

Risk Assessment Hazard Descriptions

This list was developed from the 2007 Edition of the National Fire Protection Association’s *NFPA 1600: Standard on Disaster/Emergency Management and Business Continuity Programs* in addition to hazards identified in existing HMPs in Pennsylvania. Some hazards with similar impacts and mitigation measures have been combined for the purposes of this list. The individual hazards constituting such combined hazards remain listed within the combined hazard descriptions in bulleted form. Such individual hazards may be extracted and addressed separately at the discretion of the planning team.

Hazard	Hazard Description
<i>Natural Hazards</i>	
<i>Avalanche/Glacier</i>	An avalanche is a mass of snow sliding down a mountainside. It occurs when the stress (from gravity) trying to pull the snow downhill exceeds the strength of bonds that form between snow grains within the snow cover. Temperature, precipitation, wind, depth of snow cover, slope, and vegetation density all influences the frequency and intensity of avalanches. Conditions do not exist for avalanches to occur within Pennsylvania. (FEMA, 1997). A glacier is a very large mass of ice which may or may not be moving slowly over a land mass, formed from compacted snow in an area where snow accumulation exceeds melting and sublimation. Glaciers exist where, over a period of years, snow remains after summer’s end. They are present in North America, but have not existed in Pennsylvania for approximately 17,000 years (DCNR, 1999).
<i>Coastal Erosion</i>	Coastal erosion is a natural coastal process in which sediment outflow exceeds sediment inflow at a particular location. These sediments are typically transported from one location to another by wind, waves, currents, tides, wind-driven water, waterborne ice, runoff of surface waters, or groundwater seepage. Depending on the location and processes in place, coastal erosion can take place very slowly, whereby the shoreline shifts only inches to a foot per year; or more rapidly, whereby changes can exceed ten feet per year. Intense storms and human interference can result in erosive events where large portions of a beach or dune are washed away by strong currents and large waves. With the exception of portions of Erie County, coastal erosion is not a hazard for communities in Pennsylvania. (FEMA, 1997).
<i>Drought</i>	Drought is a natural climatic condition which occurs in virtually all climates, the consequence of a natural reduction in the amount of precipitation experienced over a long period of time, usually a season or more in length. High temperatures, prolonged winds, and low relative humidity can exacerbate the severity of drought. This hazard is of particular concern in Pennsylvania due to the presence of farms as well as water-dependent industries and recreation areas across the Commonwealth. A prolonged drought could severely impact these sectors of the local economy, as well as residents who depend on wells for drinking water and other personal uses. (National Drought Mitigation Center, 2006).

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<p><i>Dust, Sand Storm</i></p>	<p>A dust or sand storm is a severe windstorm that sweeps clouds of dust across an arid region. Drought and wind contribute to the emergence of dust storms, as do poor farming and grazing practices by exposing dust and sand to the wind. Dust and sand storm events can be hazardous to transportation, navigation, and human health. Severe or prolonged dust and sand storms can result in disaster causing extensive economic damage over a wide area and personal injury or death in some cases. Dust and sand storm events occur in the dry regions of the United States (e.g. Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona) and historically have not been considered a significant hazard in Pennsylvania. (NOAA, 2009).</p>
<p><i>Earthquake</i></p>	<p>An earthquake is the motion or trembling of the ground produced by sudden displacement of rock usually within the upper 10-20 miles of the Earth's crust. Earthquakes result from crustal strain, volcanism, landslides, or the collapse of underground caverns. Earthquakes can affect hundreds of thousands of square miles, cause damage to property measured in the tens of billions of dollars, result in loss of life and injury to hundreds of thousands of persons, and disrupt the social and economic functioning of the affected area. Most property damage and earthquake-related deaths are caused by the failure and collapse of structures due to ground shaking which is dependent upon amplitude and duration of the earthquake. (FEMA, 1997).</p>
