



# Risk of violence too close to home

One of our readers recently emailed to congratulate us for finally displaying hazards from that well-known, but oft overlooked, workplace: the home. In fact, last month's "What's wrong with this photo?" contest – featuring a home care worker tending to an unkempt and clearly dangerous client – struck a chord with many. You needn't work in health care to appreciate the dangers of working alone, particularly under threat of violence. In fact, WorkSafeBC occupational safety officer and former registered nurse Jacqueline Dulac says an initial risk assessment would prevent most workers from ever putting themselves in this kind of danger in the first place.

Here is this month's list of the most obvious occupational hazards evident in the photo, care of WorkSafeBC's health care team:

## Violence

- Physical contact is evident between the client and the worker
- The worker is wearing a long, dangling necklace and earrings
- The client is pulling on the worker's necklace
- The exit route is unclear
- There is a firearm on the couch
- Signs of alcohol consumption are present
- The dog represents a potential hazard
- The client's daughter is making an unwelcome gesture
- The client has a baseball bat



## Tripping/slipping hazards

- The area carpet is turned up/folded over
- The room is filled with garbage and general clutter
- The electrical cords pose a tripping risk

## Exposure to sharps

- Used sharps are scattered
- One used sharp is exposed
- The sharps container is inadequate

## Patient handling concerns (applicable to clients requiring assistance)

- The wheelchair's position is hazardous
- There is a lack of transfer assist equipment

## Other safety issues

- The client's daughter is smoking
- The worker is working alone

Now it's your turn. See our centre-spread, pullout poster for a closer look at the safe stacking and storage of materials.



**Jennifer has won  
a blanket tote for her  
letter!**



## Worker in trouble needs a working alone plan

Editor, *WorkSafe Magazine* (Re: March/April issue, “What’s wrong with this photo?”)

First and most obvious, I notice the following:

- The worker is wearing a lanyard that has not/will not break away. A better option is a lanyard with at least one break-away point. In this case, it would have engaged. But if the woman behind the worker had pulled the lanyard from behind, where the single point is normally located, it may not have engaged. It’s best to wear the lanyard with three break-away points.
- The woman is smoking, exposing the worker to second-hand smoke.
- The dog is not in a separate room, which could lead to a bite or exposure to allergens.
- A number of slip-and-trip hazards are present, such as beer cans, the curled rug, and bags, including a large garbage bag.
- Needles are out, including one that is used, exposing the worker to a puncture wound and potentially a communicable disease.
- There is a gun on the couch. As soon as the worker saw this, she should have left and reported the unsecured weapon to her supervisor.
- The remnants of food and food packaging leads me to suspect that these clients might be inviting rodents, exposing the worker to hantavirus – an often overlooked hazard when entering poorly maintained homes.

I speculate as follows:

- This worker was about to assist the client in a transfer to the wheelchair, exposing the worker to a likely musculoskeletal injury. If the client is not able to transfer to the wheelchair predictably, with little to no assistance, a mechanical transfer device is needed.
- A risk assessment via phone was not conducted prior to the worker attending. In that assessment, the worker would have learned that the clients own a gun and a dog, and that they smoke. At that time, the worker could have educated the clients on the employer’s policies and expectations and that a breach could result in a suspension of service.
- A working alone plan is not in place. Based on the presented scenario, even if controls were in place to allow a one-worker visit, check-ins prior to entering the home and immediately following the visit are advisable.
- The worker is not aware of her right, or obligation, to refuse unsafe work. When advocating for worker safety in similar situations to this, I’m often confronted with, “But it’s their home....” While this is true, as soon as a worker enters, it is also a workplace; therefore, the employer has a responsibility to protect the worker’s safety and a worker has a responsibility to work safely.

I am a strong advocate for health care workers. I’m so thankful they’ve chosen to care for us in times when we’re not at our best, but it is time to say and believe: “do no harm, patient and self.”

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## Workplace requires a reliable escape route

Editor, *WorkSafe Magazine* (Re: March/April issue, “What’s wrong with this photo?”)

It was cool to see a fellow Quesnel resident/joint occupational health and safety committee person listed as last month’s prize winner, even though I do not know him. We will post the “What’s wrong with this photo?” poster on our safety bulletin board for other staff to challenge their safety skills.

Here are my observations for this issue:

- The firearm on the couch needs to be locked in a case or cabinet.
- The lady in the doorway is smoking indoors. It’s not healthy or safe for her or the others in the room or the house.
- The stool in the doorway is obstructing/restricting access. The stool has a stack of papers/pizza box that could fall and cause a slip/trip hazard.
- The man is showing physical abuse to the lady by pulling on her necklace.
- The carpet is curled up (a slip/trip hazard).
- There is clutter on the floor (beer cans, a plastic bag, papers, bags, a magazine) causing trip/slip hazards. One can is beside the left front wheel of the wheelchair.
- A loose white electrical cord or rope on the floor in front of the wheelchair is a trip/slip hazard and could get caught up in the wheelchair wheels.
- The duct tape on the right arm of the wheelchair should be repaired.
- There are loose hypodermic needles spilled on the coffee table (one with no protective cover on it). The unused needles should be in a medicine cabinet out of harm’s way and used ones should be recycled at a medical facility.
- Pill bottles are on the coffee table beside empty and partially filled liquor bottles, indicating that medication might be taken by the patient, and that alcohol might be consumed. Pill bottles should be put away in a closed cabinet.
- Junk food (chips, beer, cheese) is not healthy. The man is overweight (not healthy).
- The sandwich plate is resting on the arm of the couch and empty cans of beer are also on the couch. The food plate should be on a tray or flat eating surface. Beer and food could spill on the couch, making for unsanitary conditions.
- The lady in purple has no clear escape route. The wheelchair, coffee table, lady in the door with a dog in hand, and the stool in the doorway all hamper or possibly prevent her from getting away from a possibly dangerous or life-threatening situation. The lady in the doorway with the dog in her arm might have been the one drinking and taking medication or both she and the man might have been drinking and taking medication.
- If the lady in purple is a health care worker, she should have a cell phone or pager to contact emergency aid/response. She should have assessed the situation, and, if possible, left the scene or not entered. Or she should have requested a second person or RCMP officer, once seeing alcohol, medication, the firearm on the couch, and a potentially inebriated or under-the-influence-person(s) – one of whom appears to be acting abusive/violent.
- I do not see a house phone or cellphone that could be used.
- It appears to be a baseball bat behind the wheelchair leaning against the wall (another potential weapon to be aware of).
- The lady in purple could be wearing protective rubber gloves if handling any needles or contaminated/spoiled foods or liquids.

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View more responses to “What’s wrong with this photo?” on our website, [WorkSafeMagazine.com](http://WorkSafeMagazine.com).