

Institute of Conflict Management / Scottish Executive

Two day Foundation Certificate in Managing Work Related Violence

Report of the Fire and Rescue Service Training Pilot 6 and 7 April 2006

at Fife Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters

1 Introduction

Since 2004, the Scottish Executive has promoted a campaign in partnership with the Scottish Trade Union Congress (STUC) to protect staff who serve the public from the risk of violence from customers or clients. The work of the campaign is a part of the overall strategy including the Emergency Workers (Scotland) Act 2005 to promote the unacceptability of such behaviour and encourage staff and their employers across all relevant sectors to take a pro-active approach to dealing effectively with the issue.

2 Range of Partners

Scottish Executive / STUC joint Protecting Public Service Workers campaign

The campaign is the result of a partnership between the Scottish Trades Union Congress and works towards a series of recommendations contained in the Scottish Executive report Protecting Public Sector Workers: When the Customer **isn't** Right. This is available online and details are available in Annex A of this document. One of the recommendations which has proved through independent evaluation to have had a significant impact is a public awareness campaign to promote the unacceptability of abusing workers which uses poster and television advertising of bus and train staff, nurses, retail staff and firefighters. The report also recommends working to encourage employers to recognise the benefits of training staff in the front line in identifying potential aggression and in so doing be able to effectively defuse situations involving conflict before they develop.

Institute of Conflict Management

The Institute of Conflict Management (ICM) played an integral role in the development of National Occupational Standards (NOS) for the management of work related violence. The Standards provide employers with an insight into the key elements of an effective violence strategy and recognise the significant role training plays in this. They have also worked closely with the campaign and have provided expertise and advice to the team in the Scottish Executive.

Representative Bodies

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) and the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA) are also involved in initiatives to reduce assaults on firefighters on the fireground.

As part of the Scottish Executive campaign, a joint approach with the ICM was made to Fife Fire and Rescue Service (FFARS) with its representative bodies to pilot a training course aimed at all sections of the Service including operational personnel at incidents.

3 Background

Work related violence is now considered by many as one of the most serious occupational hazards facing staff working with the public. Teachers, nurses, transport workers and many others are reporting an increased level of attacks and aggression against them. In the previously mentioned Scottish Executive report it was highlighted that although this is seen as a significant problem few effective or consistent reporting mechanisms are in place to measure the extent of the problem.

The Fire Service is one area where it is recognised that operational firefighters are considered by some sections of the community to be ‘fair game’ for direct attacks but as with all other comparable sectors there appears to be an equally significant level of under reporting. Neither has there been any meaningful research into the issue or its causes. This makes it difficult not only to assess the problem but to put measures in place to combat it.

Currently in Fire and Rescue Services across Scotland statistics are gathered on attacks on fire crews and at the time of the course being carried out we were not aware of any Fire and Rescue Service that collated or published statistics related to other forms of violence in the workplace by members of the public.

The organisation with responsibility in the UK for enforcing legislation surrounding Work Related Violence (WRV) is the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and local authorities for premises which they regulate.

The HSE define WRV 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.**

Relevant Legislation

- Emergency Workers (Scotland) Act 2005
- Health and Safety at Work Act (1974)
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (1999)
- Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (1995)
- Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977
- Employment Rights Act 1996
- The Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations 1996

Health and Safety legislation places many important responsibilities on the employer to protect their staff and others using their premises. Under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, employers have a legal duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the

health, safety and welfare of their employees. The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 also require employers to consider the risks to employees, including protecting employees from exposure to reasonable foreseeable violence. Employers must:

- Establish the significance of the risk of violence and aggression;
- Identify what can be done to prevent or control the risk; and
- Produce a clear management plan to do achieve this.

The HSE report ‘Violence and aggression management training for trainers and managers’ estimates that:

“The damage done by workplace violence is not limited to the physical injury – and even death – that can result from a physical assault. All forms of workplace violence have a profound negative impact upon psychological well-being. Indeed, a growing body of evidence links verbal abuse, threat, and even fear of violence, with impaired health and well-being e.g. increased symptoms of feeling worn out and uptight, higher levels of burnout and withdrawal, lower job satisfaction, lower commitment to the organisation and greater intention to leave the job. Increased exposure to violence and aggression has also been linked to a number of negative health behaviours e.g. increased alcohol and cigarette consumption and impaired sleep patterns.”

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4 Training pilot - 'Managing Work Related Violence in the Fire and Rescue Service

Part of the work of the partnership between the STUC and the Scottish Executive is to source and/or promote good practice across different sectors in Scotland in training and prevention strategies. To this end the ICM invited the Scottish Executive to identify a Fire and Rescue Service to assist in fine tuning the already tried and tested course materials in this area which had been previously used in other emergency services as well as other public facing sectors.

Fife Fire and Rescue Service agreed to host the course which took place on 6th and 7th April 2006. Three other brigades were invited to participate but unfortunately were unable to do so.

