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ProTect  SECURITY Staff Training

**Assessing your bar:
Owners' guide to reducing
incidents**



The *Assessing your bar: Owners' guide to reducing incidents* booklet is part of the ProTect Security Staff Training program. Information is available from:

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Table of Contents

Introduction: A guide for bar owners and managers

Part 1: Assessing Your Bar

A. Entering the bar.....	2
B. A safe and friendly atmosphere	4
C. Layout	6
D. Physical comfort and safety of customers.....	8
E. Setting rules and keeping order.....	10
F. Servers and bartenders.....	12
G. Security staff.....	14
H. Minimizing problems.....	16
I. Closing time	18
J. Other aspects of a safe environment	20
K. Other things to think about... ..	23

Part 2

Plans for Change.....	24-27
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Introduction: A guide for bar owners and managers

This guide is intended for use by owners and managers of licensed premises who want to reduce the risk of aggression and violence in their bars.

Operating a licensed premises can be a risky business. Customers sometimes get caught up in the moment and injure themselves, other customers and/or staff. Although it is not possible to eliminate all risks, it is possible to minimize those risks by making changes to your bar. Reducing risks will make your premises safer and will lessen the chances of people filing lawsuits against you and your staff.

This guide is based on research studies conducted in bars. These studies identified several risk factors that are associated with aggression and violence at licensed premises: the degree of crowding, the atmosphere and how licensee staff treat the customers.

You may already be aware of these and other risk factors from your experience owning or managing a bar. The purpose of this guide is to provide a tool for making a comprehensive assessment of risk factors as they apply to your premises.

In **Part 1: Assessing Your Bar**, Sections A to J group the risk factors under 10 major headings in a format that allows licensee staff to score the risks for their bar. Section K identifies other considerations that could affect a bar's risk factors and making changes.

Plans for Change helps licensee staff identify and plan changes to reduce the risks of violence for each of the 10 areas. The list of risk factors covers many different bar situations.

Note: The list of risk factors is very long to cover many different bar situations. Because bars vary in size, activities, clientele and other important ways, some items may not be applicable to your premises.

Reducing risks means changing what you reasonably can. It does not mean addressing every risk identified in this booklet. It would not be realistic to expect bar owners to eliminate all risks.

What is important is to *recognize* existing risk factors and change what you can. For example, many bars have pool tables. Although pool tables tend to increase the risk of aggression, they may also be a major reason why people come to the bar. Therefore, rather than getting rid of the pool tables, a licensee might reduce the risk of violence by ensuring that the pool tables operate under clear rules and ensure customers know that arguments and aggressive behaviour will not be tolerated.

Part 1: Assessing your bar

A. Entering the bar

		Circle one				
		Never or almost never	Seldom	Some of the time	Fairly often	Always or almost always
Do you ...						
1	Make sure that people are not intoxicated before they enter the bar?	1	2	3	4	5
2	Keep track of the number of people inside the bar on a busy night?	1	2	3	4	5

When you have a lineup do you or your staff ...

If you never have lineups, go to Section B.

3	Tell the people in line how long they'll have to wait?	1	2	3	4	5
4	Supervise the lineup so people can't drink alcohol while waiting in line?	1	2	3	4	5
5	Prevent people inside the bar from talking with or bothering people waiting in line?	1	2	3	4	5
6	Tell young people ahead of time or have a sign posted about the kind of "proof of age" ID they will need to enter?	1	2	3	4	5
7	Prevent people from cutting ahead of others in the line? How?	1	2	3	4	5
8	Use special passes or favouritism to let certain people into the bar ahead of others?	1	2	3	4	5

Higher scores on questions 1 to 7 and a lower score on question 8 indicate a lower risk of violence.

Explanations

1. Intoxicated people are more likely to cause problems. Not allowing them to enter will be easier than responding to problems they may cause later.
2. Overcrowding is associated with violent behavior.
3. If you tell people how long they will have to wait, it shows you are concerned about their comfort. It also reduces frustration because people can choose either to wait or go elsewhere.
4. If customers drink in line, they are more likely to be intoxicated when they get into the bar. Allowing people to drink in line also suggests that the bar will put up with illegal or unruly behavior.
5. Contact between people in line and those inside the bar sometimes leads to problems, such as people inside the bar passing drinks to those in line outside or sneaking people inside.
6. Young customers should know before they get to the door that they will need acceptable ID to enter. Problems can occur at the door if someone has waited in line for a long time and then is not allowed in.
7. Allowing people to cut in line ahead of others sends the message that it is okay to break rules.
8. When people in line see others given “special” treatment, they feel that customers are not treated fairly. This may make them less co-operative with staff.

