



Abortion Rights
Coalition of Canada

*Your
Voice for Choice*

Coalition pour le droit à
l'avortement au Canada

Canada's only national political pro-choice advocacy group

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Position Paper #73

Anti- Choice Violence and Harassment

Because of the ongoing threat and the reality of anti-abortion violence and harassment, anti-choice groups continue to have a significant detrimental effect on society's efforts to maintain safe and secure access to abortion care. By attempting to prevent access to abortion services, these groups launch direct attacks against the freedom of women and transgender people.

Abortion protesters, with their gruesome photos and their rhetoric of blood and murder, disturb the peace, offend public decency, and inflict psychological damage. Their manipulative methods can shock, unnecessarily upset, and even traumatize women who have had an abortion, or may consider one in the future. Also, their attempts to block access to abortion clinics are against the law and a violation of privacy. Most alarmingly, many anti-choice individuals have engaged in overt violence against providers and clinic staff, both in Canada and the U.S., most of which is caused or encouraged by protests outside abortion clinics.

Early Violence

Clinic protests against abortion started sporadically after the *Roe v. Wade* decision legalizing abortion in the United States, on January 22, 1973. In June 1974, the first injunction to bar protesters from coming onto clinic property or blocking doorways was put in place at the Northern Virginia Women's Medical Center in Fairfax, Virginia. In the summer of 1975, six women protesters were arrested at the first sit-in protest at an abortion clinic in Rockville, Maryland.

The first act of violence occurred in 1977, when a Planned Parenthood abortion clinic in St. Paul, Minnesota was destroyed by arson. From 1977 to 1983, there were 8 bombings, 13 arsons, and 5 attempted bombings or arsons, all in the United States. On August 12, 1982, an Illinois doctor and his wife were kidnapped by three anti-choice extremists and held at gunpoint for 8 days inside an ammunitions bunker. In 1984, a big escalation in clinic violence ensued: 18 bombs, 6 arsons, 6 attempted arson/bombs, 23 death threats, and 70 clinic invasions and vandalisms. This pattern continued through the '80's with law enforcement refusing to link the attacks to a terrorist movement, and often doing little to apprehend and prosecute those responsible.

Violence in the 1990's

On December 28, 1991, the first shooting occurred. Two staff members at Central Health Center in Springfield, Missouri were shot by a man in a ski mask with a sawed-off shotgun. One woman was left a paraplegic for life.

Two weeks later, abortion provider Dr. Douglas Karpen was shot and wounded in a parking garage at the Women's Pavilion in Houston, Texas.

The numbers of bombings, arsons, and attempted bombings and arsons in the United States skyrocketed in the early 1990's. This spike was preceded by Operation Rescue-type blockades of clinics involving hundreds of protesters.

On March 10, 1993, abortion provider Dr. David Gunn was fatally shot in the back by a protester as he entered his Florida clinic in Pensacola.

In June 1993, anti-choice extremist Paul Hill introduced his "Defensive Action Statement", signed by 30 anti-choice leaders, saying that killing doctors is justifiable homicide. A year later, Hill himself murdered a doctor and his escort as they arrived at another Pensacola clinic.

In 1994, two female receptionists at different clinics in Massachusetts were shot dead by a protester. A clinic security guard was killed in an Alabama clinic blast in 1998 and a nurse seriously injured.

The violence spread to Canada in 1992. On May 18, 1992, a firebomb destroyed Dr. Henry Morgentaler's Toronto abortion clinic in the middle of the night. In 1994, BC doctor Garson Romalis was shot at his home in Vancouver while eating breakfast, by a sniper hiding in his back alley.

This was followed by similar shootings of two more doctors in Hamilton Ontario in 1995 and in Winnipeg in 1997, as well as two New York doctors, one in 1997 and a fatal shooting in 1998. The main suspect is anti-choice extremist James Kopp, who was charged in the Hamilton shooting and convicted of murder in the 1998 New York shooting. He was never questioned for the Canadian shootings.

In total, the 1990's saw 8 murders of doctors or clinic staff and 19 attempted murders.

Violence in the 2000's

Dr. Garson Romalis of Vancouver was stabbed outside his medical office in July 2000, earning the distinction of being the first doctor in North America to be attacked twice.

