

ENTERPRISE THREAT BULLETIN



This Bulletin is from NCSC's Enterprise Threat-Mitigation Directorate (ETD) and National Insider Threat Task Force (NITTF)

Bystander Engagement

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National Insider Threat Awareness Month (NITAM) 2023 focused on bystander engagement. As we plan and prepare for NITAM 2024 we wanted to review and highlight major themes from NITAM 2023.

What is a bystander? Someone who witnesses concerning behaviors but may not take action to help mitigate the problem. **What is bystander engagement?** The concept whereby an individual is aware of concerning behaviors, knows how to act on those concerns, and takes appropriate action. Many organizations have established processes and training to encourage personnel to be more proactive and engage appropriately. **Why is bystander engagement relevant to insider threat?** It serves as a key element in preventing workplace violence and mitigating other forms of insider threats, including espionage, sabotage, fraud, theft of intellectual property, unauthorized disclosure of sensitive information, disruption of operations, reputational damage, and other harmful actions.

Where is bystander engagement applicable? All organizations, from large governmental agencies to small businesses, global corporations, academic institutions, and medical offices, should consider bystander engagement as part of their risk mitigation approach. No matter the organization's size or shape, employees are best-postured to know how a colleague or co-worker is feeling. Your personnel thus serve as ideal sensors for detecting unusual or concerning behaviors among the workforce and ultimately preventing issues. **What are the indicators?** Behaviors that are alerting or abnormal for an individual which may warrant attention. Such indicators include threatening violence, harassment, bullying, disgruntlement, financial distress, disregard for security rules, or dramatic swings in routine.

It is understandable that some employees might be reluctant to engage for multiple reasons, including concern about co-worker reactions, assumption that others will intervene, fear of reputational damage, or retaliation for involvement. Thus, it is critical for an organization's bystander engagement process to emphasize protected and anonymized reporting that is taken seriously while highlighting the ultimate goal of keeping everyone safe and secure.

How to engage? Bystanders can decide to act via two primary methods of engagement: direct response or reporting. **Direct response** is addressing the situation in the moment and perhaps engaging the person directly with words of discouragement, caution, or protection. It is important to emphasize that personal safety is paramount and no bystander should put themselves or others in danger if attempting to engage. **Reporting** is referring concerning activity or behaviors to human resources components, medical personnel, supervisors, security officers, law enforcement, or other responsible parties.

Your role as a bystander is critically important. Your actions can make you an intervenor, supporter, advocate, guardian, and strategic enabler for your security and insider threat functions. **If used in a robust and appropriate manner, bystander engagement can help prevent workplace violence and minimize threats to your organization's safety and prosperity.**

As we look forward to NITAM 2024, we plan to build on our community's successes and enable an engaged workforce that can "deter, detect, and mitigate" insider threats to their organization.

For more information on Insider Threats please visit the [NCSC website](#).