
**Report to
The Vermont Legislature**

Safety Training Study

In Accordance with 2016 Act 162

**Submitted to: House Judiciary
Senate Judiciary
House Government Operations
Senate Government Operations
House Human Services
Senate Health and Welfare**

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Department for Children and Families**

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**AGENCY OF HUMAN SERVICES
Department for Children and Families**

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Executive Summary

Act. 162, Sec. 6a. DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES; VERMONT STATE EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION; SAFETY TRAINING STUDY

The Commissioner of the Department for Children and Families (DCF), in collaboration with DCF's contractors and grantees and the Vermont State Employees Association, shall conduct a review of the safety trainings available to the employees, contractors, and grantees of DCF and the employees of the State of Vermont, and shall report any findings and recommendations to the House and Senate Committees on Judiciary and on Government Operations, the House Committee on Human Services, and the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare on or before January 15, 2017.

Part I: Review Process

The Department for Children and Families (DCF) reached out to the Vermont State Employees Association, the VT Department of Human Resources, Building and General Services and the Agency of Human Services' Secretary's Office for their input into the review process and to collaborate on the final report.

DCF conducted the following review of safety trainings available to DCF employees, contractors and grantees, and the employees of the state of Vermont:

- Interviews with relevant personnel at the VT Department of Labor, VT Department of Human Resources, Building and General Services and the Agency of Human Services;
- An on-line survey of state agencies regarding the safety training they directly provide to state employees;
- An internal review of DCF trainings offered to its employees; and
- An on-line survey of DCF contractors and grantees regarding the safety training they directly provide to their employees and workers.

This review highlights many, but not all, of the initiatives in state government that address workplace safety. The surveys were voluntary in nature and do not capture all the training offered by state agencies and DCF grantees and contractors. It does provide a sample from which we can conclude that safety training does happen, but is not universal throughout state government or with DCF grantees and contractors.

Part II: Review of Findings

VT Department of Labor (DOL)

Vermont's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (VOSHA) provides some general safety and health training to employer groups when those groups request assistance. The federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) requires employers to develop a written, comprehensive workplace violence prevention program that should include a written outline or lesson plan.

VT Department of Human Resources (DHR)

- **DHR's Workplace Violence Training:**
This class is designed to address practical strategies individuals can utilize to recognize a potentially violent individual or situation, and options for response in a variety of circumstances.

The training was developed and delivered in partnership with the Department of Public Safety (DPS). An on-line version will be made available on DHR's website. This type of training will be mandatory for current and new state employees.

During FY16, a total of 18 classes were held throughout the state and a total of 391 state employees were trained.

Segments of this training will be incorporated into a supervisory training entitled: *Supervising in State Government Level 1: The Essentials (SSG1)*.

- **Emergency Preparedness Training (BGS Security training):**

This course is designed to give a general overview of how the State of Vermont is implementing safety teams for all major district offices. It will begin to develop consistency in how the state responds to crisis situations. It will provide information to employees about how they should respond in the event of a crisis, and will promote a culture of safety within state government.

DHR assumed coordination of the BGS Security training while the BGS Director of Security position was vacant. In August 2016, five classes were completed in Rutland attended by 117 AHS state employees.

Segments of this training will be incorporated into the supervisory training, *Supervising in State Government Level 1: The Essentials (SSG1)*.

An Emergency Preparedness training was offered on October 21, 2016 to DHR employees enrolled in the Human Resources Pathways to Excellence program. The training was intended to help HR representatives understand best practices in the event of bomb threats, active shooter situations, gas vapors, suspicious mail/packages and fires. All DHR Field Operations staff will receive the training because the HR Pathways to Excellence program is mandatory for that employee group.

- **Status of BGS Security Officer Training Support:**

DHR researched unarmed security officer training for BGS. They located information about licensure and statutory requirements for security officers in Vermont and forwarded the information to BGS. DHR will continue to support this effort and can do so by hosting the training, assisting the search for training resources, participating in the assessment of the quality of training options and by promoting and registering employees for the training.

The Agency of Human Services (AHS)

AHS, in collaboration with Buildings and General Services (BGS), developed a plan to operationalize emergency procedures statewide in AHS office buildings beginning the summer of 2015. These procedures covered a variety of emergency situations including workplace safety, active shooter, bomb threats, suspicious packages, fire, power outages and medical emergencies. To date, the following districts/regions have implemented these procedures: St. Albans, Hartford, Rutland, Newport, Barre, Morrisville, Springfield, St. Johnsbury and Middlebury. The remaining sites of Burlington, Waterbury, Bennington and Brattleboro will be completed by May 2017. AHS/DHR/BGS completed in-person trainings for several districts and will continue until all districts have received the training.