B. A Safe and friendly atmosphere

		Circle one				
		Never or almost never	Seldom	Some of the time	Fairly often	Always or almost always
1	Let people know that their business is appreciated? How?	1	2	3	4	5
2	Apply house rules equally to all people without playing favourites?	1	2	3	4	5
3	Discourage horseplay and rowdy behaviour? How?	1	2	3	4	5
4	Discourage open sexual behaviour (e.g., fondling, rubbing) between customers? How?	1	2	3	4	5
5	Prevent using or dealing drugs in and around the bar? How?	1	2	3	4	5
6	Have clear, reasonable rules for customers? How?	1	2	3	4	5
7	Demonstrate that you can ensure the safety of your customers in the bar? How?	1	2	3	4	5
8	Show physical contact sports such as boxing, hockey, football, etc. on the TV?	1	2	3	4	5

Higher scores on questions 1 to 7 and a lower score on question 8 indicates a lower risk of violence.

Explanations

1. Customers will be more co-operative with staff if they feel they are valued.
2. Favoritism is a common source of problems in a bar. Treat everybody the same to avoid such problems.
3. Violence sometimes arises when horseplay goes too far. To prevent problems arising from horseplay, set limits on rowdy behavior.
4. Although people often go to bars to meet potential partners, bars that allow open and explicit sexual behavior tend to have problems with aggression and violence. Safe bars have clear standards for sexual and other behavior.
5. Keeping drugs out is another way to show customers that the bar has standards of acceptable behavior.
6. Customers will be more co-operative if they are aware that rules are for their own safety.
7. Customers should always feel that management and staff are in control. Some people will try to cause trouble if they think staff are not able to keep control of the bar.
8. Physical contact sports (especially if shown on large TV screens and featured as a major focus of the bar's activities) get people "hyped up" and often lead to competition, betting and arguments. They can also set up models of physical aggression that customers may try to follow.

C. Layout

		Circle one				
		Never or almost never	Seldom	Some of the time	Fairly often	Always or almost always
1	Long lines at the serving bar or restrooms.	1	2	3	4	5
2	Customers getting drinks from the bar are often bumped into or pushed by other customers.	1	2	3	4	5
3	Certain areas of the bar get very crowded.	1	2	3	4	5
4	Staff and customers have a hard time getting from one part of the bar area to another.	1	2	3	4	5
5	People tend to move around in the bar a lot.	1	2	3	4	5
6	People cannot find a comfortable place to sit or stand where they would like to be.	1	2	3	4	5
7	A lot of people crowd around to watch pool games or dancing.	1	2	3	4	5
8	Staff find it difficult to keep an eye on some areas of the bar because these areas are hidden or poorly lit.	1	2	3	4	5

Lower scores indicate a lower risk of violence.

Explanations

1. Long lineups can frustrate patrons and increase congestion, bumping and other problems.
2. If people hang around the bar or if it is difficult to get to the bar, increased contact between customers, spilled drinks and general frustration can result. Keep traffic clear at liquor serving areas.
3. Even when the number of customers is within the bar's capacity, problems from crowding and bumping can occur if there is customer congestion. Try to have a layout that prevents crowding.
4. Crowding in doorways, corridors and other high-traffic areas can lead to patrons bumping and pushing into one another, other unwanted contact, spilled drinks and frustration. These bottlenecks also reduce staff's ability to respond to problem situations.
5. Constant movement in the bar can increase the risk of problems. Some movement can't be avoided but planning traffic flow can help minimize the risk of problems. Consider:
 - Having several areas for liquor service,
 - Having several restrooms, especially in large-capacity establishments,
 - Having separate exits and entrances,
 - Keeping traffic away from pool tables,
 - Ensuring the dance floor is accessible, and
 - Move tables and chairs to increase space in high-traffic areas
6. People will move around less if there are comfortable places to sit or stand where patrons want to be.
7. Crowding around pool tables and dance floors may lead to conflict between the people who are playing or dancing and the people who are watching.
8. Customers are less likely to break rules if they know staff are monitoring their behaviour. Poor lighting may make this more difficult for staff.

