



## HUMAN RESOURCES POLICY

Title: Workplace Violence Prevention Policy #: WPV 09-01  
Adopted Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Last Review: April 2009

### I. POLICY

This policy shall be known as the Harnett County Workplace Violence Prevention Policy. Harnett County recognizes that employees are its most important asset, and that a place of employment reasonably safe from violence is fundamental to the well-being, health and productivity of our employees and citizens. Harnett County shall use reasonable efforts to deter the threat of workplace violence and to provide a safe workplace for employees and citizens. The County of Harnett will not tolerate threats or acts of violence against persons and/or property. This policy applies to all employees of Harnett County while in any place related to County employment or conducting County business. Failure to comply with this policy shall be a direct violation of County policy and of the terms and conditions of County employment, and may result in discipline up to and including termination of employment.

### II. PURPOSE

Harnett County recognizes that a safe environment is fundamental to a productive and positive workplace. Harnett County adopts this policy to define prohibited acts of violence or threats of violence, to give guidance to managers and supervisors in recognizing and reacting to threats of violence or violence, to provide procedures to deal with threats of violence or violence that may occur during business hours or on its premises, and to provide for review and evaluation of incidents which may occur.

The County of Harnett encourages employees to bring their disputes or differences with other employees to the attention of their supervisors or the Human Resources & Risk Management Director before the situation escalates into potential violence. The County of Harnett is eager to assist in the resolution of employee disputes, and will not discipline employees for raising such concerns.

### III. DEFINITIONS

- A. "Workplace violence" is any assaultive act within the workplace including intentional harassment, physical attack, communicating threats, and/or verbal or written threats of such acts, as well as actions that are perceived as violent or threatening and which investigation confirms were reasonably interpreted to be violent. Workplace violence may include, without limitation, stalking, threatening communications, shoving, kicking, spitting or violation of restraining orders. Workplace violence does not include agitated bodily gestures or loud or rude verbalization in and of themselves, but would include that conduct directed at another person in such a manner as to put a person of reasonable fortitude in fear of harm.

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- B. “Threatened violence” is the legally unjustified threat (i.e., not in self-defense) of imminent or future force, or of imminent or future physical injury, on another under circumstances where the intention or ability to carry out the threat appears reasonably credible, or reasonably puts a person of reasonable fortitude in fear of imminent harm.
- C. “Threat” means an avowed or apparent present determination or intent to injure presently or in the future, whether or not subject to a contingency under the maker’s control.
- D. “Violence Incident Report” is the form used by the County of Harnett, which shall be completed for all reported occurrences of violence and/or threats of violence within the scope of this policy.
- E. “Incident Assessment Team” is the team that consists of: County Manager or designee, Human Resources & Risk Management Director, Risk Management & Safety Coordinator, Staff Attorney or designee.
- F. “Employer workplace violence restraining order” is an order obtained pursuant to the provisions of Article 23 of Chapter 95 of the North Carolina General Statutes.

#### **IV. GENERAL**

- A. Harnett County seeks to provide a work environment which is reasonably safe for employees and other persons in the workplace. Harnett County recognizes, however, that it does not act as the guarantor of the safety of employees and other persons in its workplaces.
- B. Harnett County will not tolerate threats or acts of violence against persons or property. Harnett County will have a “zero tolerance” policy towards threatened or actual violence.
- C. Workplace violence may be “stranger” violence against an employee where a stranger to the workplace threatens or commits violence.
- D. Workplace violence can be “client” violence against an employee where a client or customer threatens or commits violence.
- E. Workplace violence may be “employee” violence between employees, including against a supervisor or manager. This may include subcontractors coming to the work site.
- F. Workplace violence may be “domestic” violence involving employees. This may include spouses or domestic partners coming to the work site.

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### **V. VIOLENCE PREVENTION STRATEGIES**

- A. Each County agency or department shall familiarize all employees with this policy. This policy shall be prominently displayed within each County agency or department.
- B. Each County agency or department shall periodically review or, alternatively, request the Sheriff's Office to review, security measures for work areas and any incident reports of threatened or actual violence.
- C. Harnett County shall provide appropriate training for the Incident Assessment Team.
- D. Harnett County shall provide managers and supervisors training in violence prevention and employment techniques. Employees will receive orientation to this policy.
- E. Managers and supervisors will promptly report any valid threat to the Incident Assessment Team. Nothing in this section shall deter any employee from immediately notifying law enforcement to protect lives and property.
- F. The Incident Assessment team shall determine the proper intervention for each reported threat.
- G. Any manager or supervisor who becomes aware of a threat of imminent danger of violence toward an employee shall immediately notify that employee of the potential danger.

