DEALING WITH VIOLENT OR AGGRESSIVE CUSTOMERS

You have a responsibility to maintain a safe working environment for all staff and customers. Your safety, and the safety of others, comes first. Violence can be prevented through sound risk-management strategies and good communication.

Violence can occur when:

- Staff confront people caught stealing.
- Troublemakers create conflict because they’re bored, showing off, or diverting your attention while someone else is stealing.
- Customers have disputes or complaints about goods and services, including requests for refunds, anger over long waits in queues, and so on.
- Staff try to deal with those who are mentally ill or affected by alcohol or drugs.

Remember that violence and aggression is not always from outside – aggressive actions, such as bullying, can also occur between staff.

Preventing Violence From Occurring

- Have opening and closing procedures in place, especially for staff working alone.
- Introduce security measures such as duress alarms, safety screens, access controls and stickers on phones with emergency contact details. Ensure that staff know how to use these and how to raise the alarm.
- Improve visibility and surveillance to increase the chance of detection and capture.
- Arrange floor fit out to provide natural barriers – but check that staff still have “escape” corridors.
- Play soft and soothing music.
- Adopt a zero tolerance policy for workplace violence.
- Develop an emergency and crisis response plan, and use it to train staff, including practising emergency escape routes. Evaluate and review the plan regularly.
- Train staff in good customer service, including strategies for dealing with difficult customers and avoiding behaviour that could trigger a violent reaction.
- Put in place effective post-incident support for staff, for example counselling.

Possible Causes of Violence and Aggression
If someone behaves in a threatening way:

• Back away.
• Tell staff to get behind the counter or keep their distance.
• Ask staff to raise the alarm.
• Remain calm and non-confrontational.
• Remember as much about the offender as possible so that you can give this information to the police.
• Following the incident, complete the ‘Offender Description Form’.

For further information and advice, please do not hesitate to contact your local Police Crime Prevention Officer at the Central Metropolitan Police District Crime Prevention Office on 9286 7200. They are more than happy to visit your premises to provide free onsite safety and security advice and training for your business and employees.

This factsheet contains general guidelines for increasing security of small businesses. No responsibility is accepted for any damage, injury or loss resulting from application of these guidelines.