

# Front Desk Security Guide

Workplace Security Solutions



January  
2009

The purpose of this guide is to help organizations develop safe and secure guidelines and practices to ensure the safety of their front desk personnel, their co-workers and community.

# Front Desk Security Guide

## Emergency Contact Information Sheet

(Fill out this sheet to be used as reference in an emergency)

Address of facility \_\_\_\_\_

### Emergency Contact List

Position	Work #	Cell #	Home #
Emergency Coordinator			
Security			
Director/CEO			
Safety Manager			
Human Resources			
Occupational Health Nurse			

Where else is this contact sheet available (front desk, offsite and outside the facility, online)?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Where are floor plans, schematics and emergency plans kept (front desk, offsite and outside the facility, online)?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



# Front Desk Security Guide

## GUIDE OUTLINE AND ADAPTATION

This guide should be modified and enhanced through the support of a 'Threat Management Team', a multi-disciplinary team of professionals and committed personnel who can assess the specific threats as identified by the organization's unique risk factors.

Such a team may consist of Security, Safety and Health, Human Resources, Risk Management, Legal Counsel and the frontline employees.

A thorough assessment of an organization's unique risks includes

- a) an audit of previous incidents,
- b) an in-depth review of the facility by a trained professional,
- c) examination of policies and procedures and
- d) a candid report of the employees concerns and perception on security.

For more information on this procedure, please email [contact@epanicbutton.com](mailto:contact@epanicbutton.com) or call 919.274.5515

This guide is not to be considered legal advice or specific measures for any particular agency or individuals. It provides a reference for a team of informed and dedicated professionals in the development of customized policy and procedures.



## Front Desk Security Guide

### THIS GUIDE WILL HELP FRONT DESK PERSONNEL-

1. Identify vulnerabilities in the security of the reception area
2. Develop procedures and policies to maintain a secure facility
3. Develop ability to recognize at-risk behaviors whether that is from an irate client, member of the public or other criminal activity
4. Identify common tactics to distract front desk personnel
5. Offer guidelines in the de-escalation of hostile visitors and clients
6. Be prepared with emergency response procedures
7. Develop strong access control policies to prevent unwanted entry
8. Establish a response plan including crime scene preservation
9. Understand contact procedures with emergency personnel include police

#### Includes

Template Sheet for Emergency Contacts  
Quick Reference Language Sheet for Handling Hostile Encounters

#### Topic Covered

- The Prepared Organizations
  - Facility and Technology
  - Policies and Procedures
- Managing Hostile Encounters
  - Prevention - To stop it from escalating
  - Intervention - When their behavior must be addressed
  - Survival - To protect yourself and others
  - Unique Situations
  - Things to say to de-escalate behavior
- Security - for crime prevention
- Handling Emergencies
- Suspicious Packages and Bomb Threats

The foremost and central security feature must be an awareness of the surroundings, a commitment to safety and unflinching attitude to take action when the need arises.



# Front Desk Security Guide

## THE PREPARED ORGANIZATION

Most security incidents can be prevented or the damage reduced by being prepared. Some of these recommendations require management support and resources while others can be developed with a little time and consideration.

### Facility and Technology

---

#### 1) Layout

If you are developing a new or remodeling the front lobby area, simple control measures can be considered in the general layout. The front desk receptionist should have a clear sight of the entrance and have a physical barrier or separation from the public. The lobby should be clear of any hiding places and have an open, full view of all inhabitants.

Public or client areas should be clearly identified from staff only or escorted areas.

A concept behind security based on environment is Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED). Consultation support may be available from your local law enforcement. For professional services, you can contact your Chamber of Commerce or online. ASIS is a security professionals association with local chapters available at <http://www.asisonline.org/chapters/index.xml>.

#### 2) Entry Control

Either for entry from the outside or from the public lobby area to the staff area, a reliable system for regulating access should be established. There is a wide range of technology available with a sufficient type depending on the industry and facility. These may include bio-metrics access control, key card access, keypad codes or regular keys. Front desk personnel can have greater control of access with the installation of a buzzer that unlocks a door. Combined with a camera and intercom, this is a very effective way of protecting a facility.

