



## Field staff threatened with physical violence and intimidation

**Date of issue:** 25 November 2009

### Background

A PB field engineer was threatened with physical violence and intimidation during field works adjacent to a former service station site at Bridgewater, Tasmania.

### Incident

A PB field engineer was approached and verbally abused by several youths, when gauging groundwater monitoring wells adjacent to a site.

The youths claimed ownership of an interface meter in the possession of the engineer and threatened violence in response to the engineer not handing the equipment over. The engineer was able to avoid physical confrontation and returned to his vehicle to leave site.

Bridgewater has a high crime rate and the potential risk of a third party threat was identified in the HESP. The HESP control was to leave site if threatened.

One of the youths threw a piece of asphalt at the car, which struck the vehicle and resulted in panel and paint damage.

A police offense report was filed with Tasmanian Police. The field engineer was demobilised from site and works were placed on hold until the incident report process was completed.

### What went right

- The field engineer was able to avoid physical confrontation and left the site, as identified in the HESP
- A police offense report was made
- The field engineer was demobilised from site until safety could be assured

## Root causes / What we need to do

The following root causes were identified:

- The engineer was working outside the security of a site fence, therefore public approach was possible
- The engineer was working alone
- A bus stop was close to the sampling locations, meaning that the engineer's activity was visible to the youths
- High crime rate in the Bridgewater area
- Field engineer was protecting PB equipment

The following controls are recommended to prevent similar incidents:

- Risk to field staff from third parties should be assessed on a site-by-site basis. Additional risk controls such as security and minimum two field staff should be considered for high crime areas
- Staff shall not work alone unless: the work activity has been risk assessed to be a low hazard potential; the person's supervisor is aware of their location at all times and the nature of the work they are doing; and a communication plan has been established.
- Staff are encouraged to walk away and remove themselves from confrontation if threatened. Equipment is not more important than staff safety



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