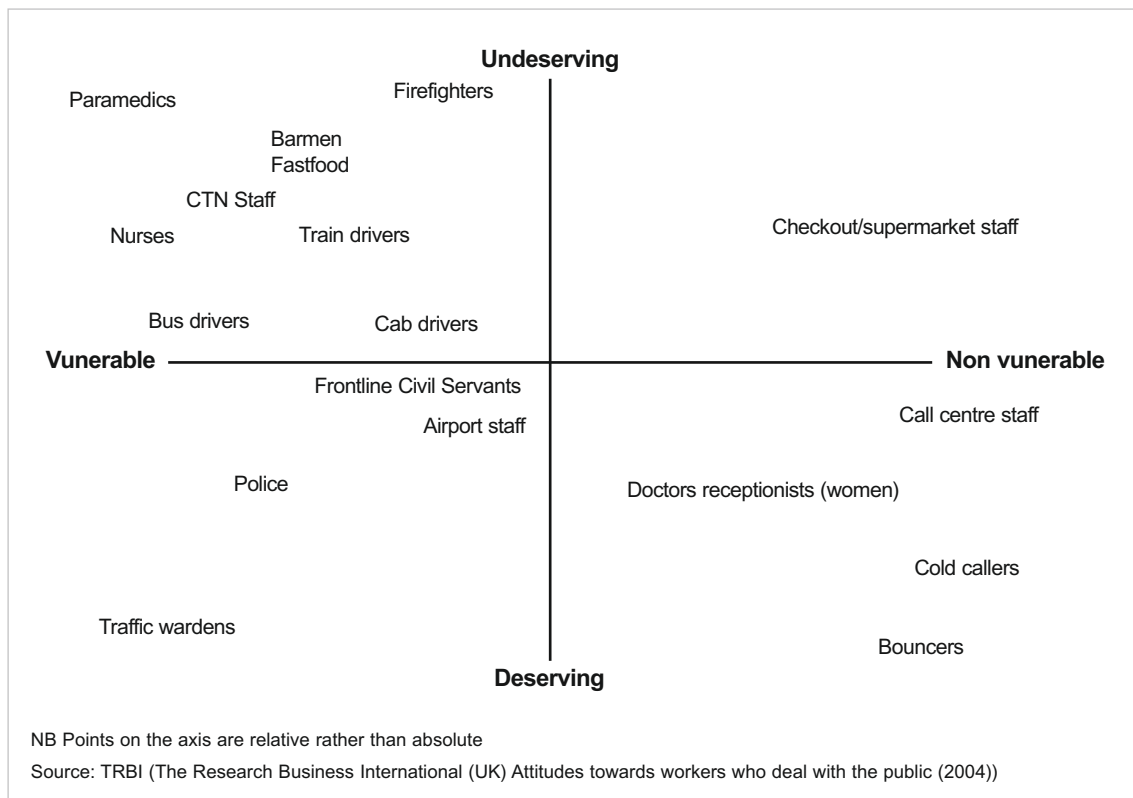
² Annual Population Survey of Scotland www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/06/28140032/3

³ Merchants Global Contact Centre Benchmarking Survey

Phone rage and its impact on individuals and organisations

Physical and verbal abuse is a recognised problem across all ranges of occupations involved in working with the public. This abuse can have an impact on the physical and or mental health of those on the receiving end, which in turn has a knock-on effect on the productivity of the organisation.

Research by the Scottish Government indicates that workers in call centres are considered by some members of the public to be 'fair game' for abuse.



What the Health and Safety Executive say

Physical attacks are obviously dangerous, but serious or persistent verbal abuse can be a significant problem too, as it can cause damage to employees' health through anxiety and stress. For their employers this can represent a real financial cost – through low staff morale and high staff turnover. This in turn can affect the confidence of a business and its profitability. Further costs may arise from expensive insurance premiums and compensation payments.

Consequences of ignoring phone rage at work

The psychological effect of single or repeated, unreciprocated incidents of verbal abuse can have a devastating effect on the worker.

