



Green Cross for Safety® Awards 2023 Finalist | Excellence

Anne Arundel County Government Risk Management

Situational Awareness in the Workplace

The employees of Anne Arundel County Government proudly serve the residents, businesses and visitors of Anne Arundel County Maryland through various county departments and divisions. The Office of Central Services Risk Management Division is composed of safety and insurance personnel. The Risk Management's safety team provides training and compliance in occupational safety and health administration. Risk control measures are developed and implemented to reduce the county's liability associated with risk. These control measures include – but are not limited to – worksite safety awareness, safety inspections, emergency response plans, OSHA safety training, CPR/AED training and trend analysis.

Anne Arundel County Government believes the success of its safety programs starts and ends with steadfast partnerships with its county colleagues. Its goal is to ensure employees feel safe in all aspects of their jobs within Anne Arundel County Government. Risk Management's goal is to make Anne Arundel County Government the safest place to work.

In 2022, there was a growing concern impacting many of its county departments and, by extension, a majority of its county personnel. A wave of targeted and aggressive confrontations directed toward county employees created a feeling of unease and apprehension in the workplace. In addition, some public-facing employees were being confronted and antagonized, often while being filmed, to solicit a negative response.

An investigation of this phenomenon found this trend toward confrontation with county personnel was ongoing not only on a county level but also throughout the United States. Anne Arundel County Government also found that while the pandemic afforded many opportunities to work remotely and interact digitally, the absence of face-to-face interaction impacted many employees' confidence in social interactions, which resulted in a decline in overall conflict resolution skills.

With the ultimate goal of affording its employees the knowledge and skills to perform their tasks as safely as possible, Risk Management's safety team understood it had an opportunity

and obligation to develop a program focused less on tangible safety outcomes and more on the psychological safety and wellbeing of Anne Arundel County Government employees.

Educating employees on the laws and regulations regarding public versus non-public spaces, the bounds to which employees could extricate themselves and terminate negative interactions, and techniques on de-escalation were needed to support a safe working environment. More importantly, it also empowered county staff to navigate distressing interactions. Providing employees with information regarding de-escalation tactics, scenario-based exercises and outlets for assistance if de-escalation is not a viable option proved to be appropriate and timely.

While holding firm in its goal to provide innovative and well-rounded training experiences, Risk Management collaborated with the Anne Arundel County Office of Law to augment situational awareness training with leaders in both the safety and legal areas of expertise. The purpose of this collaboration was twofold: to create an open dialogue as a means of presentation and to supplement Risk Management's de-escalation and situational awareness strategies with the legal framework to support it.

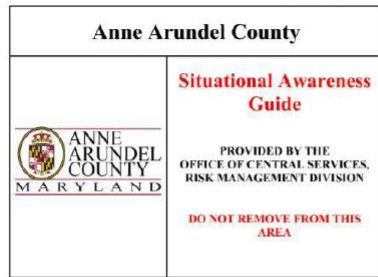
There were multiple objectives of the "Situational Awareness in the Workplace" Training Program. The primary objective was to increase the overall safety of all county employees by creating training, support and tools that would allow employees to perform their duties and assist visitors safely and lawfully. Secondary objectives of the program were to improve countywide communication, provide a level of personal privacy for public-facing employees and mitigate the risk of lawsuits by educating county employees on the laws and regulations regarding access to public spaces.

Training sessions were conducted in a hybrid format, providing opportunities for employees to attend online or in person. To promote engagement and ensure all questions were addressed at the training, Risk Management's safety staff members served as presenters and moderators. A county attorney attended as a legal subject matter expert.

This program is rooted in the understanding that every situation and interaction is different. The goals were not only to provide factual information and lawful responses but to develop a process and conversational roadmap that could be used by any employee to speak with any aggressive person to abate conflict. A flipchart with the lawful responses and tangible resources was created as a hands-on reference and it was made available in the resource tool kit provided after each session.

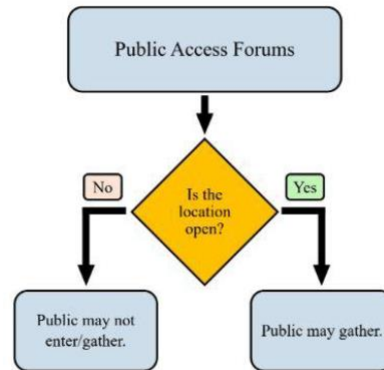
The chart was intentionally designed so employees could use it as a barrier to prevent themselves from being recorded while they referenced the material. The two-sided flip chart contains de-escalation procedures on the employee-facing side. On the reverse public-facing side, the flip chart reads, "Anne Arundel County is committed to ensuring the safety of all employees, contractors and visitors." The message reinforces the idea that the main concern for all involved is safety, which may also help in the effort to defuse the confrontation.

Updated August 2022



IN THE EVENT OF AN EMERGENCY REQUIRING POLICE, FIRE, OR EMS DIAL 911

- Public Access Forums
- Non-Public Access Forums
- Limited Public Forums
- Requesting Identification
- Filming in Public and Non-Public Forums
- Filming in Limited Access Forums
- Contact the Police / Call 911



Sidewalks, parks, town squares, etc. are examples of Public Access Forums. Accessing, filming and protests are freely permitted.

The "Situational Awareness in the Workplace" Training Program was designed by Risk Management's safety team to alleviate the unease and distress surrounding conflict-oriented interactions occurring on county property and within county buildings. Risk Management's safety team created a procedure for online course registration, data collection, scheduling, tracking and feedback to identify the participation levels by department. Information was used to assess the demand for courses and to evaluate the efficacy of the training. This approach provided real-time updates used for planning and modification of course materials, course offerings, scheduling and reference material.

Situational awareness training is an important component when facilitating additional safety wellness initiatives within the county. As research suggests, psychological safety and wellbeing in the workplace are as important as one's physical safety. Safety culture and program engagement are improved when training acknowledges the importance of mental health and wellbeing. When employees know their personal safety is a priority, they prioritize safe working habits.