In July 2001, the violence spread outside North America for the first time, when a security guard was shot dead at a Melbourne Australia clinic by a gunman who also threatened other staff before being overpowered.

Accused doctor sniper James Kopp was caught in France in March 2001 and extradited to New York in July 2002. He confessed to the murder of New York's Dr. Barnett Slepian later that year, was convicted, and sentenced in May 2003 to 25 years to life in prison.

There have been no episodes of violence in Canada since 9/11. However, shortly after 9/11 in the U.S., anti-choice radical Clayton Waagner, an escaped fugitive, sent hoax anthrax threat letters and packages to hundreds of clinics across the U.S. Waagner was caught in December 2001.

Also caught in May 2003 after five years on the run was Eric Rudolph, charged in the fatal bombing at a Birmingham Alabama abortion clinic, and the main suspect in several other bombings.

The execution of convicted doctor-killer Paul Hill took place in September 2003 in Florida.

An anti-abortion gunman killed 67-year-old George Tiller in a Wichita, Kansas, church in 2009. Tiller was one of the few U.S. physicians who performed late-term abortions.

On November 29, 2015, a shooting at Planned Parenthood in Colorado Springs left three dead (a police officer and two civilians) and several injured, and the suspect Robert L. Deer was apprehended. In May 2016, he was declared incompetent to stand trial after a mental evaluation.

In the US, between 1977 and 2015, anti-choice extremists directed more than 7,200 reported acts of violence at abortion providers. This included 42 bombings, 185 arson attacks, and thousands of death threats, bioterrorism threats, and assaults. In addition, more than 234,300 acts of disruption were reported, including bomb threats, hate mail, and harassing calls.

Murders and Attempted Murders

Since 1991, there have been 11 murders and 26 attempted murders of abortion providers and clinic staff in North America and one murder in Australia.

Note: The shootings of Dr. Wayne Patterson, Dr. Paul Hackmeyer, and Dr. George Klopfer were never officially attributed to anti-choice motives, but the pro-choice community is strongly suspicious.

Date	Name	Clinic/Place	Location	Assailant	Description
1991 Dec 28	Don Catron, Building Manager Claudia Gilmore, Office Manager	Central Health Center	Springfield, Montana	Never caught	Wounded by gunshot Wounded by gunshot
1992 Jan 14	Dr. Douglas Karpen	Women's Pavilion	Houston, Texas	Never caught	Wounded by gunshot
1993 Mar 10	Dr. David Gunn	Pensacola Women's Medical Services	Pensacola, Florida	Michael Griffin Convicted, life in prison	Murdered by gunshot
1993 May 19	Dr. Robert Crist	His residence	Overland Park, Kansas	Never caught	Shots fired into house, no injuries
1993 Aug 19	Dr. George Tiller	Women's Health Care Services	Wichita, Kansas	Rachelle Shannon Convicted	Wounded by gunshot