The 'drip, drip' effect of verbal abuse can wear someone down, both mentally and physically. Also, if everyone else around them seems to be coping, they can feel isolated, stressed, fearful, and anxious, and can easily tip over into depression.

Consequences for the individual:

- suffering and humiliation which can lead to a lack of motivation
- loss of confidence and reduced self-esteem
- if the situation persists, physical illness, psychological disorders or tobacco, alcohol and drug abuse.

Stress

Stress can damage physical health, social relationships and the way we function at work and at home. It is important to remember that the following symptoms may have nothing to do with stress but they are often danger signs which should not be ignored:

- physical signs like headaches, insomnia, indigestion, high blood pressure, alopecia, loss of appetite
- emotional factors such as irritability, lack of concentration, anxiety, depression, loss of confidence, low morale
- behaviour aspects such as poor work performance, accidents, poor relationships at home and work, dependence on tobacco, drugs and alcohol

“Mental and physical ill health are a personal loss to your employees and a cost to your company whether they mean sick pay for those who stay home or poor performance from those who come to work. A quick response can prevent the situation deteriorating further and may well lead to considerable improvements for both you and your employees.”

The Scottish Centre for Healthy Working Lives
www.sahw.co.uk/main-section/workplace-topics/violence.cfm

Consequences at the workplace:

Workplace violence causes

- sickness absence
- immediate, and often long-term disruption to interpersonal relationships, the organisation of work and the overall working environment, usually leading to deterioration in the quality of service provided.
- compensation claims - employers not only bear the direct cost of legal liabilities and lost work but have to commit resources to deal with this in direct costs of reduced efficiency and productivity, deterioration in the quality of service provided.
- high staff turnover and difficulty in recruiting or retaining qualified personnel, loss in company image and a reduction in the number of clients.

Consequences in the community:

The costs of dealing with the results of phone rage and other forms of violence include:

- health care and long-term rehabilitation costs for victims
- unemployment and retraining costs for victims who lose or leave their jobs
- social mistrust, lack of unity and fear

Training to manage phone rage effectively

Good practice in training staff to address phone rage should normally include three main areas:

- 1** The physical and mental wellbeing of the call handler
- 2** The understanding of the emotions and potential state of mind of the caller who may become enraged and how to manage them
- 3** The difference between justifiable anger and rage

The training package

A well rounded training package will address each of these points and also ask the following questions:

- What factors lead people think that it is ok to abuse call handlers and what steps can we take to address this?
- Is rage anger that is unmanaged and what steps can we take at the onset to cool the caller down?
- What are both the ragers' and call handlers' attitudes to language and swearing?
- How does our brain and body react to threats and aggression (fight and flight) and what steps can we take to neutralise the physical and mental harm this can cause?
- In the absence of body language how do we communicate effectively over the telephone to lessen frustration?
- Why is it important to mirror the energy and communication style of the caller?
- Can using clarifying statements and open questions to gather information, establish trust in the call handlers' ability to deal with the contentious issue?
- What makes people angry and can the intensity of the anger be gauged if you know what the caller is angry about?
- Can understanding the ego state of the caller assist the call handler in managing the call and avoiding the argument cycle?
- An awareness of what can trigger rage

Read about The Student Loans Company's approach to training staff

The Student Loans Company has been identified as an organisation which has adopted a well rounded approach to training staff to defuse potentially difficult calls and improve efficiency. As part of the Scottish Government/STUC campaign they provided a pilot course for external organisations.