#### 3) Surveillance and Monitoring

The technology and cost of closed circuit TV (or CCTV) has improved greatly in the past years. Cameras are getting smaller with better pictures, recording capability and even web enabled. It is an effective deterrent from crime and can assist greatly in any follow up investigation. However, it rarely deters those that are intent on committing violence unless it is actively monitored by security. Installation providers can assist with location placement but should include the entrance, front desk and entry to staff area.



# Front Desk Security Guide

## Policies and Procedures

---

### 1) Visitor policy

Every agency and facility should have a visitor's policy, even those that serve the general public. While specifics differ depending on the industry, there are some elements that are universal. There should be clear, visitor waiting areas with the staff, back office areas not easily accessible.

- a. A written policy- Management should develop a policy that outlines how non-employees, including vendors, clients and family members, should be handled. Dissemination and training of all employees should be conducted.
- b. For visitors, there should be a clear signage informing them of the process.
- c. Sign in Procedures - Visitors should provide record of their visit. At the least, this should include their name, company that they come from (in applicable), date and time, reason of visit and who they are visiting. Depending on the security issues of the facility, the receptionist may ask for identification for verification. Acknowledging when the leave can be just as important as visitors should sign out as well. Receptionist must be vigilant in having all visitors sign in, review what is written and note when they leave.
- d. Visitor ID Badge - The facility can provide badges, clips or even stickers that identify them as visitors. These are important to identify non-employees for facilities with large workforces where all the staff are not readily known.
- e. Escorting visitors- Visitors should be escorted to and from the staff areas by the staff they are visiting. They should also assist and guide the sign-in and sign-out process. Unaccompanied visitors should be asked if they need any help and who they are there to see.

Note on regular visitors-

- For vendors, delivery or service personnel, there can be special accommodations but any new workers need to be verified.
- Family members and intimate relations should follow the same rules and never be given keypad codes or allowed to use "the backdoor." Note that in domestic violence situations, victims often do not tell management of their troubles and the partner that has been coming to the holiday parties for the past 8 years may be recently estranged and intent on harm.



## Front Desk Security Guide

### 2) Banned Individuals

For various reasons such as a terminated employee, declined client or stalking ex-boyfriend of a worker, it may be necessary to ban or prohibit certain people from a facility or grounds. Note for government agencies- Citizens can be banned from public buildings.

While it is always possible to get a Trespass Order against an individual, some states have Workplace Restraining Orders, a legal injunction against an individual which would result in civil and/or criminal charges if violated. Similarly, for employees with Domestic Violence Restraining Orders, obtain a copy and work closely with the victimized employee and the local domestic violence support agency. With all of these considerations, consult your legal counsel for support.

If there is a banned person or anyone that should be denied entry, it is vital to have a process in place.

- a) Inform appropriate personnel such as the front desk receptionists, security, grounds crew and other staff who have a view of the entrance or parking lot. Depending on the situation, all staff may be informed.
- b) Provide a description of the banned individual which may include their picture and a description of their vehicle.
- c) Have a response plan established which may include contacting security, calling the police or even locking down the facility.
- d) Be careful of slander/liable issues. Do not make statements such as "He is dangerous" but simply state if they are barred and steps to take. All such plans should be made with your legal counsel.

### 3) Tracking Incidents

As part of every assessment and the continual process for security improvement, every incident that required support, raised concerns, had a near miss or actual threat must be documented and tracked.

#### **Automate the process with the ePanic Button**

The Instant Message Alerts have a "Notes" feature that lets you add follow up and investigation notes to each message sent.

You can then export all those Alerts with the follow up notes into a log file for saving, compilation and tracking.

Every incident can have a log of when, where, who was involved and any follow up notes.



# Front Desk Security Guide

## MANAGING HOSTILE ENCOUNTERS

These guidelines are numbered but in no way suggest a proper sequence of actions. Respond to the incident with the appropriate measures to ensure your own safety. Above all, follow your instincts and take the necessary steps when you feel threatened or uncomfortable.

PREVENTION – To stop it from escalating

### 1) Stay Centered

The agitated person will want to engage you in a confrontation. Do not allow them to gain control of your emotions by reacting to their taunts, insults or when they are pressing “your hot button”.

