

Personal Safety Guidelines

At the office

1. Wear your photo ID when in the building. Never leave your ID unsecured.
2. All visitors must wear a DHS visitor badge. Be alert for strangers in the building. Immediately notify security if you notice suspicious behavior including: loitering in the community areas, waiting areas or private offices.
3. Do not leave your checkbook, purse or wallet out. Put them out of sight or lock them in your desk or other locked space.
4. Know the Central Office security desk phone number: (651) 431-3000.
5. Follow the procedures for after hours and weekend access to the building. If you are going to be working late or on a weekend, notify the security desk. Make sure your working area and halls near your office are well lighted.
6. If interviewing someone in the office who may become agitated or violent, discuss options for interview arrangements with building security before the interview.
7. If you are aware that another employee is in trouble, knock on the door and call the employee out of the room/office, saying, for example: "May I see you for a moment, please?"
8. If you are aware of a threat against someone consider it an emergency and warn the intended victim. You should report any incident or circumstance that makes staff uncomfortable in a location to a supervisor immediately.
9. Keep cell phones, laptop computers, PDAs or other valuable items secured in your office.

Preparation for a field visit

1. Be alert and observant. Develop a sense of your immediate environment.
2. Notify your supervisor and other staff of your day's schedule.
3. Have a cell phone and call your office to check in.
4. Keep address/client files updated.
5. Work with a partner, if possible.
6. If the visit is in an unfamiliar location, ask someone who may be familiar with the location to brief you regarding any known risks or hazards. Ask for precise driving instructions or study a map before leaving the office.
7. Any incident or circumstance that makes you uncomfortable in a location or on a home visit should be reported to your supervisor. Examples of such situations at a home visit include: unsecured weapons or

pets, threatening clients or family members, evidence of a clandestine lab and locations where illegal activity may be taking place.

8. Contact the client ahead of the visit so he or she will be watching for your arrival.
9. Arrange your work schedule so you can make new or questionable visits early in the day. You will be less likely to find loitering or illegal activities.
10. Contact your supervisor for assistance on home visits when needed.
11. Wear shoes and clothing that make it easy to move quickly.
12. Carry a small amount of money, your driver's license and your keys on your person, not in a purse. In fact, carrying a purse is not advisable while in the field. Lock your purse in the trunk of your car before leaving the office.

In the car

1. Lock your car doors and keep your windows up.
2. Keep any valuables out of sight. Put your purse, computer, etc. in the trunk or on the floor.
3. Keep your car in good working order.
4. When approaching your car, try to look under it and check the back seat.
5. Choose a parking space that is well lit or in the open that offers the safest walking route to the dwelling.
6. To lessen the chance of being blocked in when you want to leave, do not park in a driveway.
7. Park in the direction you want to go when leaving the home.
8. Beware of dead-end streets.
9. If possible try to park where you can see your car from inside the home and check on it periodically. Try to park in front of the client's home.

Approaching the dwelling

1. Trust your instincts. Leave if you feel uncomfortable.
2. Drive around the area and block of the dwelling looking for unsafe conditions (poor lighting, limited visibility fences and bushes), unsecured animals, people shouting, drinking, fighting, or loitering, sources of help like neighbors at home, open businesses, other community workers such as police or fire personnel, and utility trucks.
3. If you find you have an incorrect address do not search for the client by knocking on strange doors. Call your office from a cell phone or public facility.
4. If a group of people is loitering on the street or sidewalk, cross the street.
5. If you suspect someone is following you, enter the closest public place. If a car is following you, turn around and walk in the opposite direction.
6. If you are verbally confronted, maintain a professional manner and do not attempt to answer verbal challenges.
7. If you are using an elevator, use an empty one if possible. Always stand next to the door and the control panel. If you have a problem, push all the buttons so the elevator stops on all the floors, providing a

better chance of escape. If someone suspicious gets on while you are already in the elevator, get off when possible.

At the dwelling

1. Do not enter a home when you suspect an unsafe condition.
2. Pay attention to signs like "No Trespassing," "Beware of the Dog," etc., as they may be indicators of the residents' attitudes toward strangers.
3. Pause at the door before knocking and listen. If you hear loud arguing, fighting or other disturbances, leave immediately.
4. If an unfamiliar person answers the door, find out if the client is home before entering.
5. If you decide that entering is safe, do not let your guard down. Be alert to signs of violence or sexual advances from either the client or family members.
6. Note other exits/entrances when you enter the dwelling, also where the telephone is.
7. If there are other people there that you are not comfortable with, or traffic in and out of the home reschedule the visit.
8. If you detect evidence of clandestine lab activities ('chemical' odors, gas smell, lab type equipment, etc.) leave immediately.
9. If there are pets in the home, note this on your record. Should the pet be a nuisance, ask the client to put it in another room for the duration of the visit.
10. If there is an unsecured firearm in the home, you should leave the home immediately. Note the weapon on the client's record and let the client know that the firearm must be secured before you will make the next visit.
11. Do not go into a dark room, basement or attic first. Have the client go first and turn on the light. Follow; never lead, even if you have been to the dwelling before.
12. If you need to retrieve something from outside, knock again or say hello when you re-enter.
13. If a family argument erupts, leave the client's home if you feel unsafe.
14. When sitting, choose a hard chair to help you to get up more quickly.
15. If possible, sit so your back is to a solid wall, not to an unknown space. Sit as close to an entrance or exit as possible.
16. End the home visit if the client is under the influence of mood-altering chemicals.

Dealing with hostile or angry clients

1. Think about the person's history. Rehearse ahead of time what you would say or do in these situations.
2. Assume a nonthreatening position; try to be at eye level with the person. Assume the same posture as the client (sitting or standing). Don't ask the client to change his or her position.
3. Do not physically corner yourself. Leave a way out and stand out of reach.
4. Do not physically or psychologically corner the person.
5. Stay with the client and let him or her know that you want to help solve the problem.
6. Listen to the person and let him or her talk.

7. Remove all emotion from your face and speak clearly, calmly and softly.
8. Be respectful.
9. Do not argue, demand, command or disagree.
10. Before ending an interview, involve the client in a conversation or activity different from the one about which she or he was in conflict or in crisis.
11. When possible, interview potentially aggressive clients in the office. If the client becomes aggressive or threatening, let the client know that you take threats seriously and end the interview. If necessary, call for assistance.

If violence or harassment occurs

If a physical or verbal threat occurs, take immediate steps to ensure your own safety. Also, consider the following responses, depending on the situation:

1. If threatened or assaulted during an interview, get out of the situation and get to a secure place.
2. Self-defense actions should be an attempt to ensure your safety or reduce additional risk rather than inflict harm on a client. Your defense should be reasonable and proportionate to the situation, with a minimum of contact or injury to the client. Leave as soon as possible.
3. If you see or overhear a violent incident in progress, determine if intervention will help the staff member. If not, call the security desk or if out of the building call the police.
4. If needed, get medical help.
5. Immediately notify your supervisor and document the event.
6. Discuss with your supervisor whether criminal charges should be filed.

For additional information contact:

Name: [Michelle Lakso](#), Safety and Health Manager

Phone: (651) 231-2975

12/08