

Workplace Violence – Awareness and Prevention

Workplace violence is a frustrating problem facing companies today. While more and more information on the causes of violence and how to handle it is becoming known, there is often no reasonable rationale for this type of conduct and, despite everything we know or do, violent situations happen. No employer is immune from workplace violence and no employer can totally prevent it.



What is workplace violence?

Workplace violence is any act or threat of physical violence, harassment, intimidation, or other threatening disruptive behavior that occurs at the work site. It ranges from threats and verbal abuse to physical assaults and even homicide. It can affect and involve employees, clients, customers and visitors. The impact of workplace violence ranges from psychological issues to physical injury, or even death.

The cost to organizations is staggering. It is impossible to overstate the costs of workplace violence, because a single incident can have sweeping repercussions. There can be the immediate and profound loss of life or physical or psychological repercussions felt by the victim as well as the victim's family, friends, and co-workers; the loss of productivity and morale that sweeps through an organization after a violent incident; and the public relations impact on an employer when news of violence reaches the media.

Workplace violence affects other areas as well. The adverse impact on organizations and individuals is wide-ranging and can include:

- ▲ Temporary/Permanent Absence of Skilled Employee
- ▲ Psychological Damage
- ▲ Property Damage, Theft, and Sabotage
- ▲ Productivity Impediments
- ▲ Diversion of Management Resources
- ▲ Increased Security Costs
- ▲ Increased Workers' Compensation Costs
- ▲ Increased Personnel Costs
- ▲ Temporary/Permanent Absence of Skilled Employees

There are many theories about the causes of workplace violence. However, caution should be taken when profiling or stereotyping individuals or organizations since the presence of any of the factors related to these theories does not necessarily indicate a violent act will be carried out. Nevertheless, an incident can be the result of any one or a combination of these factors.

Remember – violence or threats of violence in all forms is unacceptable workplace behavior. It should not be tolerated and it should be dealt with appropriately.

Homicide is currently the fourth-leading cause of fatal occupational injuries in the United States. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries (CFOI). However it manifests itself, workplace violence is a major concern for employers and employees nationwide.

Injury Data

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 16,160 workers in the private industry experienced trauma from nonfatal workplace violence in 2015. These incidents required days away from work.

Of those victims who experienced trauma from workplace violence:

- ▲ 67% were female
- ▲ 69% worked in the healthcare and social assistance industry
- ▲ 23% required 31 or more days away from work to recover, and 20% involved 3 to 5 days away from work

Fatality Data

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 350 workers in private industry were workplace homicide victims in 2015, 294 of which were workplace shootings.

Of those victims who died from workplace violence:

- ▲ 83% were male
- ▲ 49% were white
- ▲ 32% were working in a retail establishment

Who is at risk of workplace violence?

Nearly two million American workers report having been victims of workplace violence each year. Unfortunately, many more cases go unreported. Research has identified

factors that may increase the risk of violence for some workers at certain worksites. Such factors include exchanging money with the public and working with volatile, unstable people. Working alone or in isolated areas may also contribute to the potential for violence. Additionally, time of day and location of work, such as working late at night or in areas with high crime rates, are also risk factors that should be considered when addressing issues of workplace violence.

How can workplace violence hazards be reduced?

In most workplaces where risk factors can be identified, the risk of assault can be prevented or minimized if employers take appropriate precautions. One of the best protections employers can offer their workers is to establish a zero-tolerance policy toward workplace violence. This policy should cover all workers, clients, visitors, contractors, and anyone else who may come in contact with company personnel.

By assessing their worksites, employers can identify methods for reducing the likelihood of incidents occurring. A well-written and implemented workplace violence prevention program and training can reduce the incidence of workplace violence.

This can be a separate workplace violence prevention program or can be incorporated into a safety and health program, employee handbook, or manual of standard operating procedures. It is critical to ensure that all workers know the policy and understand that all claims of workplace violence will be investigated and remedied promptly.

What can these employers do to help protect these employees?

- ▲ Provide safety education for employees so they know what conduct is not acceptable, what to do if they witness or are subjected to workplace violence, and how to protect themselves.
- ▲ Secure the workplace. Where appropriate to the business, install video surveillance, extra lighting, and alarm systems and minimize access by outsiders through identification badges, electronic keys, and guards.
- ▲ Equip field staff with cellular phones and hand-held alarms or noise devices, and require them to prepare a daily work plan and keep a contact person informed of their location throughout the day.
- ▲ Keep employer provided vehicles properly maintained.
- ▲ Instruct employees not to enter any location where they feel unsafe. Introduce a “buddy system” or

provide an escort service or police assistance in potentially dangerous situations or at night.

How can the employees protect themselves?

Nothing can guarantee that an employee will not become a victim of workplace violence. These steps, however, can help reduce the odds:

- ▲ Learn how to recognize, avoid, or diffuse potentially violent situations by attending personal safety training programs.
- ▲ Alert supervisors to any concerns about safety or security and report all incidents immediately in writing.
- ▲ Avoid traveling alone into unfamiliar locations or situations whenever possible.
- ▲ Carry only minimal money and required identification into community settings.

A supervisor’s response is the key to dealing with threats of violence:

- ▲ Treat all employees fairly
- ▲ Investigate all threats
- ▲ Take them seriously
- ▲ Get information from all sides
- ▲ Don’t allow retaliation

What should employers do following an incident of workplace violence?

- ▲ Encourage employees to report and log all incidents and threats of workplace violence.
- ▲ Provide prompt medical evaluation and treatment after the incident.
- ▲ Report violent incidents to the local police promptly.
- ▲ Inform victims of their legal right to prosecute perpetrators.
- ▲ Discuss the circumstances of the incident with staff members. Encourage employees to share information about ways to avoid similar situations in the future.
- ▲ Offer stress debriefing sessions and post traumatic counseling services to help workers recover from a violent incident.
- ▲ Investigate all violent incidents and threats, monitor trends in violent incidents by type or circumstance, and institute corrective actions.
- ▲ Discuss changes in the program during regular employee meetings.

TPM is always available to assist you with designing and implementing a Workplace Violence policy and plan. For assistance with a Workplace Violence policy, or to view a sample program, call 509-535-4646.