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Policies and Procedures

This material is part of a collection that documents the harassment, discrimination, and retaliation perpetrated against Alaska's women research scientists by their supervisor, with full knowledge (and arguably, "tacit approval") of their federal employer, the USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS)

Title: Preventing Workplace Violence

Number: 122.1

Date: July 21, 2000

Originating Office: Deputy Administrator for Administrative and Financial Management

Distribution: REE Offices in Headquarters, Areas, and Locations

This P&P describes the essential elements of, and assigns responsibilities for, identification, prevention, and response to threats or incidents of violence in the workplace.

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1. REFERENCE

USDA Handbook on Workplace Violence Prevention and Response, December 1998.

2. ABBREVIATIONS

- WPVP - Workplace Violence Prevention
- HPPPA - High Priority Potential Problem Areas
- TMRT - Threat Management and Response Team
- EAP - Employee Assistance Program

The USDA Agricultural Research Service administrators and Human Resources personnel were notified about Alberto Pantoja's unlawful harassment and intimidation of the women research scientists in his unit, beginning in 2003 and continuing until 2010 when the last woman research scientist quit to escape the ongoing retaliation being perpetrated against her.

3. DEFINITIONS

Workplace Violence. Workplace violence can be any act of physical violence, threats of physical violence, harassment, intimidation, or other threatening, disruptive behavior that occurs at the worksite. Workplace violence can affect or involve employees, visitors, contractors, and other non-Federal employees.

Threat Management and Response Team (TMRT). Agency designated employees, supervisors, and WPVP professionals responsible for assessing and formulating action plans for responding to threats of violence in the workplace, and conducting workplace violence “post event” evaluations of incidents.

REE Prevention of Workplace Violence Oversight Committee. A committee including a designated representative from each REE agency; the Chief, Employee Relations Branch, Administrative and Financial Management (AFM)- Human Resources Division (HRD); the Assistant Director, Facilities Division, AFM; one Area Administrative Officer, ARS; and the Civil Rights Staff. (Others may be added as necessary.)

Employee Assistance Program (EAP). A program within the Employee Relations Branch (ERB), HRD, to serve the agencies in the resolution of conflict, specifically those problems which include misconduct, performance, and labor/management relations.

Local Legal Authorities. Municipal, County, State, and Federal law enforcement offices, having local jurisdiction, or public safety personnel, such as police, fire fighters, arson investigators, bomb threat investigators, etc., of the jurisdictions where USDA-REE employees are located.

4. POLICY

REE will not tolerate threats or acts of violence against persons or property. All threats of violence will be taken seriously and reported to line management in a timely manner. Incidents of workplace violence shall be grounds for serious disciplinary action (including removal) and possible criminal charges.

5. RESPONSIBILITIES

REE Agency Heads will:

- ensure policies and procedures to prevent and respond to workplace violence are implemented at all worksites;
- establish threat management and response teams (TMRT) at appropriate levels within the agency;
- designate an individual to serve on the REE Prevention of Workplace Violence Oversight Committee;
- identify and report Highest Priority Potential Problem Areas (HPPPA) in their organizations to the Chief, ERB, HRD, AFM; and
- assure all agency employees are trained in the prevention of workplace violence.

Deputy Administrator for Administrative and Financial Management will:

- serve as executive sponsor of the REE Prevention of Workplace Violence Oversight Committee;
- develop employee workplace violence prevention training; and
- serve as the REE representative on the USDA Workplace Violence Prevention and Response Advisory Committee.

Research, Education and Economics Prevention of Workplace Violence Oversight Committee will:

- provide oversight for all workplace violence prevention activities in the REE mission area in support of agency programs and departmental initiatives;
- provide advice and assistance in support of the AFM Deputy Administrator's participation in the Department's Workplace Violence Prevention and Response Advisory Committee; and
- serve as liaison between the Department's Workplace Violence Prevention Coordinator and the REE agencies.

Managers, Supervisors, and Location Officials will:

- take all threats seriously;

- inform employees of workplace violence policies;
- ensure employees know specific procedures for dealing with threats and emergencies;
- respond to potential threats by utilizing the appropriate resources, e.g., local law enforcement personnel, EAP counselors, Human Resources staff, etc.;
- ensure the safety and security plans for local and field sites are in place and communicated to all employees;
- identify in advance the types of workplace violence situations which may occur and how to deal with such situations appropriately;
- report incidents of workplace violence to line management and the agency/Area TMRT; and
- conduct post incident reviews and analyses.

