

Workplace Violence

Definition

Workplace Violence is any situation that may:

- Threaten the safety of an employee or business patron/visitor
- Have an impact upon an employee's physical and/or psychological well-being
- Cause damage to company property

How Serious Is The Problem?

- Workplace violence is the fastest growing form of murder in the USA.
- In the United States, 10% of men killed at work die of murder while the figure for women is 40% . It is the leading cause of workplace death for women (compared to natural causes and accidents).
- According to the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, each year more than 1,600 people are murdered at work.
- More than 2,000,000 people are assaulted on the job each year and more than 6,000,000 are threatened.

Workplace violence is an increasing phenomenon - Why?

- Increasingly violent society
- Domestic discord
- Poor leadership and management skills
- Economy - Job pressures
- Influence of drugs and alcohol
- Media influence
- "copycats"
- "15 Minutes of Fame"
- Persons used to resolve their differences by talking it out. Now, they often resort to violence as an initial problem-solving technique.

Types of Workplace Violence

Third Party Intrusion into the Workplace

- When a person not a member of the business or organization enters the workplace
- Is the greatest potential for workplace violence
- Armed Robbery is a frequent occurrence
- Often estranged or recently divorced husband, ex-boyfriend or the emotionally disturbed person
- Women obtaining increased number of emergency protection orders (EPO) or emergency restraining orders (ERO)

Disgruntled Employees - "Going Postal"

- Usually directs their act(s) of violence towards coworkers, supervisors or managers
- The motive for the act or acts of violence is usually revenge
- They believe something very important has been taken away from them such as a promotion, raise, or assignment or transfer

Prevention of Workplace Violence

Robbery

Working with their local law enforcement agency, management should develop and maintain an effective robbery prevention program.

Customer Conflict

- Teach customer service orientation -may serve to diffuse the customer's anger or hostility
- Teach conflict resolution skills to employees
- Design of office facilities
- Use of CCTV and audio monitoring
- Criminal prosecution
- Documentation of incident
- Establish policy

Domestic Conflict

Staff members should notify supervisors of domestic conflicts. Employees should be encouraged to notify their supervisors whenever they experience domestic conflict involving abuse, violence or threats or when they experience misdirected affection (romantic obsession). The supervisor can subsequently be more alert to the possible intrusion into the workplace and possibly initiate proactive measures.

- Notify Security Department - When an employee has obtained an emergency protection order directed toward an estranged or recently divorced spouse, ex-boyfriend, family member, etc., the company security department should be notified.
- Duress Alarm - A temporary duress alarm may be installed in the workplace of the individual who is threatened. Such an alarm should be monitored by the company security department, if possible.
- Cell Phone - Programs have been developed in some communities whereby cellular telephones are provided free-of-charge to persons (usually women) threatened by domestic violence.
- Escorts - The person who is threatened and/or has obtained the emergency protection order may be escorted from and to his/her motor vehicle to the workplace by a uniformed security officer.
- Personal Alarm - The person threatened may be encouraged to carry a high decibel personal battery powered alarm device.

- Community Services - Victims of domestic conflict or discord may be referred to community social services ("Battered Women's Shelter") that may be of assistance.
- Law Enforcement Domestic Violence Program - Many law enforcement agencies have developed domestic violence programs to provide aid, assistance and counsel to victims.

Disgruntled Employees - Who Are They?

Profile of Attackers Involved in Workplace Homicide

- Male
- 35 years or older
- Owns a weapon or weapons
- Has a history of violence against women, children or animals
- Is withdrawn or a loner
- Their job provides self-esteem
- Has a history of substance abuse or mental health issues
- Blames others for life's disappointments
- Poor coping skills and resources
- High probability of military service

When Are Employees Under Greatest Stress?