Mr Gordon Culbert of the ICM led the training and Ms Linda Shanahan from the Scottish Executive / STUC also attended. Ten students from FFARS participated and these were

drawn from operational personnel, community fire safety department, training department and administration staff.

Agreement was reached with the FFARS Senior management Team prior to the course that issues emerging would be raised with the Team, representative bodies and elected members of Fife Council with a view to redressing them appropriately.

5 What the course covered

The course is based on the NOS “Managing Work Related Violence” and consists of four units entitled “Assessing the Risk of Violence to your Workers”, “Ensure your actions contribute to a positive and safe working environment”, “Protect yourself from the risk of violence at work” and “Respond to work related incidents”.

These are aimed at managers who have responsibility for staff and who are required by law to take into consideration their health and safety. A separate course is available for front line staff in dealing with violence or potential aggression as it occurs.

The elements of the units are set out below:

Unit 1. Assessing the Risk of Violence to Your Workers. This unit has three elements:

- 1.1 Identifying the triggers of violence
- 1.2 Assessing the level of risks and prepare an action plan
- 1.3 Review your assessment of risks

Unit 2. Ensure Your Actions Contribute to a Positive and Safe Working Environment.

This unit has two elements:

- 2.1 Identify the risk of violence in your working environment
- 2.2 Reduce the risk of violence in your working environment

Unit 3. Protect Yourself from the Risk of Violence at Work. This unit has two elements:

- 3.1 Help to de-escalate a potentially violent situation
- 3.2 Review the incidence for recording and monitoring purposes

Unit 4. Respond to Work Related Violent Incidents. This unit has two elements:

- 4.1 Resolve a violent situation

4.2 Follow procedures for evaluating violent incidents

6 Personal Experience of the Group participating in the pilot

The types of violence experienced by those attending the course ranged from life threatening and frightening situations to low level common types of incidents, which were more commonplace and where it was often considered 'not worth reporting' or simply 'part of the job'.

The following list is not exhaustive of the types of occurrences of attacks but are examples of some of the types of incidents experienced by the students of the course:

- being shot at by unknown assailants under cover of darkness
- bricks and debris being thrown
- deliberate fires set with gas canisters, etc in the fire
- interference with equipment
- verbal abuse at an incident
- to being shouted at in a face to face standoff in an enforcement situation
- being shouted at and threatened when supplying safety advice
- dealing with aggression at Fire Service open days
- being verbally abused over the telephone.

Those who had as part of their reference had contact with outside agencies, such as home carers, had first hand experience of training delivered to other staff in the Council who are regularly placed in situations where they are vulnerable to verbal or physical abuse often in the assailants on home. This had stood them in good stead but was limited to only a few members of the group.

No one in the group had been given specific Fire Service training on dealing with aggression from clients and some referred to having been moved across departments where their job had changed to working alone but had received no training other than an instruction to read the lone worker policy. This existing policy document was felt to be inadequate for its purpose.

Until a few years ago it had been common practice for trainees to complete their initial training in a culture of being shouted at and this was often referred to as being "verbally abused". This culture has changed and new training regimes have been introduced, and it was felt that this now means that trainees return from initial training aware of their rights and are less likely accept with abusive behaviour from either colleagues or the public.

All uniformed staff identified readily with the issue of being attacked at or proceeding to and from an operational incident although not all of those attending had considered violence against staff to be occurring in other contexts within the service.

There were different views on how operational situations are currently dealt with as most had at some time tried to turn the situation around using a range of measures developed

by watch managers and their crews. None of the measures discussed feature in a service policy other than the advice contained in directives issued prior to the period running up to 5th November when there are traditionally a higher level of attacks on firefighters than at other times of the year. These are generally aimed at removal of personnel from a dangerous situation once it has developed rather than around defusion of a potential incident of verbal or physical violence.

Due to efficiency measures and pressure to complete incidents it was not always possible to interact with youths in attendance in a positive way and there was a view that it is often easier to override their wishes rather than persuade them. This can lead to exacerbating an already potentially volatile situation and lead to staff being put in further danger.

Not everyone was aware that there was a lone working policy but all agreed that if they were looking for information on dealing with violence at work they would not consider that it would be found in the lone working policy.

Many examples were given of incidents of verbal abuse which had never been reported. No one was aware of any verbal abuse ever having been reported, and although there is a reporting system in place, the results are not published to staff and it is felt they are kept solely to be able to make performance returns on an annual basis.

The examples ranged from verbal abuse to all staff over the telephone – sometimes from their colleagues – as well as at operational incidents, delivering community fire safety advice and enforcing legislation and in reception areas. An instance was given where on a recruitment open day; some of those in attendance had not been given enough information to deal with a diverse range of enquiries, which meant that some members of the public had felt disgruntled. This had led to aggressive verbal aggravation towards Fire and Rescue Staff although none of this had been reported.