<p><i>Expansive Soils</i></p>	<p>Clay soils have the potential to shrink and swell when they become wetted or dried. Expansive soils do not change size quickly, but over time can result in significant movement that can damage supply lines (e.g. roads, power lines, railways, bridges, etc...) and structures that lack, proper design. (Olive et al, 1989).</p>
<p><i>Extreme Temperature</i></p>	<p>Extreme cold temperatures drop well below what is considered normal for an area during the winter months and often accompany winter storm events. Combined with increases in wind speed, such temperatures in Pennsylvania can be life threatening to those exposed for extended periods of time. Extreme heat can be described as temperatures that hover 10°F or more above the average high temperature for a region during the summer months. Extreme heat is responsible for more deaths in Pennsylvania than all other natural disasters combined. (Lawrence County, PA HMP, 2004).</p>
<p><i>Flood, Flash Flood, Ice Jam</i></p>	<p>Flooding is the temporary condition of partial or complete inundation on normally dry land and it is the most frequent and costly of all hazards in Pennsylvania. Flooding events are generally the result of excessive precipitation. General flooding is typically experienced when precipitation occurs over a given river basin for an extended period of time. Flash flooding is usually a result of heavy localized precipitation falling in a short time period over a given location, often along mountain streams and in urban areas where much of the ground is covered by impervious surfaces. The severity of a flood event is dependent upon a combination of stream and river basin topography and physiography, hydrology, precipitation and weather patterns, present soil moisture conditions, the degree of vegetative clearing as well as the presence of impervious surfaces in and around flood-prone areas. (NOAA, 2009). Winter flooding can include ice jams which occur when warm temperatures and heavy rain cause snow to melt rapidly. Snow melt combined with heavy rains can cause frozen rivers to swell, which breaks the ice layer on top of a river. The ice layer often breaks into large chunks, which float downstream, piling up in narrow passages and near other obstructions such as bridges and dams. All forms of flooding can damage infrastructure (USACE, 2007).</p>

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<p><i>Hailstorm</i></p>	<p>In addition to flooding and severe winds, hail is another potential damaging product of severe thunderstorms. Hailstorms occur when ice crystals form within a low pressure front due to the rapid rise of warm air into the upper atmosphere and the subsequent cooling of the air mass. Frozen droplets gradually accumulate on the ice crystals until, having developed sufficient weight; they fall as precipitation in the form of balls or irregularly shaped masses of ice greater than 0.75 inches in diameter (FEMA, 1997). The size of hailstones is a direct function of the size and severity of the storm. High velocity updraft winds are required to keep hail in suspension in thunderclouds. The strength of the updraft is a function of the intensity of heating at the Earth's surface. Damage to crops and vehicles are typically the most significant impacts of hailstorms. Areas in eastern and central Pennsylvania typically experience less than 2 hailstorms per year while areas in western Pennsylvania experience 2-3 annually. (FEMA, 1997).</p>
<p><i>Hurricane, Tropical Storm, Nor'easter</i></p>	<p>Hurricanes, tropical storms, and nor'easters are classified as cyclones and are any closed circulation developing around a low-pressure center in which the winds rotate counter-clockwise (in the Northern Hemisphere) and whose diameter averages 10-30 miles across. While most of Pennsylvania is not directly affected by the devastating impacts cyclonic systems can have on coastal regions, many areas in the state are subject to the primary damaging forces associated with these storms including high-level sustained winds, heavy precipitation, and tornadoes. Areas in southeastern Pennsylvania could be susceptible to storm surge and tidal flooding. The majority of hurricanes and tropical storms form in the Atlantic Ocean, Caribbean Sea, and Gulf of Mexico during the official Atlantic hurricane season (June through November). (FEMA, 1997).</p>
<p><i>Invasive Species</i></p>	<p>An invasive species is a species that is not indigenous to the ecosystem under consideration and whose introduction causes or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health. These species can be any type of organism: plant, fish, invertebrate, mammal, bird, disease, or pathogen. Infestations may not necessarily impact human health, but can create a nuisance or agricultural hardships by destroying crops, defoliating populations of native plant and tree species, or interfering with ecological systems (Governor's Invasive Species Council of Pennsylvania, 2009).</p>