Breathe deeply, take a break, get a drink of water, remember that this issue “is not about you”, whatever it takes to ensure you remain calm, collected and professional.

Maintain an open but not vulnerable body language. Show that you are giving them attention but do not allow yourself to be trapped or cornered. Do not engage in a debate or argument with them.

### 2) Recognize Hostility

While it may be easy to recognize when someone is obviously angry (red face, shouting, panting, gritting their teeth), be aware of ‘quiet anger’, when someone is seething with rage underneath. It is a very dangerous sign when someone suddenly shifts from being loud and boisterous to being quiet as it may indicate that they have resolved to take action. A clear indication is the expression in their eyes.

### 3) Customer Service Extreme

To the best of your ability and following procedures, help this person obtain what they seek. A flat out refusal or denial of support or services may invoke greater anger. If you are not able to provide exactly what the individual demands (meeting with a manager now), offer an alternative solution such as speaking to someone else, taking a message or setting an appointment.

Establish a collaborative spirit – “How can we solve this problem?”  
Focus on solving the situation or problem at hand.

### 4) Listen!

Perhaps the most effective prevention technique is active listening. Allow them a reasonable amount of time to explain, complain and even vent. Show them that you are listening, stop what you are doing, keep eye contact and pay attention. When you reply, recount what their main issues are and identify their feelings.





## Front Desk Security Guide

INTERVENTION – When their behavior must be addressed

1) Set Clear Boundaries

If they have “crossed a line” with you, let them know that it is not appropriate. If you feel safe to do so, identify what they did that was not acceptable (cursing, yelling, getting in your face) and explain the consequences such as not able to help them or being asked to leave.

2) Be Fair but Firm

Do not allow yourself to be intimidated; at the same time, do not respond with aggression. Establish your authority in this facility but not over them. It is vital to be clear and firm with what you expect from them and the potential consequences.

3) Getting Help

Bringing support can be a very effective measure to defuse a situation. People may be more aggressive towards someone that is alone and another staff person may be able to assist you with the situation. Often, just the presence of another person can change the attitude and stance of an aggressor. You can simply contact someone by phone (“Let me get someone to assist us”).

SURVIVAL – To protect yourself and others

1) Summon Support

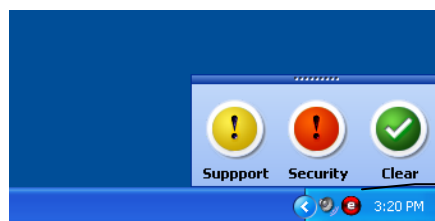
Have a discreet means to summon support such as a panic button. Consider the ease and versatility of

### The ePanic Button

The ePanic Button (ePB) is a software program that instantly summons support with a tap of the mouse, keyboard or foot.

The messages can be sent to responders in any arrangement of

- Pop up Window instant message Alerts
  - Emails
  - Text messages



Possible Buttons

ePB



## Front Desk Security Guide

### 2) Use a Code Word

Establish a code word in the office so that when you call someone, you can let them know that you need help. Under some pretense of seeking support, call a co-worker or manager but let know of the situation. For example, by asking for “Mr. Dover” to come by, you can let the other staff person know that you have a situation where you need security or support without tipping the aggressor off.

### 3) Keep your distance

Keep at least 6-8 feet from the aggressor. Use barriers to keep individual from coming close to you. Do not allow them to block your exit or escape. Do not turn your back on them.

### 4) Be aware of potential weapons

Assaults when clients get angry are rarely planned. Therefore, be aware of any objects that can be readily used as a weapon such as letter openers, staplers, paper-weights and other office tools. Keep the front desk clear of items that can be used as weapons.

Note- Keeping a weapon at the front desk for protection, even pepper spray, can lead to many complications such as it being used against you or even a civil suit in case of injury. At the very least, there needs to be a policy, procedures and training. Even so, it is not suggested.

### 5) **Do Not** try to restrain them or prevent them from leaving/entering.

Unless to save yourself or another from injury, do not touch the aggressor despite what they may say or be doing. Even if they are damaging property or trying to force their way into the staff area, laying your hands on them will most likely lead to violence. Even if you feel confident that you can subdue them, it is not your role or responsibility. Contact security or other support as you have determined with your emergency team.

