



Addressing Operator Assault through a Safety Management System

Between 2009 and 2018, transit agencies reported an average of 174 instances of operator assault per year as major incidents to the National Transit Database. In 2019, FTA issued a [Notice on Protecting Public Transportation Operators from the Risk of Assault](#). This Notice alerts transit agencies to address transit operator assault through the Safety Management System (SMS) processes required under the [Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan \(PTASP\) regulation](#) (49 CFR Part 673).¹

This article focuses on the identification of hazards related to operator assaults.

Related Resources

- [Transit Advisory Committee for Safety: Preventing and Mitigating Transit Worker Assaults in the Bus and Rail Transit Industry](#)
- [Transit Cooperative Research Program: Practices to Protect Bus Operators from Passenger Assault](#)
- [PTASP Hazards and Consequences Self-Guided Learning Tool](#)
- [PTASP Safety Risk Management Webinar](#)
- [PTASP Agency Safety Plan \(ASP\) Lessons Learned Webinar](#)

An SMS Approach to Operator Assaults

The PTASP regulation requires transit agencies to develop and implement an SMS and associated processes for all elements of a public transportation system. This includes developing a Safety Risk Management (SRM) process to:

- Identify safety hazards and their potential consequences;
- Assess the associated safety risk and prioritize hazards based on the safety risk of their potential consequences; and
- Identify necessary mitigations or strategies to reduce the likelihood and/or severity of a hazard's potential consequence.

¹ The contents of this document do not have the force and effect of law and are not meant to bind the public in any way. This document is intended only to provide clarity to the public regarding existing requirements under the law or agency policies. Grantees and subgrantees should refer to FTA's statutes and regulations for applicable requirements.

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Identifying the Hazard

It might be tempting to characterize operator assault as a hazard. However, as we know from the PTASP regulation, a hazard is “a real or potential condition that can cause injury, illness or death; damage to or loss of the facilities, equipment, rolling stock or infrastructure of a public transportation system; or damage to the environment” ([§ 673.5](#)). An assault is not a condition; it is an action taken by an individual, or individuals, that threatens the safety of the operator.

When identifying hazards related to operator assaults, agencies must determine what real or potential conditions could allow an operator to be injured by a bad actor in an operator assault scenario.

For example, what conditions in a vehicle or operating environment could allow a passenger access to the operator? Maybe the operating compartment is not physically separate from passengers, or there is seating directly behind the operator. Standing areas may be near the operator, or rules for passenger location are not enforced.

Your agency can review a variety of sources to develop operator assault scenarios (what could happen). Information sources may include reports from operators or passengers, footage from video cameras, and agency or local law enforcement records.

Such scenarios help agencies determine how their vehicles, operating practices, service characteristics and environment, and training may contribute to conditions, or hazards, that need to be addressed to reduce the risk of operator assaults. They allow agencies to use available data and subject matter experts to walk through potential assault situations and identify hazards and potential consequences before an assault occurs. In turn, this allows agencies to conduct risk assessments and identify appropriate mitigations, completing the final components of the SRM process.

Visit the [PTASP Technical Assistance Center \(TAC\) Resource Library](#) for guides, fact sheets and webinars on the PTASP regulation. Contact the PTASP TAC at 1-877-827-7243 or PTASP-TAC@dot.gov for assistance with any PTASP-related topic.



PTASP Technical Assistance Available Now

- Access one-on-one Agency Safety Plan support
- Learn and share through the PTASP Community of Practice
- Explore the PTASP Resource Library

<https://www.transit.dot.gov/PTASP-TAC>