<p><i>Landslide</i></p>	<p>A landslide is the downward and outward movement of slope-forming soil, rock, and vegetation reacting to the force of gravity. Landslides may be triggered by both natural and human-caused changes in the environment, including heavy rain, rapid snow melt, steepening of slopes due to construction or erosion, earthquakes, and changes in groundwater levels. Mudflows, mudslides, rockfalls, rockslides, and rock topples are all forms of a landslide. Areas that are generally prone to landslide hazards include previous landslide areas, the bases of steep slopes, the bases of drainage channels, developed hillsides, and areas recently burned by forest and brush fires. (Delano & Wilshusen, 2001).</p>
<p><i>Lightning Strike</i></p>	<p>Lightning is a discharge of electrical energy resulting from the build-up of positive and negative charges within a thunderstorm. The flash or "bolt" of light usually occurs within clouds or between clouds and the ground. A bolt of lightning can reach temperatures approaching 50,000°F. On average, 89 people are killed each year by lightning strikes in the United States. Within Pennsylvania, the annual average number of thunder and lightning events a given area can expect ranges between 40-70 events per year (FEMA, 1997).</p>
<p><i>Pandemic and Infectious Disease</i></p>	<p>A pandemic occurs when infection from of a new strain of a certain disease, to which most humans have no immunity, substantially exceeds the number of expected cases over a given period of time. Such a disease may or may not be transferable between humans and animals. (Martin & Martin-Granel, 2006).</p>

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<p><i>Radon Exposure</i></p>	<p>Radon is a cancer-causing natural radioactive gas that you can't see, smell, or taste. It is a large component of the natural radiation that humans are exposed to and can pose a serious threat to public health when it accumulates in poorly ventilated residential and occupation settings. According to the USEPA, radon is estimated to cause about 21,000 lung cancer deaths per year, second only to smoking as the leading cause of lung cancer (EPA 402-R-03-003: EPA Assessment..., 2003). An estimated 40% of the homes in Pennsylvania are believed to have elevated radon levels (Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, 2009).</p>
<p><i>Subsidence, Sinkhole</i></p>	<p>Subsidence is a natural geologic process that commonly occurs in areas with underlying limestone bedrock and other rock types that are soluble in water. Water passing through naturally occurring fractures dissolves these materials leaving underground voids. Eventually, overburden on top of the voids causes a collapse which can damage structures with low strain tolerances. This collapse can take place slowly over time or quickly in a single event, but in either case. Karst topography describes a landscape that contains characteristic structures such as sinkholes, linear depressions, and caves. In addition to natural processes, human activity such as water, natural gas, and oil extraction can cause subsidence and sinkhole formations. (FEMA, 1997).</p>
<p><i>Tornado, Wind Storm</i></p>	<p>A wind storm can occur during severe thunderstorms, winter storms, coastal storms, or tornadoes. Straight-line winds such as a downburst have the potential to cause wind gusts that exceed 100 miles per hour. Based on 40 years of tornado history and over 100 years of hurricane history, FEMA identifies western and central Pennsylvania as being more susceptible to higher winds than eastern Pennsylvania. (FEMA, 1997). A tornado is a violent windstorm characterized by a twisting, funnel-shaped cloud extending to the ground. Tornadoes are most often generated by thunderstorm activity (but sometimes result from hurricanes or tropical storms) when cool, dry air intersects and overrides a layer of warm, moist air forcing the warm air to rise rapidly. The damage caused by a tornado is a result of high wind velocities and windblown debris. According to the National Weather Service, tornado wind speeds can range between 30 to more than 300 miles per hour. They are more likely to occur during the spring and early summer months of March through June and are most likely to form in the late afternoon and early evening. Most tornadoes are a few dozen yards wide and touch down briefly, but even small, short-lived tornadoes can inflict tremendous damage. Destruction ranges from minor to catastrophic depending on the intensity, size, and duration of the storm. Structures made of light materials such as mobile homes are most susceptible to damage. Waterspouts are weak tornadoes that form over warm water and are relatively uncommon in Pennsylvania. Each year, an average of over 800 tornadoes is reported nationwide, resulting in an average of 80 deaths and 1,500 injuries (NOAA, 2002). Based on NOAA Storm Prediction Center Statistics, the number of recorded F3, F4, & F5 tornadoes between 1950-1998 ranges from <1 to 15 per 3,700 square mile area across Pennsylvania (FEMA, 2009). A water spout is a tornado over a body of water (American Meteorological Society, 2009).</p>
