

Security Measures

Following the recent siege in a Victorian solicitor's office, the Law Institute Journal published the following advice on safety measures in such circumstances which has relevance to all areas of the profession.

Solicitors who practice in highly emotional areas of the law, which in the past have seen violent responses from clients or other people should always be alert to threats, says Laurie Neville, the Institute's chief trust account inspector and a former Victoria Police chief inspector.

They should assess the risks and develop strategies for dealing with emergency situations.

"Solicitors and their staff may become the target of unsettled people. Experience has shown that matters such as family law, or where people have lost a large sum of money, tend to generate a lot of emotion."

Mr Neville says it should be standard practice to develop strategies and drills for dealing with office invasions and to make sure everyone in the office is familiar with the drills.

"Firms have drills in case of fire - it should be standard practice to have them for situations such as sieges."

Although no two situations will be the same, Mr Neville said there were broad security principles which should be followed.

- Devise an emergency strategy, discuss it with staff and have regular drills
- Consider installing modern technology such as panic or distress alarms. There are both mobile and fixed point alarms - they can be on a key ring or incorporated into a desk. The alarms can be linked to a security firm or to a staff member in another part of the building with instructions to contact the police if the alarm is activated.
- Review the layout of your building, including offices and reception area. If possible, arrange the office so there are escape routes behind staff members. Avoid the traditional barrier such as a desk

between staff members and the exit point or a barrier between the client and the exit.

- Establish a "safe room" to which staff can move quickly if they are unable to leave the building. The room should have a telephone, reinforced door and escape route.
- Work out the best escape routes for all staff on all floors.
- Develop a code for emergencies which can be used over the PA system such as paging a person for a phone call. The person's name is a code name for an emergency procedure. Such strategies can alert other staff without agitating the person.

In an emergency

- To contact the police in an emergency, dial 000, not the local police station.
- State the usual details: the firm's name, address, nearest cross street, a brief description of the building, exit and entry details and a contact phone number (keeping the line open), particulars of the defendant and weapons present.
- Escape only if the opportunity presents itself and you are left alone. However, you should not take unnecessary risk or do anything rash.

Dealing with an aggrieved person

- Stay calm, don't panic.
- Don't do anything which will aggravate the situation. The longer the siege goes on, the more likely the prospect of a peaceful resolution.

Receiving threats

- When solicitors or staff receive threats, these should always be taken seriously and the police contacted immediately.

Mr Neville says: "The police strategy in siege situations is to resolve them without injury to victim or offender, however long it takes. They have expert assistance and are highly trained."

CATHY LAIRD

Reprinted with the permission of the Victorian Law Institute Journal.

Commonwealth Young Lawyers' Course

The Institute of Advanced Legal Studies and the School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London invite applications for the Commonwealth Young Lawyers Course.

The course, which runs from 24 February to 27 June 1997 is designed to offer young lawyers (under 36 years of age) in private practice an opportunity to study and broaden their experience of practice in the UK.

The first six weeks of the course provide briefings across a wide range of legal developments and the remainder of the course is spent in placement with UK barristers and solicitors.

The course fees are likely to be £5,500 which does not include accommodation or expenses. Applicants may be funded by the profession locally or apply to the British Council or similar donor bodies for support.

A copy of the application form is available from the Law Society or for further information contact:

Juliet Fussell

International & Professional Training Unit
Institute of Advanced Legal Studies
17 Russell Square LONDON WC1B 5DR

Tel: 44 171 637 1731

Fax: 44 171 580 9613

Executive Director - AIJA

Applications are invited for the position of Executive Director for the Australian Institute of Judicial Administration at the University of Melbourne.

The new incumbent is expected to have an appropriate background of practical experience in administration and/or operation of the litigation systems in Australia as well as an appropriate academic background.

For further information contact
Mr John Goodwin
tel: 03 9344 7935