Date	Name	Clinic/Place	Location	Assailant	Description
1993 Aug 21	Dr. George Wayne Patterson	Parking lt	Mobile, Alabama	Suspect acquitted, case unsolved	Murdered by gunshot
1994 Mar 20	Dr. Paul Hackmeyer	His residence, in driveway	Los Angeles, CA	Never caught	Wounded by gunshot
1994 Jul 29	Dr. John Britton James Barrett, Escort June Barrett, Escort	The Ladies Center	Pensacola, Florida	Paul Hill convicted, executed	Murdered by gunshot Murdered by gunshot Wounded by gunshot
1994 Nov 8	Dr. Garson Romalis	His residence	Vancouver, BC	James Kopp suspect	Wounded by gunshot
1994 Dec 30	Shannon Lowney, receptionist Anjana Agrawal, Antonio Hernandez, Brian Murray (staff/waiting room)	Planned Parenthood	Brookline, Mass.	John Salvi convicted, life in prison	Murdered by gunshot Wounded by Gunshot
1994 Dec 30	Leanne Nichols, Receptionist Jane Sauer, Richard J. Seron (Staff/waiting room)	Preterm Health Services	Brookline, Mass.	John Salvi convicted, life in prison	Murdered by gunshot Wounded by gunshot
1995 Jan 5	Dr. George Klopfer	While driving	Between South Bend and Fort Wayne, Ind.	Never caught	Shots fired, no injuries
1995 Nov 10	Dr. Hugh Short	His residence	Ancaster, Ontario	James Kopp suspect, charged	Wounded by gunshot
1996 Dec 18	Dr. Calvin Jackson	Orleans Women's Clinic	New Orleans, Louisiana	Donald Copper, charged	Wounded by repeated stabbing
1997 Oct 28	Anonymous doctor	His residence	Rochester, NY	James Kopp suspect	Shot at in house, minor injuries
1997 Nov 11	Dr. Jack Fainman	His residence	Winnipeg, Manitoba	James Kopp suspect	Wounded by gunshot
1998 Jan 29	Robert Sanderson, guard/police officer Emily Lyons, nurse	New Woman, All Women Health Care Clinic	Birmingham, Alabama	Eric Rudolph suspect, charged	Murdered by bomb Wounded by bomb
1998 Oct 23	Dr. Barnett Slepian	His residence	Amherst, NY	James Kopp convicted; life in prison	Murdered by gunshot
2000 Jul 11	Dr. Garson Romalis	Seymour Medical Center	Vancouver, BC	Never caught	Wounded by stabbing
2001 Jul 16	Steven Rogers, security guard	Fertility Control Clinic	Melbourne, Australia	Peter Knight convicted; life in prison	Murdered by gunshot
2009 May 31	Dr. George Tiller	Reformation United Church	Wichita, Kansas	Scott Roeder convicted, life in prison	Murdered by gunshot
2015 Nov 27	Garrett Swasey, police officer Ke'Arre M. Stewart, civilian Jennifer Markovsky, civilian Nine other victims	Planned Parenthood	Colorado Springs, Colorado	Robert Lewis Dear, Jr. convicted, mentally incompetent to stand trial	Murdered by gunshot Murdered by gunshot Murdered by gunshot Wounded by gunshot

Violence in Canada

Following is a listing of all known incidents of severe or moderate violence (including serious vandalism) in Canada.

- June 15, 1983 — A man with gardening shears lunged at Dr. Henry Morgentaler outside his Toronto clinic in an assault attempt. Augusto Dantas was charged with possession of a dangerous weapon and assault.
- 1985— Anti-choice activist Jim Demers of Nelson BC, served time in jail for destroying a vacuum aspirator he stole from Kootenay Regional General Hospital in Nelson.
- February 25, 1990 — A vandal broke into the Everywoman's Health Centre in Vancouver and destroyed an ultrasound machine and aspirator, using a crowbar. In October 2000, anti-choice activist Lane Walker turned himself in for the crime. He was sentenced to one day in jail and fined \$10,000 in damages.
- August 1991— A flammable liquid was poured onto the back wall of the future Edmonton Morgentaler clinic, due to open in a month. It was ignited and caused \$1,000 damage.
- January 1992 — An arson attack at the Toronto Morgentaler Clinic resulted in \$7,000 damage. Youths set fire to a gasoline-soaked tire and hauled it onto the porch, gutting the clinic foyer. A few days earlier, a woman released butyric acid in the clinic washroom.
- May 18, 1992— A firebomb completely destroyed the Morgentaler clinic in Toronto in the middle of the night. There were no injuries, but the perpetrator was never caught.
- November 8, 1994— The five Remembrance Day shootings, so-called because they occurred around the date of November 11, began on this date with the near-fatal shooting of Dr. Garson Romalis in Vancouver, BC. (All shootings were similar: a sniper—James Kopp is the suspect—hid behind the house and shot through a glass window or door into the doctor's home, using a high-powered rifle.)
- November 10, 1995 — Dr. Hugh Short of Hamilton, Ontario was shot and wounded in the elbow by the "Remembrance Day" sniper. James Kopp was later charged.
- November 12, 1996 — The Edmonton Morgentaler clinic suffered a butyric acid attack.
- November 11, 1997 — Dr. Jack Fainman of Winnipeg, Manitoba was shot and wounded in the shoulder by the "Remembrance Day" sniper.
- July 11, 2000— Dr. Garson Romalis was again attacked, this time in the parking lot of his medical office by an unknown assailant lying in wait for him. Dr. Romalis was stabbed once in the back, nicking his spleen. The culprit was never caught.

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