### **VI. MANAGEMENT AND SUPERVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES**

Management and supervisors shall:

- A. Support the County's Workplace Violence Prevention Policy and encourage work environments that are reasonably safe from threats of violence, violence or harassing/aggressive behavior.
- B. Inform employees on a periodic basis of the County's workplace violence prevention policies and procedures.
- C. Although supervisors are not responsible for anticipating or detecting imminent acts or threats of violence, if patterns or changes in employee behavior are noted which appear to threaten workplace violence or disruption, consider addressing the matter in private constructive, supportive counseling sessions with the employee. If appropriate, referral may be made to the HR Director for acts which appear to threaten workplace violence. Behaviors which may be considered for referral to HR Director could include: refusing to cooperate with immediate supervisor; spreading malicious rumors and gossip to harm others; consistently arguing with co-workers; belligerence towards clients; constantly swearing at others; and making unwanted sexual comments; arguing increasingly with clients, co-workers, management and vendors; refusing to obey county or department policy; sabotaging equipment and stealing property; verbalizing desire or fantasy to hurt co-workers or management; displaying or focusing excessively on weapons; writing sexual or violent notes to co-workers and/or management; and seeing oneself as

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victimized by management. Referral shall be made in cases of frequent displays of intense anger resulting in recurrent suicide threats, recurrent physical confrontations and/or fights, destruction of property, or use of weapons to harm others. An employee who frequently employs loud, rude and undisciplined verbal communications with co-workers, or who engages in stressed, distorted, or extreme body language or gestures should be counseled.

- D. Upon receiving a complaint or notice of workplace violence, or upon reasonably believing that such acts or behaviors are occurring, promptly notify the Incident Assessment Team. If the threat is immediate, proper law enforcement and security authorities should be notified. Regarding security or law enforcement, keep them aware of the situation, threats, target, etc; provide pictures, and information on descriptions, vehicles, etc.; increase security levels; heighten awareness at access points. All threats shall be taken seriously until otherwise proved.
- E. The Incident Assessment Team shall manage the response from the time of notification until the threat no longer exists. The Incident Assessment Team shall consider various levels of response, which may include, but not be limited to, no response, giving the target an administrative day off or otherwise removing the target from work site, altering the predictable routines of the target, reducing possible interactions with the suspect, trespassing the suspect from the work site, seeking an employer workplace violence restraining order, referral to law enforcement for investigative follow-up, and/or referral to law enforcement for incident response and intervention ( including possibly for arrest and charge of a criminal offense). Options for response to threats or acts of violence shall be included in the training received by the Assessment Team.

## **VII. EMPLOYEE REPORTING PROCEDURES**

- A. Any employee who experiences or witnesses any acts, conduct, behavior or communication in violation of this policy must first secure his or her own safety and then immediately contact his or her supervisor (unless the supervisor is alleged to have committed the reported act, in which case the report shall be made to the immediate supervisor of the alleged offender). If the threat of violence is imminent, law enforcement shall be contacted.
- B. Do not place yourself in peril. If you see or hear a commotion or disturbance near your workstation, do not try to intercede. Do not try to handle a violent or potentially violent incident. This includes threats by employees, as well as threats by customers, vendors, solicitors, or other members of the public. When reporting a threat of violence, you should be as specific and detailed as possible.
- C. An individual that has made direct threats of or committed violence may be removed from the County work site until an investigation has been completed. At the end of the investigation, the Incident Assessment Team shall determine the County's official response. In the interim, the County may take measures and respond as appropriate under the circumstances to maintain the continuity of County operations and assure workplace safety.
- D. Harnett County will not retaliate against an employee for good faith reporting of instances of workplace violence.

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- E. Employees who reasonably are aware of or have information pertinent to workplace violence but do not report it as provided in this policy may be subjected to appropriate discipline, up to and including termination.

### **VIII. POST INCIDENT PROCEDURE**

- A. The department head, or designee shall complete or cause to be completed a Violence Incident Report describing the threats and/or acts of violence, and shall include the names, telephone numbers of any employees involved as well as physical descriptions of anyone who engaged in threatening and or violent conduct. The Violence Incident Report shall be filed with the Human Resources and Risk Management Director, with copies to the County Manager and the Staff Attorney.
- B. The Incident Assessment Team may, as appropriate, offer debriefing sessions to all personnel affected. Additionally, other specialized resources, such as Community mental health program, should be used as appropriate.

### **IX. MEDIA INQUIRIES**

Requests by the media for information regarding an act or threat of violence should be directed to the County Manager. Such requests should not be directed or responded to by any other employee.

### **X. TRAINING**

The best defense to workplace violence is employees who are well trained and educated. Training on workplace violence prevention shall be offered periodically for managers and supervisors during normal working hours. Such training should include a review and definition of workplace violence, an explanation and description of the County program, techniques for recognizing potential violence, policies and work environment arrangements to reduce risk to employees, appropriate responses to violence incidents, obtaining emergency assistance, and procedures for reporting and investigating incidents.