<p><i>Tsunami</i></p>	<p>A tsunami is a series of ocean waves generated by sudden displacements in the sea floor, landslides, or volcanic activity. In the deep ocean, the tsunami wave may only be a few inches high. The tsunami wave may come gently ashore or may increase in height to become a fast moving wall of turbulent water several meters high. Worldwide, unusual wave heights have been known to be over 100 feet high and depending on a number of factors, some low-lying areas could experience severe inland inundation of water and debris of more than 1,000 feet. No known tsunami events have been documented in Pennsylvania over the past 200 years (Dunbar & Weaver, 2007).</p>

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<p><i>Wildfire</i></p>	<p>A wildfire is a raging, uncontrolled fire that spreads rapidly through vegetative fuels, exposing and possibly consuming structures. Wildfires often begin unnoticed and can spread quickly, creating dense smoke that can be seen for miles. Wildfires can occur at any time of the year, but mostly occur during long, dry hot spells. Any small fire in a wooded area, if not quickly detected and suppressed, can get out of control. Most wildfires are caused by human carelessness, negligence, and ignorance. However, some are precipitated by lightning strikes and in rare instances, spontaneous combustion. Wildfires in Pennsylvania can occur in fields, grass, brush, and forests. 98% of wildfires in Pennsylvania are a direct result of people, often caused by debris burns (PA DCNR, 1999).</p>
<p><i>Winter Storm</i></p>	<p>Winter storms may include snow, sleet, freezing rain, or a mix of these wintry forms of precipitation. A winter storm can range from a moderate snowfall or ice event over a period of a few hours to blizzard conditions with wind-driven snow that lasts for several days. Many winter storms are accompanied by low temperatures and heavy and/or blowing snow, which can severely impair visibility and disrupt transportation. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has a long history of severe winter weather. (NOAA, 2009).</p>
<p><i>Volcano</i></p>	<p>A volcano is a vent in the earth's crust through which magma, rock fragments, gases, and ash are ejected from the earth's interior. Over time, accumulation of these erupted materials on the earth's surface creates a volcanic mountain. Hazards associated with the eruption of volcanoes endanger people, buildings, and infrastructure. Volcanoes can lie dormant for centuries between eruptions and the risk posed by volcanic activity is not always apparent. There are no active or dormant volcanoes in Pennsylvania. (FEMA, 1997).</p>
<p><i>Human-Made Hazards</i></p>	
<p><i>Building or Structure Collapse</i></p>	<p>Collapse of a building or structure refers to the loss of the load-carrying capacity of a component of the structure or the entire structure itself. The loss of a structure's load carrying capacity occurs when the loads applied to the structure exceed the structure's load-carrying capacity. This can be a result of improper design, lack of maintenance, events from a structure's load history that have gradually reduced its load-carrying capacity, or sudden and severe hazard events such as severe weather or terrorism. (Ratay, 2000).</p>
<p><i>Civil Disturbance</i></p>	<p>Civil disturbance hazards encompass a set of hazards emanating from a wide range of possible events that cause civil disorder, confusion, strife, and economic hardship. Civil disturbance hazards include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Famine; involving a widespread scarcity of food leading to malnutrition and increased mortality (Robson, 1981). • Economic Collapse, Recession; Very slow or negative growth, for example (Economist, 2009). • Misinformation; erroneous information spread unintentionally (Makkai, 1970). • Civil Disturbance, Public Unrest, Mass Hysteria, Riot; group acts of violence against property and individuals, for example (18 U.S.C. § 232, 2008). • Strike, Labor Dispute; controversies related to the terms and conditions of employment, for example (29 U.S.C. § 113, 2008).

