

## **Checklist for Safety at Work, on the Road and Points In-Between**

Personal safety is a concern for many women in the workplace. Women sometimes find themselves in situations which can be frightening, threatening, and potentially dangerous or violent. This checklist is provided as an educational tool to promote and advance workplace safety for women. Although designed with concerns of women in mind, this information applies to all workers.

No matter where you work, or what type of work you do, you can reduce the risk of violence in the workplace by increasing personal awareness and planning responses to threatening situations.

Employers can introduce some basic home safety devices and train staff in safety awareness, and business owners can work together to set up safety programs.

### **In the Workplace**

- Consider having locked washrooms.
- Install a communication or buzzer system at the reception desk and in isolated work areas. Develop a policy on response to the buzzer.
- Ensure receptionists have more than one exit from their workstation.
- Set up a watch program with neighboring businesses and stores.
- Make sure that back doors or secondary doors are locked.
- Pre-program phones to 911 or local police emergency number.
- Install phones in isolated areas such as storage rooms.
- Attackers expect alarm buttons to be at the desk. Place multiple buttons elsewhere near doors, storerooms, and coolers.
- Install good outside lighting, and check all lighting before it gets dark.
- Ensure the service desk is visible through windows and is well-lit.
- Make sure windows are not obscured. Ensure passers-by can see in.
- Develop a buddy system for employees to get to cars or bus stops after work.

### **Working with the Public**

- If you deal with hostile or threatening persons, consult your local police department for a workplace safety audit.
- Ensure that persons entering the office show proper identification before letting them in.
- If a suspicious person is hanging around, notify the police and staff in neighboring businesses.
- Be confident. Look at and greet customers. Make it clear that you are in charge and cannot be intimidated. Use assertive but respectful language.
- If you feel uncomfortable after someone enters, trust your instincts. Call for help.
- Don't discuss where you live, after-work plans, or vacation plans in front of customers or with anyone who makes you feel uncomfortable.
- If you are alone or working late and you encounter someone unfamiliar, indicate that you are not alone. Say, "My supervisor will be right here and will be able to help you."

### **Working Alone**

- Avoid working alone after hours.
- If you must work alone, make arrangements for someone to walk you to your car or bus stop, or take a taxi to your car or bus stop.
- Call home periodically and before leaving work so that someone knows when to expect you.
- Let security know you are working; tell them when you expect to leave.
- While another co-worker is present, check that all doors are locked, and make sure that washrooms and storage rooms are empty.
- If you suspect someone is lurking outside, call police or security.
- If you enter a washroom and you suspect someone is in there, don't call out. Back out, go to a safe area with a lockable door, and phone for help. Plan for safe places.

## **Business Travel**

### ***Before leaving:***

- Make sure your home looks occupied; leave clothes on the line and lights and a radio on timers, or ask someone to house sit.
- Park a car in the driveway.
- Tell staff, or friends and family members if you work alone, where you are going and when you expect to arrive and leave. Include dates you'll be in various locations. Leave emergency contact numbers.
- Make sure anyone attending to your business, mail, or phone machine does not give out any information about your absence or travel plans.
- Put only your last name, business address and business number on your luggage, or use a business card.

### ***If you're flying:***

- Check for early and late shuttle bus service.
- Leave only your car key with parking lot attendants.
- Do not accept rides from people you have met on the airplane, and be cautious about sharing taxis.

### ***Upon arrival:***

- If your work takes you to new and different settings, be alert and make mental notes of your surroundings when you arrive. The first time you go into a new setting, or if you are in a place where you feel uneasy, phone your own workplace when you arrive and again before you leave.
- Choose a hotel concerned with guest safety. Have a staff person escort you to your hotel room.
- Make sure your reservations are guaranteed if you are arriving late.
- Purchase a travel lock, alarm or motion detector for hotel room doors. These items are available from locksmiths.
- Use a business card or first initials at check-in. Keep your name private.
- Leave instructions not to give out your room number or your name.
- Get a room on upper floors close to the elevator. Make sure you are away from stairwells, fire stairs and exits.
- Do not enter your room if you suspect there is someone in there, if you are being followed, or if someone is lingering near your door.
- If you're in a motel, try to get a room next to the office or the manager's unit, and keep all windows locked.
- Verify with the front desk before allowing anyone claiming to be a hotel employee into your room.
- Ensure that your door, windows, and night locks are working.
- Use valet parking.

### ***Coming home:***

- If you believe that your home has been broken into, DO NOT ENTER. Call the police immediately.

## **Workplace Interactions**

- Trust your instincts. If somebody you work with makes you uncomfortable, discuss the situation with a co-worker you trust and plan your response to potential problems.
- Use assertive behavior with co-workers who are a threat.
- If you are being sexually harassed, take action. You have the right to feel comfortable in your workplace.
- If you feel threatened, make a scene.
- When you enter an office or meeting place alone, be aware of your surroundings.
- If you must meet new work contacts out of the workplace, meet at a public place. Keep personal information private.
- Avoid having new work contacts walk you to the car or escort you to your hotel room.
- When entering an elevator, stand next to the controls. Wait for the next elevator if you feel uneasy about the occupants. If someone makes you feel uncomfortable, push the button for the next floor or push the alarm and all buttons except stop.