### 6) Escape

Quite simply, if you feel that you are in danger, remove yourself from harm. Follow your plan to notify others but only once you are in a safe location.

More information can be found under [Handling Emergencies](#).



# Front Desk Security Guide

## Unique Situations

---

- 1) Demanding to see someone who can/will not meet them  
To inform the sought after person, pretend to be calling someone else but call that staff person and say, "Mr. Jones is in the lobby to see Ms. Thompson but I know she is not here. Do you know how to reach her?" This warns the staff member and that you may need assistance.
- 2) Solicitors  
Despite signs posted on the door, solicitors selling products to businesses and its employees will still try to gain entry. Be polite but firm. They may try to engage you in conversation and be very charming but you must be clear it is not your decision but company policy and that they must leave. Summon support if necessary and be aware they may try to sneak past you. Ensure a "No Solicitations" sign is posted and refer to it as your policy.
- 3) Ex-employees  
Especially in the case of someone who has been terminated for behavioral issues, they should have been told not to return without an appointment. However, they may try to meet with a manager and use their prior workplace relationship as a way to bend the rules. Again, explain that it is not your choice but company policy. Report the issue and summon assistance if needed.
- 4) Boyfriends, partners, family members of employees  
While some workplaces may have casual rules for family members and intimate partners to visit employees, especially at lunch, the same visitor guidelines should apply for all non-employees.  
In cases where there is domestic violence or a stalking situation, there is a high risk for violence and extreme caution warranted. The victim employee needs to be notified of the aggressor's presence. Ideally, there should be a plan of action developed when the situation is first identified.  
  
For more information about Domestic Violence in the Workplace, please visit [www.peaceatwork.org/dv](http://www.peaceatwork.org/dv)
- 5) Intoxicated or mentally unstable individuals  
Trying to de-escalate or reason with people in this condition is often fruitless. End the discussion, summon assistance and/or request for them to leave. If you feel threatened, take steps to ensure your survival such as those listed above.

### Things to Say For Handling Aggressive Encounters

#### Calming the Tension/ Noticing their needs:

- “I see that you are in a hurry, we will get through this process as quickly as possible and get you on your way.”
- “Sir, I realize that this is your third time here. I will do what I can to make sure we get this taken care of today.”
- “I know it is pretty hectic here today. Thank you for being patient during the wait.”

#### Reflective Listening:

- “So let me see if I understand you right. You have/tried/feel (repeat back the main points that they have stated).”
- “You must be feeling... (frustrated, treated unfairly, anxious, concerned, etc.)”
- “I would be feeling (appropriate emotion) too.”
- “So your main concern is .....).”

#### Setting Limits:

- “If we are going to continue to work together, I have to insist that you stop using that language.”
- “In order for us to continue, I am going to ask that you show me the respect that I have been showing you.”
- “I realize that you are mad but I do not deserve to be spoken to in that manner.”
- “If we are going to continue, we have to do so in a respectful and dignified manner.”



# Front Desk Security Guide

## SECURITY

This section refers to intruders who intend to commit a crime, usually means stealing valuables and personal property such as purses, it can also be include company property or even information. Sexual assault is also a very serious threat from intruders. Most of these crimes are “crimes of opportunity”, taking advantage of crimes made available to them. Do not provide them the opportunity!

### 1) Awareness

The foremost preventative step is being aware of your surroundings and the presence of any visitors. Despite multiple and pressing duties and requests, safety is always the primary responsibility and constant vigilance is key.

### 2) Welcome Every Visitor

Every person who enters the facility should be greeted with eye contact established and letting them know that they are acknowledged as soon as they enter. Valid visitors will come to the front desk for support so anyone who does not approach the desk after eye contact has been made should be monitored and direct inquiry made them such as “Can I help you?”

### 3) Do not leave the front lobby/visitor area unattended

A back up person or process should be established to allow the front desk personnel to leave temporarily.

### 4) Remove Opportunities

Clear area of any valuables such as purses, cell phones and handheld devices. Laptops and monitors should be secured to the desk.