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<p><i>Dam Failure</i></p>	<p>A dam is a barrier across flowing water that obstructs, directs, or slows down water flow. Dams provide benefits such as flood protection, power generation, drinking water, irrigation, and recreation. Failure of these structures results in an uncontrolled release of impounded water. Failures are relatively rare, but immense damage and loss of life is possible in downstream communities when such events occur. Aging infrastructure, hydrologic, hydraulic and geologic characteristics, population growth, and design and maintenance practices should be considered when assessing dam failure hazards. The failure of the South Fork Dam, located in Johnstown, PA, was the deadliest dam failure ever experienced in the United States. It took place in 1889 and resulted in the Johnstown Flood which claimed 2,209 lives (FEMA, 1997). Today there are approximately 3,200 dams and reservoirs throughout Pennsylvania (Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, 2009).</p>
<p><i>Disorientation</i></p>	<p>Large numbers of people are attracted to Pennsylvania’s rural areas for recreational purposes such as hiking, camping, hunting, and fishing. As a result, people can become lost or trapped in remote and rugged wilderness areas. Search and rescue may be required for people who suffer from medical problems or injuries and those who become accidentally or intentionally disoriented. Search and rescue efforts are focused in and around state forest and state park lands (DCNR, 2009).</p>
<p><i>Drowning</i></p>	<p>Drowning is death from suffocation, typically associated with swimming, fishing, boating or bridge accidents, or suicide. It can be a significant hazard in communities with numerous residential pools or water bodies (e.g. ponds, lakes, rivers, etc...) and extensive outdoor recreational activity. Drowning rates are particularly high for children ages 1-14. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that drowning is the second leading cause of injury death (after motor vehicle crashes) among children ages 1-14. (CDC, 2008).</p>
<p><i>Environmental Hazards</i></p>	<p>Environmental hazards are hazards that pose threats to the natural environment, the built environment, and public safety through the diffusion of harmful substances, materials, or products. For the purposes of the SSAHMP, environmental hazards include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hazardous material releases at fixed facilities or in transit; including toxic chemicals, infectious substances, bio hazardous waste, and any materials that are explosive, corrosive, flammable, or radioactive (PL 1990-165, § 207(e)). • Coal mining incidents; including the release of the release of harmful chemical and waste materials into water bodies or the atmosphere, explosions, fires, and other hazards and threats to life safety stemming from mining (Environmental Protection Agency, Natural Disaster PSAs, 2009). • Oil and gas well incidents; including the release of the release of harmful chemical and waste materials into water bodies or the atmosphere, explosions, fires, and other hazards and threats to life safety stemming from oil and gas extraction (Environmental Protection Agency, Natural Disaster PSAs, 2009).
<p><i>Levee Failure</i></p>	<p>A levee is a human-made structure, usually an earthen embankment, designed and constructed in accordance with sound engineering practices to contain, control, or divert the flow of water so as to provide protection from temporary flooding (Interagency Levee Policy Review Committee, 2006). Levee failures or breaches occur when a levee fails to contain the floodwaters for which it is designed to control or floodwaters exceed the height of the constructed levee. 51 of Pennsylvania's 67 counties have been identified as having at least one levee (FEMA Region III, 2009).</p>

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<p><i>Mass Food/Animal Feed Contamination</i></p>	<p>Mass food or animal feed contamination hazards occur when food or food sources are contaminated with pathogenic bacteria, viruses, or parasites, as well as chemical or natural toxins. They may lead to foodborne illnesses and/or interruptions in the food supply. Contamination may occur due to natural foodborne illnesses and chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear exposure. Most foodborne illnesses are caused by Campylobacter in poultry, E. Coli in beef, leafy greens, and raw milk, Listeria in deli meats, unpasteurized soft cheeses, and produce, Salmonella in eggs, poultry, meat, and produce, Vibrio in raw oysters, Norovirus in many foods, and Toxoplasma in meats (CDC, 2013). Contamination usually occurs accidentally during the production/preparation process but can also be the result of intentional acts.</p>
<p><i>Nuclear Incidents</i></p>	<p>Nuclear accidents generally refer to events involving the release of significant levels of radioactivity or exposure of workers or the general public to radiation (FEMA, 1997). Nuclear accidents/incidents can be placed into three categories: 1) Criticality accidents which involve loss of control of nuclear assemblies or power reactors, 2) Loss-of-coolant accidents which result whenever a reactor coolant system experiences a break or opening large enough so that the coolant inventory in the system cannot be maintained by the normally operating make-up system, and 3) Loss-of-containment accidents which involve the release of radioactivity. The primary concern following such an incident or accident is the extent of radiation, inhalation, and ingestion of radioactive isotopes which can cause acute health effects (e.g. death, burns, severe impairment), chronic health effects (e.g. cancer), and psychological effects. (FEMA, 1997).</p>