The students, who included trainers, were asked to provide comments in an evaluation some months after the course. These included:

- “ I now maintain the adult ego state and do not get involved in arguing ”
- “ the reflective and empathetic listening has helped me to understand the customer and react accordingly as well as summarising and repeating key points”
- “ advised manager to assist colleague undergoing an abusive situation ”
- “ now think about the ego state of caller ”
- “ I remain calm now and don't take abuse personally or get involved ”
- “ It is easier to separate out multiple problems whilst judging caller's ego state ”
- “ Callers now thank me for being patient ”
- “ My manager now speaks to customers and advises them that shouting at my colleague on the phone is not acceptable ”
- “ Caller became more polite and agreed to be put through to a person who was better able to deal with the issue ”
- “ Abuser was not able to undermine me and attitude changed once they realised this ”

Unsolicited support has also come from Student Loans Company staff:

“ I came from an industrial background, where if somebody swore at you, well you swore right back at them. SLC taught me to use the systems alright but until now I had no skills in dealing with angry customers, this course has made all of the difference to me and the way I interact with angry customers. ”

“ Julie would pass difficult accounts to me if she was unsure of how to handle the enquiry, or if the customer was becoming irate. She now takes more control of these calls (since the training). I still assist her with difficult customers but she will now check information first and then speak to the customer themselves rather than escalating calls. ”

Top 10 triggers of phone rage

Capita UK (www.capita.co.uk) estimate these are the 10 top triggers of rage for customers on the telephone:

1 Inaccessibility to call being answered

- The phone is not answered in reasonable time. The caller is uncertain they have dialled the right number, but aren't try again in case they have to go back to the bottom of the queue.
- The call is answered and then put into a queuing system. Some callers are annoyed that they have to pay the phone costs when being kept on hold. However, many callers say that they prefer this to not knowing if there is anyone likely to answer the call at all, with the phone just continuously ringing.
- The caller has been waiting a long time while the phone is ringing, then the line goes dead/or the phone is apparently lifted, but no-one speaks.
- Being put on hold without being kept informed – one minute on hold feels like 10 to a caller!
- Line which is constantly engaged/no apparent alternative numbers to try.
- No means by which to leave a message after hours (very important in internationally-based companies and in an era of changing working patterns).

2 Dealing with machines, not people

- The customer feels processed, or the victim of a faceless corporation.
- Lengthy menu of options, the customer often ends up where they started.
- Voice mails/answer-phones – seen as 'black-hole' for losing customers and not having to deal with customers when they need you.

3 Insincerity

- Standard greetings and pleasantries which do not sound sincere.
- Scripted conversations, especially from sales people.
- Over-use of names and/or inappropriate use of first names.

4 Being treated impersonally

- Abrupt, bored or generally unreceptive voices taking the call.
- Being made to feel processed. E.g. name, number, address, postcode.
- Being made to feel bad or rushed when the caller has rung at the end of the working day or just before lunch.
- No use of names or acknowledgement of the caller's long-term relationship with the company.
- Feeling a victim of bureaucracy – form filling, being bombarded with jargon.

5 Customer Advisor not taking ownership of problem

- Being passed around, with nobody taking responsibility or the initiative to find the right person or call the customer back – so the caller ends up having to do all the work AND all the waiting.
- Caller has to repeat their name and reason for calling, several times to different people.
- Staff blaming each other as if they are not part of the same organisation.
- Advisor withholding his or her name from the customer, even when the caller asks for a name.
- Dealing with different people every time – seen as annoying when the customer has to spend time re-explaining situations to someone different, especially when there doesn't appear to be any hand over of information or common access to records.

6 Not being kept informed

- Being put on hold or kept on hold without being told what's happening.
- No transfer phrase when the caller is being put through to someone else, instead of "I'm transferring you to...". Or "David's line is ringing for you now" all the customer hears is a click and then silence so they assume they have been cut off.
- Some customers find music annoying when on hold. However, most people prefer to hear music rather than nothing at all. It also depends on the music.

7 Promises not being met

- Calls not returned when promised.
- Several calls made, re-assurances given (e.g. goods dispatched) – no response.

8 Lack of authority

- The person receiving the call lacks the knowledge/authority to resolve the caller's problem.
- Instead of passing the call to the best person to help, they 'flannel' the caller.

9 Denied access to member of staff

- Caller is fobbed off – 'he's in a meeting', 'too busy to speak to you, can you call back?'
- Screening process, making customers feel as if they are being kept out, e.g. – 'who's calling, 'what's it about', 'just one moment and I'll see if she's in'.

