

Appendix I-D-2

**Sample Safe Work Procedures  
Community of \_\_\_\_\_  
Safe Work Procedure #1  
Dealing with Irate Customers**

This Safe Work Procedures has been developed to provide employees with guidance on how to deal with an irate customer.

All employees will have a means of contact available to them at all times. Office staff will have access to telephone with a list of emergency contact phone numbers. Staff not working in the office will have a means of communication (portable radio, or truck mounted radio) and an emergency contact list.

The following are suggestions and guidelines to deal with an irate customer:

1. **Let the customer vent.** Give the customer an opportunity to say what is on his/ her mind, and resist the urge to interrupt. Listen carefully to what the customer is saying so you can identify the real problem. Ask questions and focus on finding solutions.
2. **Attempt to diffuse the customer's anger.** It is easy to become flustered when a customer is yelling. Diffuse the situation as quickly as possible by focusing on the customer's needs and wants, not their angry tone.
3. **Apologize for the inconvenience.** At this point in the conversation, you don not know if the issue is yours or not. It does not matter. The customer is upset and is taking it out on you. Say, "I can tell that you are upset. I'm sorry you have to deal with this. Let me see what I can do to help."
4. **Clarify the problem.** After the customer explains the nature of the problem, briefly restate it to indicate your understanding of the situation. For example, say, "Let me make sure I understand what you're saying."

For example:

You remember there only being three pump-outs this month, but have received a bill for four. Is this correct?"

5. **Be accountable.** When a problem arises, try your best to resolve it. Avoid placing blame on another department or employee. When you blame someone else for the problem in front of the customer, it only generates more ill feelings toward you and your organization. The customer wants the issue resolved, so be accountable for your organization and provide alternatives in order to fix the problem.

6. **Resolve the conflict immediately.** If possible, address a conflict when it arises in order to douse ill feelings before they develop. When you delay the resolution of a conflict, it allows more time for people to let the situation fester and create negative feelings.
7. **Watch your tone of voice.** Tone of voice can change the impression or meaning of words more than you realize. There is a fine line between sounding interested and helpful or bored and condescending. Take deep breaths, smile, and make sure you don't speak in a monotone.
8. **Use positive language.** State what you can do, not what you cannot do. Instead of saying, "We do not accept checks," say, "We gladly accept cash or credit card."
9. **Be proactive.** Do not wait to take action. Customers are anxious to resolve issues. Look for positive solutions to challenging situations. When you delay, it generates more frustration and anger. If you exhibit a genuine concern and a willingness to take immediate action, the customer will remember your positive attitude longer than any negative feelings will last.
10. **Agree on a solution.** Clearly explain your solution and gain the customer's agreement. If there is more than one potential solution, explain each option and let the customer choose the option he/she likes best.