D. Physical comfort and safety of customers

How would you rate your bar on busy nights?

Circle one

1. Noise level	<p>Quiet to moderately noisy</p> <p>1</p>	<p>Very loud</p> <p>2</p>	<p>Noise hurts ears</p> <p>3</p>
2. Air quality	<p>Fresh</p> <p>1</p>	<p>Somewhat smoky/stale</p> <p>2</p>	<p>Very smoky or stuffy</p> <p>3</p>
3. Room temperature	<p>Comfortable</p> <p>1</p>	<p>Occasionally too warm or too cold</p> <p>2</p>	<p>Often too warm or too cold</p> <p>3</p>
4. Empty bottles and glasses on tables or bar surfaces	<p>Always kept clear</p> <p>1</p>	<p>Mostly cleared</p> <p>2</p>	<p>Full of empties</p> <p>3</p>
5. Spills, broken glass and other hazards on floors	<p>Always kept clean</p> <p>1</p>	<p>Mostly kept clean</p> <p>2</p>	<p>Sometimes sticky, with broken glass</p> <p>3</p>
6. Restrooms	<p>Always kept clean and serviced</p> <p>1</p>	<p>Sometimes get messy</p> <p>2</p>	<p>Cleaned only at the end of the evening</p> <p>3</p>
7. Upkeep	<p>Bar is clean and well-maintained</p> <p>1</p>	<p>Some part of the bar are a bit run-down</p> <p>2</p>	<p>Bar tends to get pretty run down</p> <p>3</p>
8. Violent images or language present in music, as part of other entertainment, such as video games, or as part of décor	<p>None</p> <p>1</p>	<p>Sometimes</p> <p>2</p>	<p>Often</p> <p>3</p>

Lower scores indicate a lower risk of violence.

Explanations

- a. Very high noise levels can be painful and make aggression more likely. It is best to have music no louder than is necessary to satisfy customers.
- b. Poor air quality and rooms that are too hot or too cold can make people uncomfortable, frustrated and more likely to respond aggressively. Have the best ventilation you can.
- c. See 2 above.
- d. Empty bottles, broken glass and spills can lead to accidental injuries. Clearing away empty beer bottles and glasses also helps to prevent them from being used as weapons.
- e. See 4 above.
- f. If the bar is dirty and in poor condition, customers will get the message that property damage from violence and vandalism is expected.
- g. See 6 above.
- h. Violent images in music, as well as other violent symbols (e.g., posters, weapons on the wall), are likely to increase aggression among customers.

E. Setting rules and keeping order

Circle one

Never or almost never	Seldom	Some of the time	Fairly often	Always or almost always
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On a busy night, do you ...

	1	2	3	4	5
1 Prevent customers from arguing or betting at the pool tables? How is this done?	1	2	3	4	5
2 Make it clear to someone how they are supposed to behave in the bar (e.g., no standing on chairs, shoving, yelling)? How do you make this clear?	1	2	3	4	5
3 Have clear guidelines for when a customer will be told to leave?	1	2	3	4	5
4 Have a way to keep out people who have been told to leave or who have been barred?	1	2	3	4	5
5 Make sure that dancing doesn't get too rough? How?	1	2	3	4	5
6 Have house rules that customers consider to be fair?	1	2	3	4	5
7 Have regular customers who support staff in keeping the rules?	1	2	3	4	5
8 Have a lot of egocentric behaviour between groups of people in the bar?	1	2	3	4	5

Higher scores on questions 1 to 7 and a lower score on question 8 indicate a lower risk of violence.

Explanations

1. Pool tables are popular but are often a source of problems. Problems can be minimized by making sure the area is well-controlled.
2. There are many ways to let people know the standards of behaviour expected in your bar. One way is to have house policies that let customers and staff know how to behave.
3. Customers should know what kinds of behaviors will lead to being told to leave or barred. They should expect that rules will be enforced fairly, consistently and effectively. Staff should be able to make sure that rules are followed.
4. See 3 above.
5. If dancing is so rough that women are avoiding the dance floor, there are likely to be problems with violence on *and* off the dance floor.
6. House rules are most effective if regular customers are supportive of staff. Rules are difficult to enforce if customers see staff as the enemy or as people to work against.
7. See 6 above.
8. Competition among groups of people (for example, groups from different geographic areas, different cultures or races) often leads to problems. This might include “eye- balling,” “accidental” bumping, or pushing and fighting. Try to discourage competition between groups, and be especially watchful if your bar attracts competing or conflicting groups of patrons.

