Attachment D

Employee Assistance Program Considerations

Employee Assistance Program (EAP) participation can be important to the success of the Agency's Workplace Violence Program. The EAP counselors usually play an active role in early prevention efforts, sometimes participates on the Crisis Management Team (CMT), and assist with organizationally recovery after an incident of workplace violence has occurred.

A. Overview of the EAP

The EAP provides short-term counseling and referral services at no cost to the employee. Services are provided through either a contractual arrangement with a private contractor or interagency agreement with another Federal agency. FEMA currently has interagency agreements with the Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, and private contracts with Green Spring Health Services, Inc. The EAP is staffed by professional counselors who are available to assist with any personal or work-related problem, including performance and conduct issues, alcohol/drug abuse, or marital or financial problems. EAP counselors will refer employees to other professional services and resources within the community when it is determined that long-term counseling and assistance or medical attention is warranted. If employees are referred outside the EAP for assistance, any expenses associated with that referral are the responsibility of the employee and may be covered by the employee's health insurance.

Confidentiality is an important aspect of the program. Therefore, employees who seek EAP services are afforded considerable privacy by laws, policies, and the professional ethics of EAP professionals.

CMT members should familiarize themselves with the structure, scope, and special considerations of the EAP providers for their organizations. The CMT may identify needs for expanding the program's existing services to meet the needs of the Crisis Management Plan for their organization.

B. Role in Early Prevention Efforts.

1. Promotion of EAP. An active, well-known EAP presence can enhance the effectiveness of the Workplace Violence Program. The EAP should be promoted by issuing periodic statements to all employees, endorsing the program and reminding employees of the services offered. Another promotion technique is having EAP counselors attend staff meetings to familiarize employees and supervisors with the counselor and to have counselors give briefings and seminars for managers, employees, and union representatives.

2. Information Dissemination. Literature should be distributed periodically to all employees and supervisors regarding the services available and on various topics, such as domestic violence, stress reduction, dealing with angry customers, conflict resolution, depression in the workplace, etc.

3. Early Involvement in Organizational Change. When faced with a reorganization, restructuring, or other organizational change which may have a negative effect on employees, the EAP can help, through individual or group sessions, to keep information flowing, keep feelings under control, prevent potential outbursts, provide constructive outlets for feelings, and help employees plan for the future.

Also, since EAP counselors understand how important it is that supervisors and co-workers not diagnose an employee's problem, they are in an excellent position to explain the delicate balance between identifying problem behavior early on and labeling an individual as potentially violent.

C. Participation on the Crisis Management Team. Since every incident of workplace violence is different, EAP participation will depend on many factors. Issues need to be clarified ahead of time to avoid misunderstandings and conflict.

1. Consultation with Supervisor When Incident is Reported. Depending on the type of incident reported, it may be necessary for a counselor, along with an Employee Relations Specialist and Security Officer, to be part of the incident response team that consults with the supervisor. In some situations, such as potential suicide, the EAP can play a major role. In other situations, such as dealing with an employee who frightens co-workers, but who has not

actually done or said anything warranting discipline, the EAP can assist in working with the supervisor to plan an effective response.

2. Response/Intervention. The EAP counselor can help with conflict resolution and can work with the victim by giving advice and guidance, or with the perpetrator by helping to diffuse the anger/hostility that could lead to violence. The counselor can help clarify options and procedures in which substance abuse or mental illness seems to be a factor.

a. Individual Intervention. Prompt intervention for particularly stressful experiences are sometimes necessary. Though most employees will need only brief intervention, provision should be made for those who may need longer-term professional assistance. Debriefing sessions may be conducted immediately following the incident or 2 to 3 days after the incident. If the EAP servicing your organization is not trained to provide Critical Stress Debriefing, potential sources for additional help should be explored, such as private contractors, community health resources, university or medical school programs, or the Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Public Health Service.

b. Consultation on Recovery. The EAP can be very helpful to management in dealing with unfamiliar challenges under high stress following the incident. An effective EAP needs to be familiar with not only providing mental health care during a crisis situation, but also with management practices that facilitate recovery and with other resources that may need to be mobilized. In thinking about an organization's recovery, there is a temptation to focus narrowly on care-giving responses, such as debriefings and counseling. These services are essential, however, the way the manager conveys information, assigns responsibilities, sets priorities, and monitors employee performance after a violent incident can play a vital role in helping or hindering recovery. Particular attention should be focused on these aspects of recovery.

3. Should the EAP Counselor Take the Incident Report? The EAP should not take the incident report, as confidentiality requirements prohibit EAP counselors from disclosing information. Putting a counselor in the position of informing CMT members about an incident could lead to serious misunderstandings among employees and could harm the credibility of the EAP. In addition, incident reports could get confused with EAP records covered under the Privacy Act. Many times the EAP counselor will be the

first person to hear about an incident involving threatening behavior, and managers and employees often feel comfortable telling the counselor about a situation that frightens them. The planning group, therefore, should decide ahead of time which types of reports the EAP counselor should handle alone and which types should be reported to the CMT, while making sure that confidentiality requirements of the EAP are maintained.

4. Should the EAP Counselor be the First Intervenor? The EAP should not be the first intervenor in workplace violence situations for the following reasons:

a. Issues of confidentiality cause numerous conflicts for the counselor; and

b. It could lead to a perception of treating perpetrators of workplace violence as victims needing counseling rather than appropriate discipline.

5. Should the EAP Conduct the Psychological Examination? The EAP counselor should not perform these examinations, as they are highly specialized. The examinations should be conducted by an experienced external contractor. The Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Public Health Service, can provide this service on a contractual basis, when warranted, at the employing organization's expense.