### 5) False Impressions

“A clipboard is better than any key” is an old saying for those who can rob a facility with a smile. It is easy to appear as delivery personnel, inspectors and service repairmen with even uniforms with logos readily available. Validate any deliveries or services with appropriate staff before allowing access.

### 6) Company Information

Keep your desk and monitor clear of sensitive information. While most thieves are may be seeking items, information can be just as valuable. Do not have visible or accessible personal information about clients or employees. Likewise, do not leave sensitive company information or files unguarded. Be wary of individuals who try to view your computer screen.



## Front Desk Security Guide

### 7) Suspicious Behavior

First and foremost, listen to your instincts. If someone makes you feel uncomfortable, there is probably a valid reason.

Be wary of any individuals who –

1. Appear to be avoiding notice or do not make eye contact.
2. Are looking for security devices such as door-release switches, buzzers, monitors, locks, cameras or appear to be “casing out the location”.
3. Ask about security, if you are working alone, layout of the building, anything that does not relate to the services that you provide or usual business.
4. Continue to wear heavy, concealing clothing while inside or articles that conceal their features. This would include hoods, baseball caps drawn down low, sunglasses inside or anything that would make an identification or description difficult. Such heavy cover during warmer seasons is strongly suspect.
5. Could be concealing a weapon in a bag or knapsack. If is unusual for someone to be carrying a bulky item at your establishment, monitor closely.
6. If it is not clear why they are there, they continue to ask questions, provide too many details or disrupt you after you asked them to wait, give clear instructions on what they should do (i.e., “Please sit in the and someone will come out to assist you soon”.)
7. If they require a lot of attention, they could be distracting you from the activity of their accomplice. Anything that demands your focus (they are demanding, knock something over, require additional help), be aware of new comers who may be trying to sneak past you or commit some of other criminal act.
8. Note: Do not rely on stereotypical image of criminals. Thieves can appear clean cut, well dressed and have a professional demeanor. They may be of any age, gender, race, ethnicity or appearance.



## Front Desk Security Guide

### Response to suspicious people or activity

---

- 1) Ask if you can help or verify their identity purpose why they are there if you feel safe doing so. If they become argumentative or hostile, do not confront them. Follow security procedures, get support and ensure your own safety.
- 2) If the individual does not listen to your instructions or raises your concern, call for assistance. Ideally, a particular manager or staff should be contacted to deal with the person directly.
- 3) If they have left, make sure to follow up with a report. If possible and safe, try to obtain the tag number of their vehicle.
- 4) If someone gets past you  
Follow your security plan which may include contacting security, calling the police, broadcast notification and conducting a search. Do not try to restrain them yourself.



# Front Desk Security Guide

## HANDLING EMERGENCIES

Specifics need to be developed by your Threat Management Team

### 1) Do Not Panic

Though this sounds obvious, panic and lack of self control make small emergencies much worse. Taking a breath, taking a moment to gather thoughts and resources and focusing on “the big picture” will help individuals make sound decisions.

### 2) Weapons, Threats and Violence

Do not try to take a weapon away or restrain a perpetrator. Even if property is being destroyed, the primary responsibility is your own safety and those of others. Simply flee if you can. Even if you feel confident that you can restrain an individual, do not do so unless to protect yourself or others.

### 3) Calling 911

If there is present danger, leave the scene, notify others and contact 911 from a safe location. The decision to call 911 should be the same as you were at home; if any one is hurt or is in immediate danger, make the call, then contact management.

When the operator answers, provide your name, the agency, the location and state the nature of the emergency. Answer any questions the operator asks to the best of your ability. Do not hang up until the operator states they are finished.

## Notification of Staff and Community

A system should be in place to notify emergency personnel and all staff of an emergency. This may be a PA system, phone, radio or other technological service. There should be redundancy in the system to ensure notice is made and it should be tested periodically.