F. Servers and bartenders

Circle one

		Never or almost never	Seldom	Some of the time	Fairly often	Always or almost always
1	Consume liquor before or during work hours?	1	2	3	4	5
2	Behave in a rude, impatient or unfriendly way with customers?	1	2	3	4	5
3	Have trouble cutting off people who show signs of intoxication?	1	2	3	4	5
4	Have friends who hang around the bar while they are working?	1	2	3	4	5
5	Serve several drinks at a time to one person without knowing who the extra drinks are for?	1	2	3	4	5
6	Act friendly but avoid being overly friendly or intimate with customers?	1	2	3	4	5
7	Encourage customers to slow down or stop drinking before they show signs of intoxication?	1	2	3	4	5
8	Show commitment to being part of a well-run bar?	1	2	3	4	5

Lower scores on questions 1 to 5 and higher scores on questions 6 to 8 indicate lower risk of violence.

Explanations

1. Servers and bartenders who are under the influence of alcohol or drugs will not be able to deal with problem situations effectively.
2. Unpleasant staff can provoke people to respond aggressively.
3. Staff should develop the ability to cut people off without confrontation and problems. There are several ways to do this, including giving intoxicated people a free non-alcoholic beverage to discourage them from ordering more liquor.
4. Having friends hang around can distract servers or bartenders from doing their jobs well and may affect their ability to resolve problems fairly.
5. If people get several drinks at a time from the bar, it is difficult to monitor who is consuming the drinks. In bars where customers often get their drinks at the bar, it is important for all staff and management - not just servers! - to work together to ensure that customers do not become intoxicated and aggressive.
6. Pleasant, friendly staff can help to prevent or minimize problems. Being overly friendly is unprofessional and may interfere with the staff's ability to do their job.
7. Staff can slow down a person's drinking and avoid problems if they recognize the early signs of intoxication and pace liquor service appropriately. In some situations, staff may have to stop or refuse liquor service to that customer.
8. Staff who feel committed to the bar and their co-workers will work together to create a pleasant environment.

G. Security staff

		Circle one				
		Never or almost never	Seldom	Some of the time	Fairly often	Always or almost always
Do security staff ...						
1	Consume liquor or during work hours?	1	2	3	4	5
2	Look mean or intimidating?	1	2	3	4	5
3	Have a reputation for being tough and aggressive?	1	2	3	4	5
4	Have friends who come to the bar while they are on duty?	1	2	3	4	5
5	Communicate well with customers?	1	2	3	4	5
6	Act pleasant, but avoid being overly friendly or intimate with customers?	1	2	3	4	5
7	Feel valued by management in terms of salary and other rewards?	1	2	3	4	5
8	Work with other bar staff as part of a team?	1	2	3	4	5

Lower scores on questions 1 to 4 and higher scores on questions 5 to 8 indicate lower risk of violence.

Explanations

1. Security staff members who are under the influence of alcohol or drugs will not be able to deal with problem situations effectively.
2. Mean-looking staff members do not necessarily discourage people from causing trouble. Sometimes customers see mean or tough staff as a challenge and want to fight them. It is important to avoid making customers see security staff as their enemy.
3. Security staff who have a reputation for being tough may attract customers who want to fight them. It is better to have staff members that have a reputation for being fair but effective instead of tough and aggressive.
4. Security staff must address problems calmly and without favoritism. This may be difficult if friends are around, particularly if friends become involved in incidents.
5. Staff who are good at talking to people can prevent most problems from becoming physical.
6. Security staff should like people and show it. This will help them get people's co-operation. At the same time, staff should treat people equally. They should not be overly friendly with some customers or they will have trouble settling disputes fairly.
7. "Power-tripping" should not be the main reward of the job. To avoid this, security staff should have other rewards, such as feeling valued by management and being paid accordingly.
8. Security staff can use teamwork to prevent problems. Each person should have a specific area of the bar to monitor and provide backup to other staff when required. Any problems that arise can be handled more effectively and safely when staff members work as a team.