- Loss of job
- When there is a death in the family
- When undergoing a divorce
- During a physical move
- Experiencing serious financial stress

"Red Flags" or Warning Signs

- History of violent behavior
- Fascination with weaponry and/or acts of violence
- Carrying a concealed weapon
- Verbal, nonverbal, or written threats or intimidation
- Obsessive involvement with the job
- Unwanted romantic interest in coworker
- Paranoid behavior
- Unable to accept criticism
- Holds a grudge
- Recent family, financial and/or personal problems
- Talks about past killings/violence
- Tests limits of acceptable behavior
- Stress in the workplace such as layoffs, ROFs, and labor disputes
- Little tolerance of others
- Gets away with unacceptable job performance ratings
- Fond of violent films and TV shows

- Non communicator - loner
- Extreme reactions to new policies - has a hard time with authority figures
- Change in quality of work
- Very neat or very sloppy - or sudden change
- Lies, exaggerates or over reacts on a regular basis
- Self-centered or aloof
- Withdrawal of funds
- Irrational beliefs and ideas
- Expressions of a plan to hurt himself or others
- Externalization of blame
- Taking up much of supervisor's time with behavior or performance problems
- Drastic change in belief system
- Displays of unwarranted anger
- Feelings of being victimized
- Intoxication from alcohol or other substances on the job
- Expressions of hopelessness or heightened anxiety
- Productivity and/or attendance problems
- Violence towards inanimate objects
- Steals or sabotages projects or equipment
- Lack of concern for the safety of others

At Risk Work Environment

- Chronic labor/management disputes
- Frequent grievances filed
- Large number of injury claims
- Under staffing or excessive demands for overtime
- High number of stressed personnel
- Authoritarian Management Approach - an aggressive style where management tells employees what and when to do everything.
- Polarization between employees and managers - the relationship is one of an us verses them syndrome.
- Inconsistencies between employees and managers - employees and management do not share the same work related goals. Environmental pressures - pressures from home, financial problems, work schedules or unfair work demands.
- Sequence of Employer-Directed Violence
- Individual suffers trauma which creates tension or anxiety
- Single major event
- Cumulative minor events
- Individual perceives problems are unsolvable
- Individual projects all responsibility onto the situation
- Individual's frame of reference becomes self-centered
- Self-preservation and self-protection gradually becomes sole objective
- Violent act perceived as only way out
- Violent act attempted or committed.

Levels of Violence

Level One

- Refuses to cooperate with immediate supervisors
- Spreads rumors and gossips to harm others
- Consistently argues with co-workers
- Belligerent toward customers/client
- Is profane towards others
- Makes unwanted sexual advances

Level Two

- Argues increasingly with customers, co-workers and management
- Refuses to obey company policies and procedures
- Sabotages equipment and steals property
- Verbalizes wishes to hurt co-workers and/or management
- Sees self as victimized by management

Level Three

- Recurrent suicide threats
- Recurrent physical fights
- Destruction of property
- Utilization of weapons to harm others
- Commission of murder, rape and/or arson

What Companies Should Do...

Non-Harassment Policy

A clearly written company policy should be developed that prohibits intimidation and harassment in the workplace

Zero Tolerance for Weapons

Companies should have a consistent, well-publicized policy that allows zero tolerance for weapons in the work place.

Encourage Employees to Report Incidents

Employees should be encouraged to report incidents of violence, harassment, intimidation, threatened violence, etc. to their superiors and/or the company security department.

Employee Training

Employees should be trained to recognize warning signs or "red flags" in the behavior or circumstances of co-workers that may lead to workplace violence.

Evaluate Employment Procedures

Wherever possible, employment procedures should include a thorough background check of prospective employees.

Advise Employees of Counseling Services

Insure that all employees are advised of available counseling and employee assistance programs that are available.

Provide A Healthy Work Environment

Provide a work environment that includes benevolent rather than authoritarian management, predictable supervision, value for dignity of the employee and reasonable work demands or requirements.

Evaluate Security and Emergency Procedures

In cooperation with the local law enforcement agency or the company security department, evaluate access control, security and emergency response procedures.

Minimize Workplace Stress

As much as possible to do, work to minimize labor/management disputes, under staffing, unsafe conditions, excessive demands for output or any other factors that contribute to workplace stress

Provide a Threat Management Plan

When threats or implied threats are reported or made known, the company should have a team of professionals that pull together to analyze risk factors and plan a course of action. This team may vary according to the situation, but may include representatives from:

- The Human Resources Department
- The Company Security Department
- Employee Assistance Services
- Company Legal Council
- Senior Company Management