
Prevention of Workplace Violence Policy

Department Policy Number

170 006

Effective Date

July 2, 2004

Purpose

To prevent the occurrence of violence in the workplace.

To ensure behaviours that intimidate, threaten, harass, abuse, injure or otherwise victimize employees or students are not tolerated.

To recognize that incidents of workplace violence may occur between fellow employees, between employees and members of the public, or between employees and supervisors, and that domestic violence may have an effect on the workplace.

To ensure that all Athabasca University executive, management and employees understand and meet ethical and legal obligations regarding workplace violence.

Definitions

Hazard Means a situation, condition, or thing that may be dangerous to the safety or health of employees.

Work Site Any location where Athabasca University business is performed is considered part of the work site, including traditional office and plant environments, field locations, collaborative sites, vehicles, or other off-site and non-traditional work locations, including working in the home office when activities are directly related to university business.

Workplace violence includes:

Abusive Statements Statements that are insulting, derogatory, demeaning, racist or sexist are abusive. They may not necessarily contain profanity.



- Coercion** Attempts to influence someone's judgment or pressure them to behave in ways that are illegal, immoral or inappropriate are coercive. Coercion may involve threatening to expose embarrassing personal information or spread false rumours.
- Direct Threats** A person telling another that he or she will commit a violent act against a specific person is making a direct threat.
- Harassment** Objectionable and unwelcome comments or actions directed towards a specific person or group of persons that serves no legitimate work or academic related purpose are considered harassment. Harassment may take many forms, including in-person contact, e-mail, voice-mail, phone calls, and stalking. Refer to the Harassment Policy for categories of harassment.
- Indirect Threats** A person hinting that "something might happen" to another, with harmful or negative consequences, is making an indirect threat.
- Intimidation** A person makes a statement or action, other than a direct or indirect threat, that causes another to fear for his or her own or another's safety.

Policy

The executive and management of Athabasca University (AU) recognize the potential for workplace violence and other aggressive behaviour directed at employees. Employees and students will receive information on the risk of violence and ongoing management support for a workplace environment that is free from violence. Appropriate steps will be taken to protect our employees and students from the risks associated with workplace violence and a commitment will be made to provide our employees with protection from the risks associated with workplace violence. Any act of violence committed by or against any employees or students will not be tolerated. Employees or students cannot be penalized, reprimanded or in any way criticized when acting in good faith while following the procedures set forth for addressing situations of workplace violence.

With recommendations from the Occupational Health and Safety Committee (OHSC), the Executive Group will:

Inform employees if they are working in an area where there is a potential for violence and identify violence related hazards that are specific to AU.

Ensure that regular hazard assessments are conducted to confirm that appropriate procedures are in place to eliminate or control hazards and to protect our employees from violence.

Management will:

Ensure that employees are trained in recognizing and responding to situations involving workplace violence.



Ensure that the employee is advised to consult a healthcare professional of the employees' choice for treatment or referral if the employee reports adverse symptoms resulting from workplace violence or is exposed to workplace violence.

Ensure that every incident of workplace violence is reported, investigated, and documented and that the document is retained for two years.

Employees will:

Become familiar with and follow the procedures that are in place to protect them from workplace violence.

Attend workplace violence prevention training programs.

Report all known or observed incidents of workplace violence immediately to their supervisor and the Human Resources Department (see the Harassment Policy).

Participate in work site hazard assessments and implementing procedures to eliminate or control hazards.

Regulation

N/A

Hazard Assessment Procedure

Part Two of the Alberta Occupational Health and Safety code states that the employer must assess the work site and identify existing or potential hazards. The assessment must be repeated at reasonably practicable intervals, or when a new work process is introduced, or when a work process or operation changes, or before the construction of a new work site.

The following process outlines the steps of the hazard assessment to be conducted.

Step 1 - Establish Hazard Assessment Team

The team assigned to assess hazards for workplace violence at AU will be composed of members representing a university wide perspective including members of the OHSC, management, front-line and high risk employees.

The hazard assessment team will be organized to facilitate the use of prudence in areas that have been identified as presenting increased risk factors at AU, that is, areas where employees are:

Working as educators or advisors or in other front-line services with students, potential students, or the general public.

Working alone or in small numbers.



Working with cash, cheques, and credit card information.

Working at times when there is limited security personnel available.

Working during periods of significant organizational change.

Step 2 - Review Previous Incidents of Violence

The hazard assessment team will identify previous incidents of workplace violence that have occurred within AU and gather information on both common and unique types of violent incidents that have occurred at other distance education or post-secondary educational institutions. Any issues or trends that emerge from the information collected must be identified and potential solutions noted.

Step 3 - Obtain Employee Input

Through methods such as one-on-one interviews, focus groups, employees surveys and work site inspections the hazard assessment team will collect and document information from employees about their experiences with workplace violence, their current concerns, and their suggestions for improvement.

Step 4 - Hazard Analysis

The hazard assessment team will analyze the information collected and identify workplace hazards at AU as well as possible means of elimination or control. In collaboration with affected employees, the hazard assessment team will rate workplace violence hazard vulnerabilities at AU according to frequency and impact on employees and AU operations (including negative impact on employee confidence, morale, credibility and productivity).

Step 5 - Evaluation and Hazard Control

At the completion of the hazard assessment, the hazard assessment team will prioritize the workplace violence hazards that have been identified, evaluate possible means of elimination or control, and make recommendations to the executive and management of AU. The executive and management of AU must then implement measures to eliminate or control hazards that have been identified as required by the Alberta Occupational Health and Safety Code. Control measures may be, first, engineering controls, which are physical such as installation of security devices or systems; second, administrative controls which are procedural such as best practice guidelines and response plans.

Develop a Response Plan

Following the completion of the first hazard assessment for prevention of workplace violence at AU, a Response Plan will be developed which will address:

Procedures for reporting incidents of workplace violence or potential workplace violence.



Identification of those responsible for responding to and managing reported incidents of workplace violence.

Procedures for responding to and managing reported incidents of workplace violence, including investigation and documentation.

Support available to victims of workplace violence.

Employee Training

Train managers and supervisors to respond to and manage reported incidents of workplace violence. The manager will ensure that employees are instructed on:

How to recognize workplace violence.

Policies, procedures, and work site arrangements that minimize or eliminate work site violence.

Appropriate responses to work site violence such as how to obtain assistance including counselling or a health professional of their choice.

Procedures for reporting, investigating, and documenting work site violence.

Approved by

Executive Group

Amended Date/Motion No.

Related References, Policies, and Procedures

Harassment Policy for Employees

[Non-Academic Misconduct Policy](#)

Security Procedures

[Occupational Health and Safety Policy](#)

Applicable Legislation/Regulation

[Alberta Occupational Health and Safety Act, Regulations and Code 27 Violence, Code 28 Working Alone Policy](#)

[Alberta Workplace Health and Safety- Preventing Violence at Work: A guide to developing a workplace violence prevention program](#)

[Alberta Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act](#)

[University Collective Agreements](#)

[Workers Compensation Board](#)

Responsible Position/Department



Director, Human Resources

Keywords

violence in the workplace, Occupational Health and Safety, hazard assessment, hazards, harassment, workplace violence, front-line, high risk, response plan