H. Minimizing problems

		Circle one				
		Never or almost never	Seldom	Some of the time	Fairly often	Always or almost always
Do security staff ...						
1	Confront disruptive patrons with anger and aggression?	1	2	3	4	5
2	Solve disputes by telling people to “take it outside”?	1	2	3	4	5
3	Take sides in a dispute?	1	2	3	4	5
4	Use their job to show off or to humiliate people?	1	2	3	4	5
5	Use physical force to resolve problems?	1	2	3	4	5
6	Watch for signs of trouble and try to resolve problems by talking to people?	1	2	3	4	5
7	Separate disruptive patrons from other customers before trying to resolve with a problem?	1	2	3	4	5
8	Respond to problems in a calm, consistent and firm manner?	1	2	3	4	5

Lower scores on questions 1 to 5 and higher scores on questions 6 to 8 indicate lower risk of violence.

Explanations

1. People whose behaviour is disruptive or causes trouble should be spoken to calmly, treated with respect and given space. If staff stand too close and intimidate the person, this may make the person angrier and more aggressive. Staff can show they are in control without being aggressive.
2. Telling people to “take it outside” does not reduce the responsibility of the owner for any injuries that may occur because of a fight between customers from the bar.
3. If security staff members take sides, one side will feel they have been treated unfairly. Customers are much more willing to co-operate with rules if they feel they are treated fairly.
4. If staff members are showing off or “scoring points” at the customer’s expense, this will likely lead to problems.
5. The more physical force that is used, the more it is needed. Staff should be trained in using alternatives to physical force and avoid using force whenever possible.
6. Staff who have good verbal skills can help calm to a problem situation and prevent a situation from escalating
7. Whenever possible, staff should separate the person causing the problem from other people. This allows the person to calm down and talk with staff without interference from other people. It may also help the person to “save face.”
8. Some of the worst violence occurs when security staff members lose their tempers. Problems are also likely if staff sometimes allow certain behaviors and other times do not. A calm, consistent, no-nonsense but pleasant approach is likely to get the best results.

I. Closing time

		Circle one				
		Never or almost never	Seldom	Some of the time	Fairly often	Always or almost always
On a busy night, do you or your staff ...						
1	Encourage people to switch to non-alcoholic drinks near closing?	1	2	3	4	5
2	Try to “mellow people out” (e.g., by playing softer music) as closing time approaches?	1	2	3	4	5
3	Use a friendly but firm approach when telling people they must leave?	1	2	3	4	5
4	Monitor the immediate area outside the bar to prevent problems as people are leaving?	1	2	3	4	5
5	Allow patrons to stock up on drinks near closing time or at last call?	1	2	3	4	5
6	Have to stop people from taking drinks with them as they leave?	1	2	3	4	5
7	Have to constantly tell people to drink up and leave after closing time?	1	2	3	4	5
8	Have to deal with crowding at exits as people leave?	1	2	3	4	5

Lower scores on questions 1 to 4 and higher scores on questions 5 to 8 indicate lower risk of violence.

Explanations

Problems often occur at closing time. Most problems occur when activity, noise and music reach a peak right at closing time and a hyped-up crowd is then pushed out the door.

Try to wind down the action as closing time approaches.

1. If you help people reduce their consumption of alcoholic beverages near the end of the evening, they are less likely to be intoxicated when they leave. The risk of violence and incidents increases if people are intoxicated when they leave.
2. Problems arise if the entertainment causes people in the bar to reach their peak of excitement right at closing time.
3. If staff members are pleasant when they move people out of the bar, people will be more cooperative and less likely to cause problems after they leave.
4. Licensee staff are still responsible for the behavior of the people to whom you served alcohol — even after they leave the bar.
5. Many problems at closing time are related to the intoxication level of the crowd. If possible, reduce liquor service as closing time gets near. It is easier to get people to leave the bar if they have finished their drinks.
6. People who try to sneak out drinks were probably over-served near closing time or at last call. This can lead to problems caused by intoxication. It can lead to additional problems when staff take liquor away from people.
7. There are fewer problems at closing time if the liquor service and entertainment “wind down” near the end of the evening.
8. You can avoid problems from crowding and bumping if all exits are opened and people are encouraged to use more than one exit.

J. Other aspects of a safe environment

Check one
Yes No

Preventing intoxication that may lead to violence

- 1 Are a range of food selections (including light meals) available for purchase right up to closing?
- 2 Do you offer free snacks?
- 3 Can a non-alcoholic beverage be bought for a price lower than beer?
- 4 Do you promote non-alcoholic drinks as “designated driver” specials?

