

Washington Courts Incident Reports 2020-2022

546

Incidents reported

183

Critical Incidents

75

Courts submitting incidents 2020-2022

37

Incidents involving individuals with weapons

16

Security breaches presenting a threat to court staff or the public

44

Positive outcomes with security staff intervention

Security Trends

Washington Courts began requiring incident reports to be submitted in 2017 as part of GR 36.

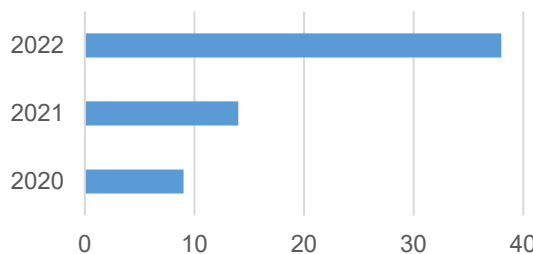
In 2022 174 incidents were recorded, a 3.6% increase from 2021, and a 14.7% decrease from 2020.

Of the 174 incidents, 47.7% (83) were deemed to be critical incidents presenting a significant risk of harm to individuals, a 22.7% increase from 2021, and a 15.9% increase from 2020 during the same timeframe. This continues a trend of increasing severity of the incidents Washington Courthouses are experiencing.

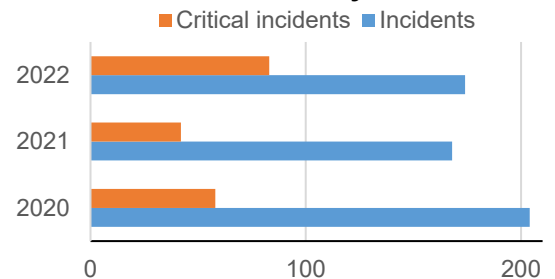
Threats to judicial staff have increased 63.2% since 2021 and 76.3% since 2020.

Bullet holes were found in windows or internal areas which originated from outside of the courthouse on 3 separate occasions in 2022.

Threats to Judicial Staff



Annual security incidents



*Data was compiled using incidents submitted to the Court Security Incident Log on inside.courts.wa.gov.

Incidents

A man was observed on camera coming towards the courthouse with multiple firearms. Law enforcement on-site were alerted and confronted the gunman as he entered the court building. A lockdown was initiated and a multi-hour standoff occurred which was ultimately resolved peacefully.

Jurors reported that the family and friends of a defendant followed them out to their vehicles and photographed and filmed them with their cell phones.

A group of jurors were approached by a woman. One juror was accosted by the woman and threatened for several minutes. The juror reported feeling anxiety about returning to the courthouse following this event.

A defendant bypassed security and tried to reach the podium with the court staff and Commissioner, but was barred by a chair pushed up to the path by the clerk. The defendant then ran out of the court, broke the fire extinguisher glass with their hand, grabbed the fire extinguisher, and was threatening staff until subdued by police officers who responded.

A defendant attempted to strike his attorney during a hearing, but was stopped by a marshal. Later, while taking the defendant into custody, the defendant attempted to fight the marshal and tried to get ahold of his gun.

A Judge discovered a gun shot to their office window after returning from the bench.

Critical Incident Criteria

Critical incident definition:

A submitted incident that presented a significant threat of physical harm or fear of physical harm, or exposed a security flaw that could be exploited to cause harm.

The following criteria were used to screen for critical incidents:

- Physical harm occurred to non-law enforcement staff or the public;
- Physical harm was threatened or implied to non-law enforcement staff or the public;
- A weapon was seized in the courthouse;
- A security flaw that demonstrated an ability to access secure areas was revealed;
- Security intervened in an escalating situation that could have become violent.

While AOC acknowledges the importance of the data of all events submitted, the following types of incidents were screened out of consideration as a critical incident:

- Incidents in which the behavior of an individual could not cause harm (e.g. throwing papers at a window);
- Incidents submitted from false alarms (e.g. a bag left on grounds);
- Incidents in which individuals were on the grounds and acting in a way that was causing concern, but not in a way intended to threaten or present clear security risks (e.g. individuals upset in court areas);
- Incidents where individuals were concealing contraband to not bring it into the courthouse;
- Incidents that took place in jail facilities within a courthouse unless specifically involving court staff;
- Incidents in which injuries to law enforcement occurred as a result of taking defendants into custody on Judge's orders if no other individuals were involved. This was treated as a job-related risk that would not be affected by changes in court security;
- Incidents in which law enforcement brought firearms into courthouses while on personal business and complied with security;
- Incidents in which vandalism occurred with no victim present, and did not present a specific threat to the security of the courthouse (e.g. a window broken during protests, but no entry attempted);
- Incidents occurred outside of courthouses that did not directly involve courthouse staff or the public visiting the court;
- Incidents where individuals were upset by a ruling unless their behavior was specifically noted as presenting a threat.