## **Commuting to Work**

### ***Walking:***

- Plan your route carefully; avoid shortcuts and unlit areas.
- Walk on well-lit streets, in the center of the sidewalk, away from bushes, doorways and parked cars- anywhere that an attacker could hide. Cross the road if necessary.
- Keep your keys in your hand.
- Walk confidently and with purpose. Observe your surroundings.
- If you suspect you are being followed, cross the street, go to the nearest home or open business, and call the police.
- Walk facing traffic. If someone in a car is bothering you, turn around and walk the other way. Try to get the license plate number and report it to the police.
- When you feel something just isn't right, trust your feelings.
- Digging in your purse, wearing headphones, or struggling with heavy briefcases, luggage and uncomfortable clothing reduces your ability to be prepared.
- Carry a personal safety alarm on your key ring, or wear it around your neck or pinned to clothing.
- Report any suspicious incidents to employers or police.
- Wear comfortable shoes, such as runners.
- If you are using a stairwell, be sure it is well-lit and that you can quickly exit to a safe place.
- If you think someone is following you, turn around and check. Let them know that you are aware of their presence. Do not go to your car or your house. Cross the street and go to a safe place, such as a store or restaurant.

### ***Riding the bus or transit system:***

- Carry a schedule. After dark, arrive just before the transit vehicle is due.
- On the bus, sit near others and tell the driver if you are being bothered.
- Use the Request Stop service available on some bus routes. Call your local transit company for more information on this service.

### ***In your car:***

- Keep your doors locked at all times while driving and when leaving your vehicle unattended.
- Before entering your car, look inside to make sure no one is hiding inside, even if the doors were locked.
- When returning to your car, have your keys in your hand so you don't have to spend extra time searching for them.
- Keep your purse and valuables out of sight, not on the front seat. It's a temptation for thieves to open the door and grab them when you are stopped in traffic.
- Survey surroundings before getting out of your car.
- Travel on well-lit streets and well-traveled roads.
- Don't stop to help a stranded motorist. Instead, stop at the nearest phone booth and call for assistance.
- Have a "HELP! CALL POLICE!" sign in your car for emergencies.
- If you suspect someone is following you, go to the nearest service station, drive-in restaurant, or police station and blow the horn.
- For winter driving, make sure the gas tank is always filled and winter safety supplies are in your car.
- Never pick up hitchhikers.
- Do not identify your keys with car plate numbers or name and address.
- Carry personal safety alarms on your key chain. They will help attract attention if you are attacked.
- Keep your car in good repair, the tank at least half full, and always check the tires.
- Park in well-lit spaces. Walk with others after dark.
- If you use underground parking, make sure you park near the attendant or exit.
- Don't open your car window more than a couple of inches to speak to someone approaching your car, or just drive away if you feel uncomfortable.
- If you suspect another car is following you, do not go home. Drive to a service, police, or fire station and stay in your car, honking your horn in short repeated blasts until someone comes out to help.

**If your car breaks down:**

- Place a "HELP! CALL POLICE!" sign in the window. Do not raise the hood of your car as that stops you from noticing if someone is approaching the car. Put the four way flashers on and wait for police.
- Stay in the car with the windows closed and doors locked.
- Only open the window a couple of inches to speak to anyone other than the police.
- Do not be embarrassed to say no to people who offer assistance.

**If You Are Attacked**

- If you are grabbed, don't freeze or panic. Breathe deeply to calm yourself, then try to get attention. Yell loudly and repeatedly. Try shouting words like "fire," "help," "no," and "stop." Blow a whistle, push a personal safety alarm, bang on something noisy. Be loud and persistent.
- If there is anyone nearby, give them instructions to help you. Single out someone and send them for help. Say, "You, in the red jacket, call the police!" This will encourage bystanders to help when they might not know what action to take.
- If an attacker is after your purse, let it go.
- If you decide to fight back, remember there are many effective ways of responding to each type of attack. Prepare yourself to fight back, do whatever feels right to you. Try to imagine yourself responding successfully to different types of attack situations. Practice taking deep breaths to keep calm. Self-defense courses can teach you valuable skills and help you learn about vulnerable parts on the body, but the best defense is to be vigilant and ready to respond.
- Take advantage of any weapons you might have. Keys, a purse, an umbrella or a comb may all be effective weapons. Be observant and aware of your surroundings.
- Only you can decide how you will respond to an attack and how to respond if the attacker has a weapon. Use whatever force you feel is necessary to escape the situation. Be ready to take the first opportunity to take action and get away.

**A Workplace Safety Checklist**

- Are there plans in place for employee safety and do employees know the plans?
- Are employees encouraged to develop a buddy system?
- Is the physical space safe?
- Are there standard first aid kits in the workplace?
- Do all employees know the location of these first aid kits?
- Are emergency telephone numbers prominently displayed? Are all personal safety needs of employees taken into consideration?

*This article is available at [www.gov.ns.ca/humr/](http://www.gov.ns.ca/humr/), the Web site of the Department of Human Resources, Nova Scotia. The information was compiled by the Government of British Columbia and the Committee on Women's Issues.*