Staff training and visibility

- 5 Are staff trained in how to minimize problems when refusing service?
- 6 Do you have regular staff meetings?
- 7 Do you keep a book or log of problem incidents that occur in the bar?
- 8 Do you use the incident log to train staff in how to prevent or minimize problems in the future?
- 9 Do staff know when someone should be asked to leave?
- 10 Do staff have clear guidelines regarding when and how they may use physical force?
- 11 Are staff aware of their legal liability for their actions?
- 12 Do you make sure that security staff do not carry weapons?
- 13 When hiring a person to work security, do you check references to make sure he or she doesn't have a history of assault or other aggressive behaviour?
- 14 Do security staff wear clothing or names tags that make them easily identifiable?

For all questions, a “yes” response indicates lower risk of violence.

Explanations

1. People will not get as intoxicated if they consume food while drinking.
2. See 1 above.
3. People are more likely to avoid intoxication if non-alcoholic drinks are inexpensive.
4. Supporting designated drivers shows concern for customer safety.
5. Violence is most likely to occur when many customers are intoxicated. Staff should be trained in preventing intoxication.
6. Regular staff meetings and incident logs can be used to maintain standards, identify problem locations in the bar and improve staff skills.
7. See 6 above.
8. See 6 above.
9. Staff members need to be trained to enforce rules consistently.
10. See 9 above.
11. Training for security staff should include learning to avoid physical contact and knowing the legal limits around the use of physical force. Serving staff should be aware of their liability for serving underage or intoxicated customers.
12. It is important to ensure that people who work as security are not prone to violence.
13. See 12 above.
14. If security staff personnel are friendly but respected by customers, their visibility should help deter customers from breaking the rules.

As well, if problem situations arise, customers can quickly identify staff to get help.

J. Other aspects of a safe environment, continued...

Check One

General order in the bar

- 15 Do you have clearly posted house policies?
- 16 Do you have a clearly posted code of conduct for staff and customers?
- 17 Do you and your staff watch for customers who might cause trouble so potential problems can be prevented?
- 18 Do you serve beer in plastic cups?
- 19 Is everything on the same level (that is, no stairs to different levels within the same floor?)
- 20 On busy nights, do you use separate entrances and exits?

	Yes	No
15		
16		
17		
18		
19		
20		

For all questions, a “yes” response indicates lower risk of violence.

Explanations

15. Staff and customers should be informed about house policies and codes of conduct.
16. See 15 above.
17. Being able to recognize a troublemaker before he or she causes problems is an essential skill in managing a bar.
18. Beer bottles and glasses can be used as weapons.
19. Different levels can create bottlenecks, performance stages for customers who want to act out and other problems. If your bar has different levels, find out whether any problems are created by those levels.
20. Separate entrances and exits can help avoid crowding and bumping

K. Other things to think about

- ◆ Who hires employees, especially security staff, and how are they recruited?

- ◆ What characteristics do you look for when hiring staff?

- ◆ Do your staff have responsible liquor service and security staff certification ([ProServe Liquor Staff Training](#) and [ProTect Security Staff Training](#))?

- ◆ What other kind of training do you require your staff to have? See [what's required](#) for licensee staff at Alberta's licensed premises.

- ◆ How are staff supervised?

Part 2: Plans for change

The following charts can help you identify and plan changes to improve safety in your bar. After rating your bar and reading the explanations for each section, complete the relevant charts. You may find it helpful to discuss possible changes with your staff.

A. Entering the bar	
Plans to improve the safety of staff and customers entering the bar	Target date for changes

B. A safe and friendly atmosphere	
Plans to provide a safer and more friendly atmosphere	Target date for changes

C. Layout	
Plans to improve the layout of the bar	Target date for changes
D. Physical comfort and safety of customers	
Plans to increase the physical comfort and safety of customers	Target date for changes
E. Setting rules and keeping order	
Plans to improve ways of keeping order in the bar	Target date for changes

F. Servers and bartenders	
Plans to reduce risks associated with behaviour of servers and bartenders	Target date for changes
G. Security staff	
Plans to reduce risks associated with behaviour of security staff	Target date for changes
H. Minimizing problems	
Plans to improve the effectiveness of staff at minimizing problems	Target date for changes

I. Closing time

Plans to improve safety at closing time	Target date for changes
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J. Other aspects of a safe environment

Other plans for change	Target date for changes
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Notes
