

# Good Practice Guide

## Hostage Situations

**This guide supports government organisations to think about how they might respond to the risk of hostage situations in government workplaces.**

### Overview

A hostage situation occurs when a person holds another person against their will by force or the threat of force (whether that threat is direct or indirect).

These situations usually arise as a result of a desperate person trying to take total control over a person and/or situation.

A threatening or violent situation involving a customer can turn into hostage situation - particularly if the offender feels trapped or under threat.

The first step is to try and avoid circumstances that could lead to such situations. Other good practice examples and guidance exist on how government organisations can deal effectively with dangerous or hostile customers (for example, some organisations train their staff on how to de-escalate situations).

It is good practice for government organisations to consider the risk of hostage situations as part of their organisational risk assessment. Government organisations should consider the extent to which they can minimise the risk of hostage situations through:

- service design and delivery
- environmental/physical security fit out
- customer risk profiling and threat assessments.

However, if a hostage situation does emerge, a key aspect of surviving such a situation is to comply with the wishes of the hostage taker, and rely on the fact that an effective response is in train which should ultimately resolve the situation.

Successfully resolving a hostage situation without harm depends on swift and deliberate responses by the organisation involved and emergency services.

It is therefore important for government organisations to consider the risk of hostage situations and to have clear plans and procedures for responding to these situations. Government organisations should also assess how regularly they need to test these plans and procedures and ensure

everyone is familiar with and can respond in line with them.

### Planning and procedures

If this assessment reveals a risk of hostage situations, it is good practice for government organisations to develop effective plans and procedures for enabling a swift and effective response to such situations. It is good practice for such plans and procedures to cover the following:

#### Key objectives of the hostage planning

It is good practice for plans and procedures to cover the key objectives of the hostage planning, such as:

- preserving life as a priority
- maintaining the health, safety, and well-being of everyone who is involved in the hostage situation including workers, others working in the location, customers, and other members of the public
- ensuring the hostage taker is swiftly and safely apprehended
- ensuring subsequent legal proceedings can effectively hold the hostage taker to account.

#### Key personnel responsibilities

It is good practice for plans and procedures to cover the responsibilities, obligations, and duties of key personnel within the organisation in terms of responding to hostage situations. At a minimum, plans should cover:

- the Chief Executive and senior management
- site management
- communications personnel
- any security personnel (including any security guards)
- front-line workers (including clear and unambiguous advice that front-line workers can rely on when dealing with a hostage situation)
- training and support.

#### Key actions

Plans and procedures should include a detailed breakdown of key actions such as:

- escalating awareness of an emerging situation

- notifying emergency services
- taking immediate steps to secure the immediate vicinity (including neighbours and unwary members of the public).

make careful risk assessments about potentially dangerous customers.

### **Maintenance and testing**

Plans and procedures should cater for the maintenance and testing of plans and procedures including:

- timing and scope of reviews
- drills and rehearsals
- the mechanisms through which learnings and adaptations are made
- clear documentation and testing of links to emergency responses, e.g. ensuring communications arrangements with emergency responders are in place.

### **Communication**

Plans and procedures should cover how the organisation will effectively communicate to ensure the right people get the right information in the right way at the right time.

### **Post-incident systems**

Plans and procedures should include systems for dealing effectively with the aftermath of a hostage situation including:

- incident debriefing and evidence collection
- trauma/psychological support for people affected by the situation
- collaborative debriefing of other agencies such as neighbouring organisations or with emergency services to ensure effective learning.

### **Advice to frontline workers on survival**

It is good practice for government organisations to ensure hostage planning gives front-line workers, exposed to the hazard of being taken hostage, access to reliable, and practical advice and training on surviving such events. Perhaps the most important way to deal with hostage situations is to avoid them in the first place.

Front line workers play a role in this in the way they deal with people. They are best placed, for example, to de-escalate situations before they get out of hand (some organisations provide specific training in de-escalation although some organisations specifically do not – see guidance note on de-escalation). They are also well-placed to