

# Key Lesson from the Washington Navy Yard Shootings



On Sept. 16, 2013, Aaron Alexis, a Navy veteran and contractor employee with a Secret security clearance, shot and killed 12 employees and wounded four others at the Washington Navy Yard. He was killed by law enforcement officers.

The Department of Defense recently released the result of several investigations into this tragedy. There are three reports:

- [Department of Defense](#) internal review
- [Independent review](#)
- [Navy review](#).

Although these reports do address issues that are novel to this workplace, such as security clearance procedures, there's at least one key lesson that all employers can apply to prevent similar incidents in their workplaces.

## **Require Supervisors & Workers to Report Disturbing Behaviour**

Before the shootings, several people, including supervisors, observed Alexis behave in a way that raised concerns about his mental stability and indicated that he may cause harm to others. For example, in the weeks leading up to the incident, Alexis was observed complaining of:

- Being followed
- Hearing voices
- Being under attack by vibrations and microwaves.

But they didn't properly report these observations as required or seek help from a mental health professional. Had they reported his behaviour to the government, his access to secure facilities would've been revoked.

As the independent review report noted, threat assessment and management efforts won't work if troubling behavior isn't identified or reported. Employers need comprehensive, easily accessible reporting mechanisms to ensure that potentially troubling behaviour gets quick attention and potential resolution.

A robust threat management approach both relies on and supports a culture in which it's acceptable to report concerns about co-workers who are showing signs of disturbance or violent tendencies. It ensures that trained, responsible professionals, such as the members of a [threat assessment team](#), are available to validate, investigate and evaluate these concerns based on established standards.

In addition, workers who report on their colleagues must feel safe from both violence and any negative consequences of reporting, such as reprisal.

The report also recommends the use of anonymous tip lines and increased awareness campaigns to spread the word that early reporting of suspect behaviour could prevent a potential terrible and violent act. And workers and supervisors should be trained on what kinds of behaviour they should look out for and report when observed.

To make sure that your company's efforts to protect workers from incidents such as the Navy Yard shootings are sufficient, go the OHS Insider's [Workplace Violence Compliance Center](#) where you'll find articles, model tools and videos on this

topic.