Employees will:

- treat each other and their customers with dignity and respect;
- secure their own workplace;
- familiarize themselves with local procedures for dealing with threats and emergencies; and
- report any threats, physical or verbal, to their supervisors immediately.

AFM Human Resources Employee Relations Staff will:

- provide supervisors with technical guidance to determine what course of administrative action/discipline is appropriate in specific situations involving violence or the threat of violence;
- provide mediation and conflict resolution services and training when appropriate;
- provide guidance on employee assistance counseling to employees and supervisors; and
- participate on incident response teams in the event of a violent situation.

AFM Facilities Division is responsible for issuing, monitoring, and evaluating compliance with security, health and safety, and facility protection plans. (See P&P 240.3 - Physical Protection, Security, and Conduct While on REE Facilities.)

6. PROCEDURES

Security Awareness. Physical security and employee safety procedures are important elements in an overall approach to workplace violence prevention. As such, ARS managers and supervisors will assure:

- security procedures such as the location and operation of safety devices, alarms, and personal security measures are discussed with employees on a regular basis;
- worksite emergency numbers including local legal authorities, fire/rescue, and medical facilities are posted and provided to all employees;

- buildings, grounds, and work areas are assessed to assure employee/visitor safety and security. Guard services, identification badges, key card access systems and other security measures should be considered as circumstances warrant.
- safety and security measures for field personnel are reviewed commensurate with potential threats. Field employees should be trained in security awareness and safety guidelines appropriate to potentially threatening situations. When working alone in remote or potentially dangerous worksites, employees must keep their supervisors and coworkers informed of their location and activities.
- when agency work locations are controlled by outside organizations; i.e., General Services Administration; other Federal/private agencies, or universities, that supervisors and employees coordinate activities with the designated official responsible for managing the organization's occupant emergency plan providing procedures for protecting life and property under emergency conditions.
- employees understand supervisors are to be notified immediately of any situation considered to be threatening or potentially violent.
- local legal authorities are summoned in any instance of immediate threat or danger.

Threat Assessment

Determining the seriousness of a potentially violent or stressful situation and how best to respond is the basis of threat assessment and preparedness.

Since it is impossible to know with any degree of certainty whether a particular threat will be carried out, agency management and employees must always take any threat seriously and act as though the person may carry out the threat.

Under most circumstances it is the local employee's coworkers and supervisors who are most likely to notice a change in behavior or hear references which might be the precursor to a violent or stressful event in their workplace.

It is the purpose of threat assessment and response to provide employees, supervisors, and coworkers with information on potential threats that might arise in the workplace, and most importantly, provide guidance on managing incidents or workplace violence in the event they do occur, in a way that protects employees.

Agency Heads should determine at what level threat assessment will occur for their agencies. This responsibility should be formally assigned to a responsible party, who, depending upon an agency's

organizational structure, geographic location, and/or local need, could be an individual supervisor, team leader, group of interested employees, or a more formal threat management and response team consisting of multi-disciplinary members from different organizations, both internal and external to the agency.

The USDA Handbook on WPVP and Response suggests Threat Management and Response Teams may include representatives from:

- Management
- Employee Relations
- Employee Assistance Program
- Law Enforcement, and/or Security
- Civil Rights/EEO
- Safety and Health Management
- Occupational Health Nurse or Other Medical Representatives
- Unions, where applicable
- Office of General Counsel
- Office of Inspector General
- Conflict Resolution Office

Responding to Potentially Violent Situations

Response to violent threats/incidents must be timely, appropriate to the situation, and implemented in a manner which protects all employees.

The responsible, onsite management official shall:

- notify local emergency response personnel; i.e., law enforcement; fire and rescue; and/or medical personnel, as appropriate, to the threat or danger -- (**NOTE:** This does not preclude employees involved in potential or real threats of violent situations from notifying emergency response personnel);
- initiate local occupant emergency plan, as appropriate;
- activate the local Threat Management and Response Team;
- request that the TMRT evaluate the incident and actions taken to determine if appropriate actions were taken; and
- report 'lessons learned' in regard to the incident to local employees and the REE Prevention of Workplace Violence Oversight Committee.

-/Sd/-

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