10 Rudeness of staff

- Rudeness, impatience and inflexibility of staff.
- Making the customer feel belittled.
- Inferring the customer is lying. 'Are you sure.....?'
- Trying to catch the caller out.
- Threatening phrases 'Now you do want this work done today, don't you?'

Auditing your workplace for the risk of phone rage

To find out the extent of phone rage in your workplace you need to consider procedures in place and encourage staff to report future incidents. To be able to support them in dealing effectively with customers or clients, information on steps to take is provided below:

Risk Factors

Assessing the risk

Setting up reporting procedures and monitoring progress

Developing a policy

Model employee survey form

Risk factors

There are many factors to consider when risk assessing for phone rage and these fall broadly into two categories: **controllable** and **dynamic**.

Controllable risk factors increase the risk of the caller becoming angry

- following procedures which do not provide much information to clients
- working in units which do not have a human image - often crowded, busy, uncomfortable lacking in essentials such as refreshments
- working under pressure created by increased workloads, staff shortages, and the absence of alternative support for the client
- working alone in physically isolated units or at hours when few other staff are around
- Procedures which are not customer friendly
- Queuing
- Unnecessary use of jargon
- Compensation culture
- Poor communication skills within organisations and with customer contact
- Organisational change
- Understaffing
- Over managed staff
- Equipment breakdown
- Scripted responses

Dynamic risk factors can increase the risk of the caller's anger tipping over into unacceptable abuse

- Personal circumstances of callers at the time of the call relating to people who have a great deal of anger, resentment or feelings of failure
- Clients who have unrealistically high expectations of what the organisation can offer
- Dealing with callers seeking quick easy solutions to long term and complex problems
- Dealing by telephone with people who are ill, distressed, afraid, in a panic or on medication
- Dealing with the friends and families of clients who may be concerned or feel inadequate in relation to the large organisation from which they are seeking help
- Working with people who get what they want by expressing violence
- Exercising power to restrict the freedom of individuals
- Enforcing legislation.

Staff more usually face a series of combined risk factors, such as working under pressure with distressed, demanding clients, in isolation from colleagues and other support. On top of these they may experience sexism and or racism.

How to assess the risk of phone rage in your workplace

Under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, employers must assess health and safety risks to identify what steps they need to take to reduce them. The risk of verbal abuse should be assessed in the same way as for any other hazard; employers must take action to remove or minimise that risk.

Just because an employer is unaware of verbal abuse at work does not mean that there is not a problem. The HSE has found that incidents regarded as isolated, upon further investigation, often reveal under-reporting with a wider range of jobs affected than at first thought.

But staff will not report incidents unless they are confident of how their report will be received by management. Many have the fear and some the experience, that involvement in a call which has broken down will be seen as their failure. Others may be distressed by the experience and believe that reporting it will add to that distress, particularly where no clear preventative action takes place.

For these reasons, the reporting and recording of all abusive calls should be established as part of an overall strategy that can be seen to be tackling this serious work-related risk. All workers are included particularly those who work in other employers premises.

Risk assessment and audit tool

HSE guidance (www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg163.pdf) suggests the following five-step approach to assessing the risk of violence.

Step 1 Identify the hazards

Step 2 Decide who might be harmed

Step 3 Evaluate the risks and decide on precautions

Step 4 Record your findings and implement them

Step 5 Review your assessment and update if necessary

Step one – Identify the hazards

- Ask your employees or their representatives what they think. They may have experiences you are not aware of. Surveys are a useful way to gain information on the potential for work-related violence. Staff should be kept informed of any survey results to demonstrate that the problem is being taken seriously.
- Are there contributory factors which can be eliminated such as queuing, understaffing, over managed staff, procedures which are not customer friendly, poor communication skills, equipment breakdown, repeat offenders
- For advice, call the Scottish Centre for Healthy Working Lives 0800 019 2211 or visit www.sahw.co.uk/main-section/workplace-topics/violence.cfm, for a free service for managers and staff of small and medium-sized enterprises providing practical advice on workplace health and safety or visit their website or contact the Customer Contact Association (www.cca.org.uk) or the Telephone Helplines Association (www.helplines.org.uk). The HSE publish practical guidance on where hazards occur and how to control them (www.hse.gov.uk).

