

PERSONAL SAFETY

Procedure for Working Alone

The aim of developing a personal Safety and Security protocol is to minimise the risk of harm to staff whenever they may be working on their own.

Introduction

A protocol is simply a set of rules. In this case the rules are designed to improve personal safety for staff working outside the office but within office hours or inside the office but not in normal working hours. Office hours in this department are between 8.00am and 6.00pm, although some people are present in the office earlier or later than this. It would be extremely unusual for outside work to fall outwith 9.00 am to 5.00pm.

The protocols mainly deal with preparation before leaving the office, working practices outside and finishing work. Those dealing with electoral/admin work are less complicated as staff are seldom out on their own and with the exception of canvassing duties they can choose their own timings and are likely to be known safe destinations. For canvassers the procedures will be different.

Inside the Office

You will rarely be working alone in the office but it is possible that you could be in early or leave late and be the only person in the office. The cleaners should be in the building until 6.30pm and will normally lock the building when they leave. Should you be working beyond 6.30pm you will require a front door key and will also require to know the procedure for setting the alarm. Tell the cleaners you will lock the building.

It is also possible for example for management team members to be in the office on their own preparing for a meeting during a public holiday. In these circumstances you should ensure that the inner front door is closed but the outer storm doors are not locked (they may need to be a fire exit). This would also indicate to emergency services that there may be someone in the building.

If working late or on a holiday unexpectedly, make sure someone (e.g. a family member) knows where you are and when you are expected to return. You should also have a copy of the Business Continuity Team contact details and be familiar with the procedures in the event of any fire or other emergency

Outside the Office

Under our current protocols it is possible that something could happen to a member of staff and we could be unaware of the fact for some time. Although the risk of serious harm is most unlikely (the number of incidents in the last twenty years confirm this) we should cater for the possibility.

TECHNICAL STAFF

Before Leaving the Office

The valuation team keeps a survey book. Before leaving the office (the night before if going straight out) fill in the following details:

- The area within which you will be working e.g. Central Stirling, Grangemouth, Polmont and The Braes. Stirling Rural, Falkirk is too vague!
- The anticipated time of return or the expectation of no return to office.

In addition, leave a note on your desk with the following information:

- A note of the geographical units to be visited in the order in which they will be visited and
- A note of the details of any appointments i.e. name address, time.

If for some reason you make significant changes to your schedule, you should phone your Line Manager with details of the change. Staff must carry a mobile phone with them at all times.

When Out

You will be visiting both non-domestic and domestic properties when out on survey. It might seem that there is less likelihood of difficulties at non-domestic properties as there may well be a number of people about, staff and customers. However, the principles remain the same.

For personal safety reasons you should not visit unoccupied properties unaccompanied, such as when keys are provided for access. In such circumstances you should be accompanied by the Proprietor/Tenant or Occupier or their agent.

Clearly identify yourself and your reason for being there. Be polite and courteous and try to obtain the information you need without unduly extending your visit. Make alternative arrangements if the taxpayer finds your visit unsuitable. Remember to show your identification.

You have probably (perhaps without realising it) carried out and continue to carry out your own risk assessment. So if something doesn't feel right it probably isn't. Leave the premises and make a subsequent visit accompanied. Be aware of your surroundings and of your exit route. Personal alarms are available to any member of staff who wishes to carry one.

See Appendix A:

- Anticipating violent behaviour
- Defusing the situation
- Non-verbal communication skills
- Verbal communication skills

Return to the Office

(a) By 4.30pm

Sign off on the survey book e.g. returned @ 16.20 hours. So if you leave for home and nobody sees you, when the book is checked it is clear you have returned.

(b) After 4.30pm

Ring the section at 16.30 hours **at the latest** to advise of the situation and the anticipated time of return. If there is another call to make, give the name and address.

(c) Not returning

Ring the section at 16.30 hours **at the latest** to advise of the situation. If there is another call to make, give the name and address.

*** In (b) and (c) whoever takes the call puts an appropriate note in the survey book.**

At 16.30 Hours

The senior staff member present at this time will ring those staff who have not been in touch with the office by this time. They will try three times. If they cannot contact the staff member they will try the home number.

