

		<h2>GENERAL POLICY MANUAL</h2>	
SECTION:	Health & Safety	APPROVED BY:	County Council
NUMBER:	7.32	SIGNATURE:	
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REFERENCE POLICY:	7.04, 7.06, 7.10	REVISED:	

Community Outreach & Home Visit Safety

POLICY

Oxford County is committed to providing a safe work environment for its employees and volunteers, including those who are required to conduct work activities in the community. These guidelines outline the preventative measures that shall be taken to ensure the personal safety of employees and volunteers who conduct community outreach and/or visit private residences while conducting work.

DEFINITION

home visit is defined in the context of this policy, as a prearranged visit by County staff to a member of the public's private residence to provide approved services or consultation. This policy does not apply to emergency services provided by the County.

GUIDELINES

Conducting outreach work in the community and visiting client homes is an important component of delivering services to the public. While most outreach activities and home visits are routine, non-threatening experiences, there is always a possibility that a safety issue could arise during a visit. County departments may implement additional procedures and measures to address departmental needs and risks. The following guidelines are intended to raise awareness and provide general guidance to employees and volunteers to mitigate those risks:

1.0 General Tips When Conducting Community Outreach & Home Visits

- 1.1 Stay alert and trust your instincts.
- 1.2 Always have an excuse to leave ready just in case.
- 1.3 Present yourself as calm, confident, observant and in control.
- 1.4 Participate in conflict resolution / de-escalation training.
- 1.5 Dress appropriately for weather conditions. Wear clothing and shoes that do not impede your movements and allow you to leave quickly if necessary.
- 1.6 Request that you leave your shoes on during the visit or bring an additional pair of indoor footwear or shoe covers. Advise them that it is your employer's policy to keep your shoes on.
- 1.7 Bring a cell phone. If you do not have a cell phone, borrow one.
- 1.8 If you wear a nametag or identification, wear it on a clip. Do not wear a lanyard around your neck.
- 1.9 Leave extravagant jewellery and valuables at home.

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- 1.10 In situations where significant confrontations can be expected (e.g. evictions) arrange to have additional staff present and/or request Police accompany County staff to appointment.
- 1.11 When visiting clients at unsheltered locations (e.g. encampments) additional safety considerations should be considered including:
 - 1.11.1 Never go alone. A team of two is the absolute minimum.
 - 1.11.2 Be aware of inherent risks at the site i.e. slippery, uneven terrain, unsecured dogs, sharps, broken glass etc.
 - 1.11.3 Discuss the visit in advance and establish a code word or phrase to signal a threat and the need to leave the site that is unbeknownst to others.
 - 1.11.4 Use harm reduction principles and distinguish between perceived threats and actual threats. Witnessing the presence of drugs or drug paraphernalia is not necessarily a threat to safety but may be depending on the circumstances or client(s) present and their behaviours.
 - 1.11.5 Provide outreach teams the opportunity to debrief and to process difficult outreach visits and events.

2.0 Before Conducting Outreach/Home Visit

- 2.1 Call ahead to arrange the appointment and to confirm the address, if possible. Ask if any other persons will be attending or present during the appointment. This may not always be feasible or necessary depending on the nature of the appointment and/or service request.
- 2.2 Where it is believed there is a likelihood the client/resident may become aggressive, discuss with your supervisor options to mitigate this risk. This may include:
 - 2.2.1 Arrange to meet in the office or at a public location (i.e. coffee shop) if the nature of the appointment allows for this.
 - 2.2.2 Have another staff member or the Police attend the appointment with you depending on the circumstances.
 - 2.2.3 Arrange phone calls immediately prior and at the end of the appointment to confirm your safety.
 - 2.2.4 Where the above measures are not practical, consider using GPS work alone software with a panic alert function.
- 2.3 Request that all pets be put in another room or secured until the appointment is completed. Even the friendliest pet can act aggressive to a stranger.
- 2.4 Always ensure that someone within your department knows your visiting schedule including dates and times, client names, addresses and telephone numbers. Refer to County Policy 7.06 – Working Alone for additional precautions that can be taken when working alone and when working alone is prohibited.

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3.0 Transportation to Outreach/Home Visit

- 3.1 Ensure your vehicle is in good running condition and make sure it has adequate fuel for the trip. It is always a good idea to keep emergency supplies in your vehicle like a flashlight/beacon, small snow shovel and first aid kit.
- 3.2 Avoid parking in isolated and poorly lit areas. Do not park in the driveway of the home if possible, since your vehicle could be blocked in by another vehicle. If you must park in the driveway, try to park in a manner that allows you to leave quickly if necessary.
- 3.3 When exiting your vehicle be attentive to your surroundings including nearby vehicles, people and pets (i.e. unsecured dogs).
- 3.4 In rural areas, if you are unsure, you have the right location, pull your car up as close to the residence as possible and honk or call the client by telephone. Once someone emerges you can verify that you are at the right location and that there are no dogs roaming freely.

4.0 During Outreach/Home Visit

- 4.1 Do not enter premises if the occupants are acting in a strange manner, appear to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs, inappropriately dressed or acting aggressively.
- 4.2 Once inside the residence, survey the premises for exits and ways out so you are prepared if an emergency occurs.
- 4.3 Meet in a common area and avoid meeting in the kitchen where there is easy access to sharp objects that could be used as a weapon.
- 4.4 Sit on a hard-backed chair if possible. Avoid sitting on upholstered furniture that may harbour infestations (i.e. bed bugs) or other hazards (i.e. sharp objects).
- 4.5 Wash hands or use hand sanitizer before and after each home visit.
- 4.6 Do not accept food or drink from a client/resident.
- 4.7 Do not address or confront suspected illegal activities (e.g. drug use) or provocative comments by the client/resident while in the home. Leave and report the situation to your supervisor and the Police, if appropriate, after you have safely left the residence. Ensure information is shared with other County staff and departments where there may be additional service requirements.
- 4.8 Refer to County Policy 7.10 – Workplace Violence Prevention for additional tips on how to deal with aggressive behaviour and when to call the Police.

5.0 After Outreach/Home Visit

- 5.1 Beware of your surroundings as you exit the residence, especially at night.
- 5.2 Lock your doors as soon as you return to your vehicle.
- 5.3 Report any aggressive, unacceptable behavior or potential hazards (e.g. vicious dog) experienced during the visit to your supervisor. This information shall be noted for reference when planning future appointments with the client or site visit

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at the address. Information must be shared with other County staff and departments where there may be additional service requirements.

- 5.4 Incidents where an employee believes their safety was compromised or where an injury was sustained shall be reported as per County Policy 7.04 – Workplace Incident, Injury & Illness Reporting Policy 7.04.

6.0 Exemptions

This policy does not apply to unplanned emergency services provided by the County that require an immediate rapid response. Departments shall ensure that suitable precautions are made in those circumstances for the protection of staff.