Step two – Decide who might be harmed

All workers are at risk of verbal abuse if they engage with the public, and the attrition effect of persistent incidents over a period of time can have a distressing effect on individuals.

However, there are also those who can be particularly vulnerable, such as:

- New or young workers, including voluntary staff
- Part time or sessional workers may miss out on briefings on new policies
- Lone workers and staff working in their own home
- Those who work in other employers' premises

Step three – Evaluate the risks

Existing preventative measures and current ways of working should be checked to determine if they are still adequate. A combination of factors is often the cause of phone rage.

- the type and level of training, information and support provided
- the working environment
- the processes involved in dealing with callers
- dealing with repeat offenders, e.g. logging details for future use or removing services

Step four - Record your findings and implement them

A written record of the main findings of the risk assessment should be recorded. This provides a useful working document for managers and staff and should include the hazards identified. For example:

- clients with a history of abusive behaviour
- high risk times of the day, week, month or year
- the call handlers exposed
- any existing preventative measures in place
- an evaluation of the remaining risks
- any additional measures needed
- the person responsible for implementing these measures
- the date by which things will be done
- how staff will be informed of the outcome

Step five – Review and revise the assessment

The risk assessment should be checked regularly to ensure that it remains valid and reflects the current work situation. The HSE believes that this process works best if it is part of the day to day management of health and safety. If incidents occur or the job or circumstances change then the risk assessment should be reviewed to consider additional measures needed.

Setting up reporting procedures

Reporting need not be a long complicated process. Indeed the simpler it is the better. It is important to make sure that the results are used to encourage staff and managers to use it properly to measure the number of verbal and / or physical assaults on staff to help plan for the future. Over complicated forms have been identified as discouraging both.

By using an effective system and asking for staff co-operation trends can be identified and planned for, such as specific times of the year, days of the week, or common operational situations. The Safer Scotland campaign website (www.infoscotland.com/violenceatwork) can provide more information on reporting procedures and a model designed for phone rage is contained in this guidance tool.

The HSE suggests that the following information is gathered as a minimum:

- an account of what happened
- the circumstances in which the incident took place
- details of the victim, the customer and anyone else involved in the call
- the outcome, including working time lost to both the individual and the organisation.

The first step in tackling the issue of violence at work is to find out what the problem is. The causes can be varied and may be the result of a number of factors. Carrying out a risk assessment is not necessarily complex, but it must be systematic if it is to achieve its aims.

The purpose of carrying out a risk assessment is to identify the:

- extent and nature of the risks
- factors which contribute to the risks
- changes necessary to eliminate or control the risks.

Staff who carry out assessments should be competent, have the training, time, resources and decision-making authority to do the task effectively.

www.sahw.co.uk/main-section/workplace-topics/violence.cfm

Developing a Workplace Policy

It is in employers' interests to develop policies to prevent violence at work, not only because health and safety law requires this but also because of the costs that can be incurred when they fail to do so such as:

- increased absenteeism
- the loss of investment in training and of experience with more staff leaving
- the cost of legal compensation
- bad publicity
- low morale.

Your policy should start with a clear commitment to prevention and make clear the methods of risk assessment, arrangements to achieve safe workplaces and effective reporting and monitoring. It should also identify the responsibilities of managers and supervisors, training, monitoring and support for employees.

As a minimum the following points should be included in the policy:

- a definition of work-related violence
- a statement from the employer that makes it clear that all verbal abuse towards staff is unacceptable, and will not be seen as an employee's failure or an inevitable part of the job
- methods for assessing the risks
- arrangements to achieve safe working methods and workplaces
- arrangements for consultation and communication with staff
- reporting and recording procedures
- responsibilities of managers, supervisors and staff
- training for management and employees
- action to be taken if a violent incident occurs
- support for employees such as debriefing or counselling
- time for call handlers to collect their thoughts before taking another call
- arrangements for monitoring and reviewing the policy.

