



EMPLOYER FOCUS:

Addressing The Realities Of Violence In The Workplace



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THE FULL definition of workplace violence might surprise you.

Workplace violence is considered any act or threat of physical or psychological violence, harassment, intimidation or bullying as well as other threatening, disruptive behavior or language that occurs at work.

What we hear most about are incidents involving homicides at work. According to the National Center for Victims of Crime, workplace homicides make up 9 percent of fatal injuries at work based on the latest data (2014). Overall levels are on the decline, with 403 total fatalities nationwide in 2014, down from 458 in 2011 and 1,068 in 1993. Other causes of fatal injuries at the workplace included the following: transportation incidents (40 percent); falls, slips, and trips (17 percent); contact with objects/equipment (15 percent); toxic exposures (8 percent); other violence/injury by animals (7 percent); and fire/explosions (3 percent).

The most common form of workplace violence is simple assault, which accounts for the vast majority of all nonfatal violent crimes. What can employers do to help protect their employees from any act of workplace violence? Consider these four steps:

1. Assess Your Work Site and Issue A Workplace Violence Prevention Policy

The document should have a policy statement and provide the scope of the policy. It should also outline the responsibility of managers and employees. Your organization should assign a threat-and-assessment team to be responsible for carrying out the procedures of the

workplace violence prevention policy. The policy should also detail what constitutes prohibited conduct and lay out a reporting procedure in the unlikely event an incident should occur. As with other types of work-related incidents, investigation and enforcement must be timely and thorough.

2. Train Your Employees And Management Team

Once you have a written policy, begin training right away. Your employees should be aware of the warning signs that sometimes occur prior to an incident and feel comfortable reporting their concerns to management. Here is a list of some of the warning signs: unusual behavior, constantly disagreeing with others, excessive profanity, irritability and outward anxiety, disregard for company policies, comments about harming others, depression, fighting, or suicidal threats. Employees should be instructed to report any changes in their co-workers immediately to their supervisor, manager, human resources representative, or any member of the threat assessment team.

3. Re-evaluate The Interview Process

All employers have a legal obligation to provide a workplace that is free from violence. This starts before you hire a new employee. Make sure you are asking the right questions during the interview process. It is important that you ask about the core technical skills, knowledge, and experiences of the candidates. Once you feel you have selected the best candidate for the position, and upon an offer of employment, conduct a thorough and complete background investigation and drug screening. If there are any

warning signs, then the employer has the opportunity to rescind the job offer. Although nothing is foolproof, it will help prevent you from hiring someone who may have a violent past.

4. Visitor Protocols

It is critical to have a procedure for guests and visitors who may arrive at your place of business. All access points of your office should be locked at all times. All employees should be assigned an access key in order to enter the building. Employees should know to never let anyone into the building, even if the person appears familiar. Guests and visitors should be directed to check in with the receptionist, and no one should be allowed into the building without first confirming the visit with the appropriate employee. Only after the receptionist has confirmed the appointment should the visitor be allowed in. Once confirmed, the individual should sign a guest book, be given a visitor's pass, and wait to be escorted through the building by the appropriate employee. When the meeting has concluded, the guest should be escorted back to the reception area, asked to turn in the visitor's pass, and sign out before being escorted to the exit.

In today's world we can never be too cautious. Encourage your employees to be aware of their surroundings and to report any suspicious behavior. We have all heard these old adages: "The life you save may very well be your own" and "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." They have never been truer than today as we continue to navigate our way through the reality and threat of workplace violence. ■