<p><i>Terrorism</i></p>	<p>Terrorism is use of force or violence against persons or property with the intent to intimidate or coerce. Acts of terrorism include threats of terrorism; assassinations; kidnappings; hijackings; bomb scares and bombings; cyber-attacks (computer-based); and the use of chemical, biological, nuclear and radiological weapons. (FEMA, 2009).</p>
<p><i>Transportation Accidents</i></p>	<p>Transportation accidents can result from any form of air, rail, water, or road travel. It is unlikely that small accidents would significantly impact the larger community. However, certain accidents could have secondary regional impacts such as a hazardous materials release or disruption in critical supply/access routes, especially if vital transportation corridors or junctions are present. (Research and Innovative Technology Administration, 2009). Traffic congestion in certain circumstances can also be hazardous. Traffic congestion is a condition that occurs when traffic demand approaches or exceeds the available capacity of the road network. This hazard should be carefully evaluated during emergency planning since it is a key factor in timely disaster or hazard response, especially in areas with high population density. (Federal Highway Administration, 2009).</p>
<p><i>Urban Fire and Explosion</i></p>	<p>An urban fire involves a structure or property within an urban or developed area. For hazard mitigation purposes, major urban fires involving large buildings and/or multiple properties are of primary concern. The effects of a major urban fire include minor to significant property damage, loss of life, and residential or business displacement. Explosions are extremely rapid releases of energy that usually generate high temperatures and often lead to fires. The risk of severe explosions can be reduced through careful management of flammable and explosive hazardous materials. (FEMA, 1997).</p>

<p><i>Utility Interruption</i></p>	<p>Utility interruption hazards are hazards that impair the functioning of important utilities in the energy, telecommunications, public works, and information network sectors. Utility interruption hazards include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geomagnetic Storms; including temporary disturbances of the Earth's magnetic field resulting in disruptions of communication, navigation, and satellite systems (National Research Council et al., 1986). • Fuel or Resource Shortage; resulting from supply chain breaks or secondary to other hazard events, for example (Mercer County, PA, 2005). • Electromagnetic Pulse; originating from an explosion or fluctuating magnetic field and causing damaging current surges in electrical and electronic systems (Institute for Telecommunications Sciences, 1996). • Information Technology Failure; due to software bugs, viruses, or improper use (Rainer Jr., et al, 1991). • Ancillary Support Equipment; electrical generating, transmission, system control, and distribution-system equipment for the energy industry (Hirst & Kirby, 1996). • Public Works Failure; damage to or failure of highways, flood control systems, deep-water ports and harbors, public buildings, bridges, dams, for example (United States Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, 2009). • Telecommunications System Failure; Damage to data transfer, communications, and processing equipment, for example (FEMA, 1997) • Transmission Facility or Linear Utility Accident; liquefied natural gas leakages, explosions, facility problems, for example (United States Department of Energy, 2005) • Major Energy, Power, Utility Failure; interruptions of generation and distribution, power outages, for example (United States Department of Energy, 2000).
<p><i>War and Criminal Activity</i></p>	<p>War and criminal activity hazards are intentional acts of violence, damage to property, and other criminal activities. This category specifically includes the following hazards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • War, Enemy Attack; foreign attack on territory of the United States (50 U.S.C., 2008). • Disinformation, Sabotage; intentionally spread inaccurate information, for example; interfering or impairing an operator's management or control of an organization (USLegal, Inc., 2008). • Criminal Activity; lawlessness, acts committed for which punishment is imposed upon conviction after due process (USLegal, Inc., 2008). • Physical or Information Security Breach; contravening security and confidentiality laws and procedures; burglary, unreasonable search and seizure, for example (73 Pa. C.S. § 2303, 2006; Network Associates, Inc., 1998). • Workplace, School Violence; some environments are more likely than others to experience violence including occupations involving contact with the public (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, 1996). • Harassment; a pattern of conduct that causes substantial emotional distress with no legal purpose (18 U.S.C. § 1514, 2008). • Discrimination; widespread treatment based on class, category, or prejudice rather than merit, applies extensively to civil and labor law (26 U.S.C. § 62, 2008).