Consult employees

Developing a policy on the management and prevention of violence will help employers avoid these costs. However, policies should not be developed in isolation without proper consultation with employees. Staff work better if they have been involved in decisions, and only they have the invaluable experience of the job and the risks. In addition, employers are legally required to consult safety representatives on matters of health and safety.

Informing Staff

Once agreed, the policy should be brought to the attention of all staff. Employers can do this by circulating the policy, holding staff meetings, and including it in induction and regular health and safety briefings.

Legal Solutions

The information provided in the preceding chapters sets out many practical ways for organisations to meet legal requirements but it is important to remember that for persistent offenders there is the possibility of legal recourse.

While prevention is always better than cure, workers who are threatened and abused at work have legal remedies under the civil and criminal law available to them. These can result in damages against the employer or individuals and unwelcome publicity for organisations that are found not to have taken preventative action.

Anyone considering legal action should of course take independent legal advice.

The emphasis in this guidance is on providing practical workplace solutions to the challenges that phone rage place on workers and their employers. However, legal solutions have a role to play in addressing this issue although they will rarely be the remedy in the first instance, with the obvious exception of safety law.

Health and Safety law

The starting point in addressing risks to workers from phone rage is effective health and safety provision in the workplace. Since the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (HSWA) employers have had a duty to provide for the health and safety of their employees and this legislation covers those employees who face a predictable risk of verbal abuse.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992 introduced the concept of risk assessment, the removal of risk at source and the introduction of comprehensive preventative strategies to control those risks that cannot be eliminated. The key phrases are risk assessment and coherent overall preventative policy.

There are various other pieces of legislation which can be used including the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 (www.unison-scotland.org.uk/briefings/harassmentprotect.html)

You may use these forms as they appear or you may find them useful in helping you create your own.

Model Staff Survey Form

This form can be used as a basis for or adapted to help identify the extent of verbal abuse and threatening behaviour towards staff in your workplace.

To help us discuss the issue of verbal threats and violence (in this workplace) and minimise the risks for staff, we need more evidence of the extent and causes of violence against staff.

Please complete this confidential questionnaire and return it to:

A report on the findings of the survey will be made available to you by (date)

1 What department do you work in?

2 What is your job?

3 Are you worried about verbal abuse from clients in your job?
YES NO

4a In the last year have you suffered any of the following from clients in relation to your work? (If more than once, state how many times)

- Swearing which you found unacceptable
- Unjustifiable criticism
- Threats or verbal abuse
- Racial harassment
- Sexual harassment
- Rage

4b Describe details of incident(s) – when, where, whom, and what happened? You need not feel that you have to repeat abusive or upsetting language.

5 Do you think your Manager takes your concerns about violence seriously?
YES NO

6 Do you know if there is a policy for dealing with violence at work?
YES NO

7 Have you been given training on managing anger and / or rage?
YES NO

8 Have you been told how to report incidents, involving?
Verbal threats or abuse
YES NO
Racial and/or sexual harassment
YES NO

9 Are you aware of any measures that management have taken to deal with violence (give examples)?

10a Can you give an example of a call that caused you distress or upset?

10b What if any support were you given at the time?

10c What if any support would you liked to have received?

11 In more general terms what could be done to prevent violence to staff and improve the help given to staff following a violent incident?

12 Is there any more information or advice relating to violence at work that you would like to share?

Thank you for your co-operation.

Please return this form to:

Report of Verbal Abuse

Name of Organisation

Name of employee

Customer details

Date of incident

Time of incident

Additional evidence
e.g. tape of call,
or witness to call,
on loud speaker,
or keyed in

Contributory Factors

Action Taken
by Line Manager

Customer account tracked

 NO

In association with...