If the staff member is not there or there is no response they will contact the Police to advise that there is a problem, and give location, car and any other available information.

All staff on survey must be aware of these procedures.

(d) Working Outwith 9.00am to 5.00pm

These arrangements are in place to cover working hours. They do not cover the period outside these hours and will not work since the switchboard will not be manned.

Staff who might need to travel or make the occasional visit outwith working hours should advise their Line Manager accordingly and may wish to arrange company for such visits.

Staff should not make arrangements outside working hours if possible.

ADMINISTRATION & ELECTORAL TEAM AND IT TEAM

Before Leaving the Office

Inform your Line Manager, Principal Administration Officer or Senior Administration Officer where you are going and when you expect to return.

Leave this information in a note on your desk.

The Management Team have considered the safety requirements of Electoral Registration Staff who may make a number of visits to specific houses or homes at particular times of the year. It is felt that such visits are likely to be different in character and frequency to those visits by Technical staff but the same principles of advising either the Line Manager, Principal Administration Officer or Senior Administration Officer of where and when visits were being made and likely return time. The rules about no or late return after 16:30 should be the same as the Technical Team

In the case of canvassers they should advise a family member or friend of the properties that they intend to visit that day and a likely return time. They should also carry a mobile phone and notify the relevant person if they will be late returning. Training will be given on personal safety at induction training. Canvassers will also be supplied with personal alarms which are to be carried at all times.

PRINCIPAL ADMINISTRATION OFFICER

Any out of office working must be advised in advance to a Senior Administration Officer so that they know where he/she can be contacted. For instance the location of any meeting and likely time of return (or the likelihood of non-return) to the office that day should be known and meetings should be noted in the MS Outlook calendar

ASSESSOR/ASSISTANT ASSESSOR

Any out of office working must be advised in advance to the Executive Assistant. For instance the location of any meeting and likely time of return (or the likelihood of non-return) to the office that day should be known. Assessor and Assistant Assessor should be contactable by landline at the location or by mobile. There is no need have a log book as the appointments should be noted in the MS Outlook calendars which are accessible to the Executive Assistant.

ANTICIPATING VIOLENT BEHAVIOUR

Although some attacks cannot be predicted, it is possible to identify certain behaviour that may be the prelude to an assault, such as:

- Increased restlessness, body tension, pacing about, excitability
- Raised voice/shouting, erratic movements
- Tense angry facial expression
- Refusal to communicate, withdrawal
- Verbal threats or gestures
- Involving others in support

DEFUSING THE SITUATION

The person you are visiting may be upset about something we have done (increased valuation or banding) or just be wound up about various issues and take it out on you as representing “the Taxman”. You can help in this situation by:

- Appear and remain calm and self-controlled
- Ensure your own “body language” is not threatening
- Engage the other person in conversation
- Maintain adequate distance
- Know when to leave

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

You should be aware of your body language and the signals you send to other people:

Eye Contact:

This should be appropriate, as in normal interaction. It is important not to stare but equally important not to avoid eye contact.

Body Position:

A head-on, face-to-face position is confrontational and aggressive so avoid it. Turning the body at an angle to the aggressor and putting body weight on your back foot changes the profile of the body and assists with defensive responses and is a signal that aggression is not intended.

Personal Space:

An aggressive individual has an increased requirement for personal space. Being too close tends to encroach upon the person and increases tension.

Tone of Voice

Speak slowly, in a calm voice, using short clear sentences and simple language. However avoid sounding patronising or superior. Speak, as far as is practicable, as one adult to another.

VERBAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

When attempting to de-escalate potentially aggressive situations you must communicate effectively and purposefully. The following guidelines should be followed:

- Allow the individual space and time to voice concerns/complaints
- Demonstrate concern and understanding through active listening.
- Reflect the individual's mood to acknowledge their feelings.

SUMMARY

The above are tried and tested techniques for dealing with various aggressive attitudes we occasionally meet. Do bear in mind that the vast majority of the public we deal with do not cause any difficulties of this nature. Also bear in mind that we do many of these things automatically. Life has already taught us how to interact with other people. The purpose of this paper is to raise or rekindle your awareness.

