

PREVENTION THROUGH PREPARATION:

Preparation is the key to success when dealing with hostile or difficult clients or emergencies. We practice fire and earthquake drills not because we don't know what to do, but because an emergency causes most people to panic, sometimes with disastrous results.

Employees should participate in regular training sessions that reinforce successful resolutions to difficult and hostile situations. Procedures for summoning police or fire and evacuation of the building in an emergency should also be established and practiced.

Considering the following guidelines when developing safety policies and procedures:

- (1) **Be alert as to what is going on around you.** Employees tend to become territorial and are sometimes reluctant to request or offer assistance to a co-worker or supervisor in another department.
- (2) **Pre-arrange a code word, phrase, or signal that says you need help or support.**
If you are alone, you can use your signal over a telephone, intercom, or someone else in the office or a neighboring office or building.
- (3) **Learn to use the 9-1-1 system effectively.** Contact your local police jurisdiction for guidelines. Ask about response times, and whether an enhanced 9-1-1 system is in place. Enhanced 9-1-1 tells the operator the address and phone number from which you are calling. So, if a telephone connection is broken, police or fire can still respond.

In any case, affix a permanent label on the phone that lists the street address of your office and indicates if "9" must be dialed to get an outside line. In an emergency, we forget things we know well. It is also possible a client may be asked to make the 9-1-1 call. If you are ready with pertinent information, you are less likely to have delays in response time.

- (4) **Designate tasks in an emergency.** One person should call 9-1-1, one should be monitoring the situation for updates or changes, another should be clearing the building of uninvolved clients, etc. In cases where you must ask a client to assist, tell them what to do in a clear, direct and authoritative manner.
- (5) **Make it a habit to keep office supplies out of easy reach.** Scissors, letter openers and similar objects can easily be used as weapons.
- (6) **Maintain your balance and ability to move in any direction.** In an emergency, you may have to move backwards and sideways before you can turn to run.
- (7) **Make it an everyday practice to maintain physical space.** Do not slouch or lean over counters, chairs or other furniture. If you must be physically close to assist a client, then step in to answer the question or concern and step away when you are done.
- (8) **If an incident occurs that is upsetting or frightening to one or more staff members, be sure to take the time to meet and debrief.** Analyze staff reactions and feelings in a constructively critical way. Avoid blame and guilt, the goal is to minimize risk and learn to work well as a team.