### **An affordable option to consider-The ePanic Button**

Multiple ways to notify others in emergency situations

<b>Emails</b>	Not for instant notice as email is not always monitored, it can inform managers that an issue has occurred.
---------------	---

<b>Text Messages</b>	For those who are not at a desk but can receive text messages on their cell phone or handheld device.
----------------------	---

<b>Pop up Instant Alerts</b>	Receivers can have a window pop up on their screen with a flashing message and audible alarm.
------------------------------	---





## Front Desk Security Guide

- 1) There may be a Lock-Down Policy in place. The Emergency Director or Safety Manager would implement the process.
- 2) For certain industries, do not forget to notify stake-holders (parents of students/patients for educational institutions), on coming shifts and others. Be aware that the media may broadcast the emergency within minutes and responding family members may swarm the facility.
- 3) For certain facilities, you may need a way to communicate with neighboring businesses. Consider a forum of local agencies and organizations to coordinate notification, evacuation and mutual support.

### After an Incident or Crisis (assault, damage to property, etc)

---

- 1) Provide First Aid  
If need be, contact emergency services and/or your own nurse. A first aid station and kit should be available and all staff trained in first aid.
- 2) Close the Facility.  
Do not let more visitors in but be on the watch for arriving emergency personnel.
- 3) Preserve Evidence  
Do not try to clean up 'the mess.' For investigations, damaged property and pictures may need to be taken for collection of evidence. Secure video surveillance, if available.
- 4) Preserve Recollection  
Do not discuss what happened with other witnesses. Accounts may be vary and hearing what another describe what happened can influence your recollection. Investigators should talk to every witness individually.
- 5) Document and Record  
While still fresh, record what occurred. If the assailant has fled, be prepared to provide description of the person, their vehicle and their tag number if possible. However, do not follow an assailant if there is any risk of being hurt.
- 6) Media Management  
Have a policy in place for managing the responding media. Do not allow access and inform other staff that they should refer media to the assigned personnel.

## Front Desk Security Guide

### SUSPICIOUS PACKAGES

- 1) Do not touch any suspicious package or object if found. Concerns may include items that are leaking, ticking, have an odor, strange marking or otherwise can be not readily explained.
- 2) Vacate the area. Do not allow others to enter.
- 3) Do not use or allow use of cell phones in the area.
- 4) Contact Emergency Director or Safety Manager or law enforcement.

### BOMB THREATS

Although the majority of bomb threats are unfounded, they all need to be considered as real and emergency procedures followed. The majority of threats are made on the phone.

1. Obtain and record as much identifying information from the caller as possible. Specifically:
  - a. Exact time and which extension it arrived. Note if caller ID is used
  - b. A description of the callers' voice, if male or female young or old and any accent or unusual characteristics.
  - c. Emphasis on the exact words spoken by the caller, as well as any key words, phrases or distinct comments.
  - d. Distinguishable background noises; Machines, Traffic, Music.
  - e. Location bomb was placed, size of device and time it will detonate.
2. Evacuate the area.
3. Notify the Emergency Director or Safety Manager.



## Front Desk Security Guide

### RESOURCES AND LINKS

The following are list of programs and organizations that provide service and information on the prevention and management of domestic violence in the workplace.

#### Peace@Work

[www.peaceatwork.org](http://www.peaceatwork.org)

#### Corporate Alliance to End Partner Violence

[www.caepv.org](http://www.caepv.org)

#### Cal/OSHA GUIDELINES FOR WORKPLACE SECURITY

[http://www.dir.ca.gov/DOSH/dosh\\_publications/worksecurity.html](http://www.dir.ca.gov/DOSH/dosh_publications/worksecurity.html)

#### Handgun Free America

May '04 Report on Workplace Violence

[www.workplaceshootings.org](http://www.workplaceshootings.org)

#### NIOSH DVD on Workplace Violence - FREE!

[www.cdc.gov/niosh/updates/upd-06-30-04.html](http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/updates/upd-06-30-04.html)

#### Guidelines for Preventing Workplace Violence for Health Care & Social Service Workers

<http://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3148/osha3148.html>

#### Hope Morrow Trauma Central

Links to the websites on trauma, crisis and violence prevention

[www.traumacentral.net](http://www.traumacentral.net)

#### Bullying in the workplace

A very thorough and extensive UK site on Bullying

[www.successunlimited](http://www.successunlimited)

#### Preventing Workplace Violence - American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees

<http://www.afscme.org/issues/1706.cfm>

