

CALIFORNIA WORKPLACE VIOLENCE PREVENTION

SB 553 Compliance Checklist

For multifamily property management operators. A practical audit of the three core requirements under California SB 553, the working-alone scenarios that get overlooked, and the documentation Cal/OSHA wants to see.

What SB 553 actually requires

Effective July 1, 2024, every California employer must have a Workplace Violence Prevention Plan (WVPP). The law applies to nearly all employers in the state, including multifamily property management companies. The plan must include three core elements:

REQUIREMENT 1 — INCIDENT LOG

A written log of all workplace violence incidents, including near-misses and threats. Must include date, time, location, description, and the people involved. Retained for at least five years.

REQUIREMENT 2 — EMPLOYEE REPORTING MECHANISM

A clear, documented way for employees to report workplace violence incidents — anonymously if needed — without fear of retaliation. The mechanism must be communicated and accessible to all employees.

REQUIREMENT 3 — ALARM OR ALERT SYSTEM

An effective means for employees to alert others when they need emergency assistance, particularly when working alone or in remote or vulnerable areas of a property.

The compliance checklist

Use this as a self-audit. Each item marked 'yes' is one fewer gap in your WVPP. Items marked 'no' are documentation, system, or training gaps you'll need to close.

WVPP Documentation

- We have a written Workplace Violence Prevention Plan specific to our properties.
- The plan was developed with employee input (not just leadership).
- The plan identifies the specific workplace violence hazards our staff face.
- The plan is reviewed and updated at least annually.
- The plan is accessible to all employees in a language they can read.

Incident Log

- We have a system to record all incidents of workplace violence and near-misses.
- Incident records include: date, time, location, description, people involved, and outcome.
- Logs are retained for at least five years.
- Logs are reviewed periodically to identify patterns or repeat issues.
- Logs are available to Cal/OSHA upon request within reasonable time.

Employee Reporting

- Employees have a documented way to report incidents to management.
- Employees can report anonymously without fear of retaliation.
- The reporting process is communicated during onboarding.
- We have a written non-retaliation policy specific to incident reporting.

Alarm or Alert System

- Staff have a device or system to alert others during a workplace violence event.
- The alert system works when staff are working alone (i.e., not dependent on a coworker being nearby).
- The alert system connects to emergency services (911) or to onsite personnel who can respond.
- Staff have been trained on when and how to use the alert system.
- The system has been tested in the past 90 days and is functional.

Training

- All employees received WVPP training at hire and annually thereafter.
- Training covers: identifying threats, de-escalation, reporting, alarm use, and post-incident response.
- Training is documented (date, attendees, content covered).

Training records are retained for at least one year.

The working-alone scenarios most portfolios miss

SB 553's alarm/alert requirement specifically addresses employees working alone or in remote areas. For multifamily operators, the most common scenarios:

Showing a vacant unit

A leasing agent meeting a prospective resident — often someone they've never met — in an unoccupied apartment, sometimes in a remote part of the property. Alarm/alert system required.

Maintenance service calls

A maintenance technician entering a resident's apartment alone, sometimes responding to escalated complaints or after-hours emergencies. Alarm/alert system required.

After-hours office work

A community manager closing the office at end of day, walking to their car through an unmonitored parking area, or addressing a resident concern alone in a leasing office. Alarm/alert system required.

Walking the property

Regional managers, maintenance supervisors, or community managers conducting property walks — particularly through parking structures, pool areas, or vacant unit clusters. Alarm/alert system required.

Eviction-related contact

Any staff interaction with residents under financial or legal stress, including delivering eviction notices, lockouts, or related communications. Alarm/alert system required.

Enforcement and penalties

SB 553 is enforced by Cal/OSHA. Penalties for non-compliance escalate based on the severity and willfulness of the violation:

- **General violations:** Up to \$18,000 per violation
- **Serious violations:** Up to \$25,000 per violation (typically applied when the violation could result in serious harm)
- **Willful or repeat violations:** Up to \$158,727 per violation
- **Failure to abate:** Up to \$18,000 per day the violation continues after notice

THE PORTFOLIO OPERATOR MATH

Penalties are assessed per violation, per location. A property management company with 25 California properties operating without a compliant WVPP at each site could face stacking exposure across the entire portfolio — $\$18,000 \times 25 = \$450,000$ in first-time violation exposure alone, before any serious or willful classifications.

California law also creates a **rebuttable presumption of enterprise-wide violation** when Cal/OSHA finds a pattern across multiple worksites. One inspection finding can trigger citations across an operator's full California portfolio.

Beyond direct penalties, non-compliance creates civil liability exposure. If a workplace violence incident occurs and the employer cannot demonstrate a compliant WVPP, the exposure in subsequent litigation can be substantially greater than the Cal/OSHA penalty.

If you found gaps

Most California multifamily operators have at least one gap when they first run this audit — most commonly in the alarm/alert system requirement (because cell phones don't satisfy it) or in incident log documentation. The good news: these are fixable.

Apartment Guardian's panic alert system satisfies SB 553's alarm/alert requirement out of the box. It connects directly to 911 and simultaneously alerts onsite staff, so help comes from two directions at once. The system also generates an incident log automatically, which satisfies the documentation requirement.

More than 170 property management companies — including operators across California — use Apartment Guardian as part of their SB 553 compliance program.

See how fast your portfolio could be SB 553 compliant

Request a 15-minute walkthrough with our team. We'll review your portfolio and give you a specific deployment plan with dates — how Apartment Guardian satisfies each requirement, what your staff sees on day one, and the documentation you'd be able to show Cal/OSHA.

You'll leave with a real plan, even if you don't move forward with us.

apartmentguardian.com/sb553