Reception procedure – the reception area in FFARS Headquarters is staffed generally by young members of staff, and although there is a panic button, it was installed several years before when the layout of reception was different. This meant that to activate it would mean that staff would have to place themselves relatively close to the perpetrator to do so. No risk assessment had taken place on this and administration staff were shocked to find that uniformed staff were unaware of the panic button or a procedure to follow should it be activated.

Data sharing across agencies with the Fife Council area was another issue where staff were not always clear on the ability to share information on potential clients who used the services of other departments of the Council. Government guidance on data sharing was made available to participants following completion of the course and can links can be found in Annex A.

7 Issues identified for Fife Fire and Rescue Service

- Training should include providing alternatives to the current mindset of some firefighters where on some occasions assumptions can be made that a group of youths are hostile. Dealing with perceived hostility with aggression can be an exacerbating factor in creating violent situations.
- Staff should be encouraged to report all instances of abuse including verbal abuse and regular feedback given across the service on the number of incidents occurring and what steps have been taken to deal with them and protect staff in the future. Examples of good practice that have been effective and the punishments given to offenders who have been prosecuted would also assist in keeping staff aware of the issue and the need to report accurately.
- A Standard Operating Procedure based on experience of current personnel should be drawn up to complement training for managers and front line staff in all sectors of the Service to cover all potential incidents of verbal or physical abuse or violence. This should also cover current guidance on data sharing across departments.
- Policy for pursuance by Police. Information on how Police pursue an incident and evidential requirements for a prosecution would be of assistance in determining when and how incidents should be reported. (Building a case against perpetrators was seen to be as important as gaining a conviction for a single incident.)
- Any policy document should contain stock phrases for dealing with difficult situations and people and staff are well equipped to share this information based on experiences in their daily working life.
- There will always be situations which will arise due to special circumstances. The needs of specific sections of the community including those with challenging behaviour require to be a fundamental part of any risk assessment process and training.
- Those staff in non-uniformed sectors of the service who worked remotely from headquarters were generally tracked due to lone working legislation but there was no known policy in place for uniformed staff who work alone. Urgent consideration should be given to developing the lone worker policy or providing a policy which deals specifically with violence containing a section of lone working.
- All areas of the service need to be risk assessed in respect of dealing with potential violence. There are many areas where this occurs already but this seemed to be anecdotal and it was felt needed to be put on a more formal footing. Reception in headquarters was identified as an area where this had occurred in the past but present arrangements were felt to be inadequate.

8 Feedback

Due to the structure and procedures in place in the Fire and Rescue Service in relation to Health and Safety and Risk Assessment for example, the Institute of Conflict Management believe that it should be relatively easy to implement effective policies for staff and maintain awareness of the issues surrounding potential and real aggression in the workplace.

Raising awareness of staff to all types of aggression and the part they can play in defusing potentially volatile situations would assist greatly in equipping staff across the Service to do this confidently and effectively.

On completion of the course students stated that they felt better informed as how to roll out future training to front line staff which took cognisance of all relevant factors. They also expressed the hope that the information gleaned from the course would assist in the formulation of an effective policy which would protect staff in the future and assist in raising awareness of how difficult situations and verbal and physical aggression can develop needlessly.

All participants were asked to complete a Fife Fire and Rescue Service evaluation of the course to enable independent monitoring of the course content. They were also offered a draft copy of this report for comment. It is intended to carry out a public presentation of the course accreditation in order to reward the participants publicly and promote the overall campaign across not only the Fire Service in Scotland but in other relevant sectors.

A meeting took place with officers from Fife Fire and Rescue Service on 15th May to discuss what outcomes could be implemented and how the materials in the course would be used to enable staff to equip themselves with the necessary information and resources to ensure that future incidents could be minimised and staff better protected.

The Scottish Executive and the Institute of Conflict Management would like to thank Fife Fire and Rescue Service providing the facilities for the course and the members who of staff who participated so enthusiastically to enable this exercise to be carried out.

Scottish Executive/Institute of Conflict Management

15 May 2006

Annex A Useful web links

Scottish Executive Campaign website

www.infoscotland.com/violenceatwork

Institute of Conflict Management

www.conflictmanagement.org

Protecting Public Service Workers: When the Customer isn't Right

www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/justice/ppsw-00.asp

Safe and Healthy Working

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

Suzy Lamplugh Trust

www.suzylamplugh.org.uk

Health and Safety Executive

www.hse.gov.uk/violence/index.htm

www.hse.gov.uk/research/rrhtm/rr440.htm

Scottish Executive Guidance on Data Sharing and Standards

www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Government/DataStandardsAndeCare

Annex B Glossary of Terms

CFOA	Chief Fire Officer's Association
FBU	Fire Brigades Union
FFARS	Fife Fire and Rescue Service
HSE	Health and Safety Executive
ICM	Institute of Conflict Management
NOS	National Occupational Standards
STUC	Scottish Trades Union Congress
WRV	Work Related Violence