Beginning February 2016, all AHS employees were required to take the *Emergency Response in the Workplace* training through the Online University. This on-line training provided concrete responses for employees to follow in the event of an emergency including violent acts or active shooter.

Starting January 2017, AHS' New Employee Orientation will expand from a half to a full day of training to provide safety awareness to all new employees. In the spring of 2017, AHS will offer annual safety training for all employees. The focus will be safety awareness, de-escalation techniques and crisis response.

Other State Agencies

An online survey was developed for state agencies to gather information on the level and types of workplace security and safety trainings made available to state employees. The survey was sent out by the Agency of Administration. Twenty-one state agencies responded to the survey, findings are below:

- Ten of the 21 state agencies provide workplace security and safety training directly to their employees; 1 reported participating in the BGS training;
- Five state agencies reported their training is mandatory, six reported it as optional;
- All 10 agencies deliver training in a classroom setting and augment with on-line and written materials;
- Majority of training is between 2-4 hours
- Most widely trained topics included identification of high risk scenarios, safety protocols, de-escalation techniques and reporting critical incidents.

Department for Children and Families (DCF)

The Family Services Division (FSD), in conjunction with the UVM Child Welfare Training Partnership, developed a two-day training curriculum entitled *Safety Awareness for the Child Welfare Professional*. This was a mandatory training for all FSD staff. It was delivered at the district office level; a total of 13 two-day sessions were held from January to June 2016. A total of 270 FSD employees were trained. The safety training has been integrated into the FSD Foundations course and will continued to be offered to all new staff. FSD is currently developing a de-escalation and safety training 2.0 (advanced).

The FSD Safety Coordinator was certified as an ALICE (Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter and Evacuate) trainer in August 2016 and will be attending the ALICE Train-the-Trainer session in December 2016 with other AHS staff. The aim is to develop a training team to bring ALICE training to AHS in a trauma-informed and collaborative manner.

FSD developed and implemented a threat reporting and response process which became fully operational in March 2016. DCF is in the process of adopting a similar threat reporting and response system for the entire department. Once finalized, training will be provided to DCF employees ensuring compliance with these procedures.

DCF sent out a survey through Survey Monkey to its contractors and grantees. It was a voluntary survey with a small sample size (87 respondents) compared to the overall number of DCF contractors and grantees, however it does provide a snapshot on practice. Approximately, 43 percent of DCF contractors and grantees provide workplace safety and security training directly to their employees. For most respondents the training is mandatory, offered in a classroom setting, and covers safety protocols, reporting critical incidents, safety assessment and planning, identification of high risk scenarios, de-escalation techniques, debriefing and self-care.

Overall Findings

- All state employees will be required to take the on-line version of DHR's *Workplace Violence Training*.
- All AHS employees will receive *Safety Awareness Training* at the AHS New Employee Orientation.
- AHS continues to work operationalizing emergency procedures across the agency pursuant to Act 109 which requires the Agency to establish and maintain a written workplace violence prevention and crisis response policy.
- DCF's Family Services Division Field Staff are required to complete the *FSD Foundations* course which includes safety training.
- Additional safety training and procedures are being developed by AHS and DCF for their employees.

Part III: Recommendations

Act 109 requires the establishment and maintenance of a written workplace violence prevention and crisis response policy from all the Agency's contracted providers who deliver social or mental health services. As such, AHS should require all grantees and contractors to document their workplace safety policies and safety trainings as part of the grant application and contracting processes. Depending on the level of need, the state should explore offering online safety training to these community partners and if it should be a mandatory condition of these grants and contracts.

A more thorough inventory is needed to document the different types of safety training offered throughout state government.

Summary

Many state agencies do provide safety training for their employees, though it is not consistently provided to all state employees. A more thorough inventory is needed to document the different types of safety training offered throughout state government. DHR has developed a Workplace Violence Training; an on-line version will be made available on DHR's website. This type of training will be mandatory for current and new state employees. Starting in January 2017, AHS' New Employee Orientation will expand to a full day training to provide safety awareness to all new employees. In the spring of 2017, AHS will offer annual safety training for all AHS employees. DCF's Family Services Division has incorporated safety training in their mandatory foundations course that all social workers must complete. AHS and DCF are working together to develop other types of safety trainings for both DCF and AHS employees. Finally, AHS should consider how to best inventory grantees' and contractors' access to safety training and explore offering either a voluntary or mandatory on-line safety training to these community partners.