

About PF13: Protection of Physical Safety

What are Psychosocial Factors?

Psychosocial factors are elements that impact employees' psychological responses to work and work conditions, potentially causing psychological health problems. Psychosocial factors include the way work is carried out (deadlines, workload, work methods) and the context in which work occurs (including relationships and interactions with managers and supervisors, colleagues and coworkers, and clients or customers).

What is PF13: Protection of Physical Safety?

GM@W defines PF13: Protection of Physical Safety as present in a work environment where management takes appropriate action to protect the physical safety of employees. Appropriate actions may include: policies to protect employees' physical safety; training in safety-related protocols; rapid and appropriate response to physical accidents or situations identified as risky; and clearly demonstrated concern for employees' physical safety.

Why is Protection of Physical Safety important?

Employees who perceive the workplace as protective of physical safety will feel more secure and engaged at work. Research has shown that when employees have higher levels of confidence in safety protection at work, they experience lower rates of psychological distress and mental health problems. The sense of physical safety protection is enhanced by: adequate training with regard to physical safety, trust that the employer minimizes physical hazards, confidence that the employer responds quickly and effectively to safety incidents, and the opportunity to have meaningful input into workplace policies and practices. The protection of physical safety is also an important bridge between traditional Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) and the new area of Psychological Health and Safety. This factor is linked to the concept of "safety climate": "employees' perceptions of the importance of safety and how it is operationalized within the working environment"¹. Protection of Physical Safety is especially important in workplaces with high levels of safety-sensitivity.

Safety climate is consistent with, and part of, the larger culture or climate of the organization. Correspondingly, a psychologically safe climate is one where there is a shared and enduring belief in, and commitment to, the importance of promoting and protecting the physical and psychological safety of all involved by taking actions to identify and address risks. It involves the complex interaction between events in the workplace or organizational environment; management commitment and leadership; employee perceptions, thoughts and knowledge; and individual and organizational behaviours or practices. Safety culture is therefore dynamic and aspirational rather than fixed. As one author noted, "Like a state of grace, a safety culture is something that is striven for but rarely attained"².

What happens when employees' physical safety is not protected?

Workplaces that fail to protect physical safety are likely to be more dangerous. Also, workers who do not see the workplace as protecting physical safety will feel less secure and less engaged, and this will increase their vulnerability to psychological distress and potential mental health problems.

¹ Cooper, M.D., & Phillips, R.A. (2004). Exploratory analysis of the safety climate and safety behavior analysis. *Journal of Safety Research*, 35, 497-512.

² Reason, J. (1997). *Managing the risks of organizational accidents*. Brookfield, VT: Ashgate.

How can Protection of Physical Safety be improved?

Start by conducting the GM@W Organizational Review and/or the GM@W Survey and reviewing the results. If Protection of Physical Safety is identified as an area of concern or relative strength, refer to the GM@W Action Resources for a practical strategy and evidence-based and effective suggested actions that can improve Protection of Physical Safety. It is also important to discuss the findings with employees to gain a further understanding of the results and to obtain input into possible interventions. Furthermore, it is important to evaluate the undertaken interventions over time to ensure they are effective and to take corrective action where needed. Consider reviewing the resources below. Finally, refer back to the GM@W website on occasion for new ideas about how Protection of Physical Safety can be enhanced.

Further information about Protection of Physical Safety:

- Clarke, S. (2010). An integrative model of safety climate: Linking psychological climate and work attitudes to individual safety outcomes using meta-analysis. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 83, 553-578. doi: [10.1348/096317909X452122](https://doi.org/10.1348/096317909X452122)
- Cooper, D. (1995). Measurement of safety climate: A component analysis. *Institute of Occupational Safety & Health Meeting*. Retrieved from http://www.behavioural-safety.com/articles/Measurement_of_safety_climate-a_component_analysis.pdf
- Gilbert, M. & Bilsker, D. (2012). *Psychological Health and Safety: An Action Guide for Employers*. Retrieved from http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/Workforce/Workforce_Employers_Guide_ENG.pdf
- Government of Alberta. (2011). *Best practices for the assessment and control of psychological hazards* (Vol. 5). Retrieved from <http://employment.alberta.ca/documents/bp013-bestpractices-volume5.pdf>
- Harvey, S., Kelloway, E.K., & Duncan-Leiper, L. (2003). Trust in management as a buffer of the relationships between overload and strain. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 8(4), 306-315. doi: [10.1037/1076-8998.8.4.306](https://doi.org/10.1037/1076-8998.8.4.306)
- Health and Safety Executive. (2005). *A review of safety culture and safety climate literature for the development of the safety culture inspection toolkit*. Retrieved from <http://www.hse.gov.uk/research/rrpdf/rr367.pdf>
- Idris, M.A., Dollard, M.F., Coward, J., & Dormann, C. (2012). Psychosocial safety climate: Conceptual distinctiveness and effect on job demand and worker psychological health. *Safety Science*, 50, 19-28. doi: [10.1016/j.ssci.2011.06.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssci.2011.06.005)
- Rashid, M., & Zimring, C. (2008). A review of the empirical literature on the relationships between indoor environment and stress in health care and office settings: Problems and prospects of sharing evidence. *Environment and Behaviour*, 40(2), 151-190. doi: [10.1177/0013916507311550](https://doi.org/10.1177/0013916507311550)
- The Great-West Life Assurance Company. (2012). PF13: Protection of Physical Safety. In *Centre Resources by GM@W Factor and On the Agenda*. Retrieved from <http://www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com>
- World Health Organization. (1999). Adverse health effects of noise. In B. Berglund, T. Lindvall, & D. H. Schwela (Eds.), *Guidelines for community noise*. Retrieved from <http://whqlibdoc.who.int/hq/1999/a68672.pdf>

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