

behavior that often precede violent acts, property crimes are included as a type of violence to be addressed in the workplace.

What You Can Do To Ensure a Safe Workplace

Learn about your company's policy on violence. Every company should have a policy that defines violent behavior and describes what an employee can expect if s/he is either the victim or perpetrator of a violent act. Most have what's called a "zero tolerance" approach — violence or threats of violence will not be tolerated. Ask to see a copy of your company's policy, and ask that it be posted for the benefit of customers and co-workers. If your company doesn't have a policy, encourage managers to develop one and to educate all employees on it once it's adopted.

Take threats seriously. Threats of violence are a serious matter. If someone remarks to you that s/he plans to "get back" at someone, "take out" someone or "make things right," immediately alert the person at your company who's in a position to do something about it (who this person is should be spelled out in your company's policy on violence). To help identify what a threat is, consider this saying from violence prevention experts: "If you feel threatened, you are."

Don't contribute to the problem. If you're engaging in behaviors that make others uncomfortable, stop. Some incidents of teasing or harassing a coworker are illegal. Besides, no one can accurately predict what another person will do if s/he is teased or harassed. Even seemingly harmless events could become fatal. In one incident, a co-worker shot and killed another coworker who took a cracker from his lunch box.

Encourage a victim of domestic violence to get

help. Many incidents of workplace violence actually begin at home. If you know of someone involved in a violent relationship, encourage that person to get help before the violence has a chance to spill into the workplace. Police agencies, shelters, even company security personnel can recommend ways to protect someone and others from further victimization.

Get help for yourself, if you need it. If you're experiencing a conflict or a problem that's too much to handle alone, get help. Talk to someone in your employee assistance program. Your health care plan may also have a list of counselors or therapists.

Help Is Available

Just talking about your problems sometimes leads to new solutions. If you or someone you know needs information, guidance or help, contact the resource and number listed below or look in the Yellow Pages for local professionals who can help.

WorkLife Solutions
Employee Assistance Program
(330) 965-1234
www.eap4me.com

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PREVENTING VIOLENCE AT WORK



Workplace Violence

Violence in the workplace has received considerable attention in the popular press and among safety and health professionals. Unfortunately, sensational acts of coworker violence (which form only a small part of the problem) are often emphasized by the media to the exclusion of the almost daily killings of taxicab drivers, convenience store clerks and other retail workers, security guards, and police officers. These deaths often go virtually unnoticed, yet their numbers are staggering and are just as problematic as coworker violence. Death or injury should not be an inevitable result of one's chosen occupation, nor should these staggering figures be accepted as a cost of doing business in society.

What Is Workplace Violence?

Defining workplace violence has generated considerable discussion. Some would include in the definition any language or actions that make one person uncomfortable in the workplace; others would include threats and harassment; and all would include any bodily injury inflicted by one person on another. Thus the spectrum of workplace violence ranges from offensive language to homicide, and a reasonable working definition of workplace violence is as follows: *violent acts, including physical assaults and threats of assault, directed toward persons at work or on duty.* Most studies to date have focused primarily on physical injuries, since they are clearly defined and easily measured; however, it is just as important to prevent emotional and mental strife on the job as well.

The circumstances of workplace violence also vary and may include robbery-associated violence; violence by disgruntled clients, customers, patients, inmates, etc.; violence by coworkers, employees, or

employers; and domestic violence that finds its way into the workplace.

What Causes Workplace Violence?

Researchers say many factors contribute to the incidence of workplace violence including:

Collapse of the "employment contract." Workers once thought that if you landed the right job, you could work for that company until you retired; having a job meant having an "employment contract" for life. It's not that way anymore. Countless millions of people have been laid off or downsized from companies that have been re-engineered or restructured in recent years. That means more stress and less security, which has led some workers to act out violently.

Pressures of modern life. Everybody is busy on and off the job these days. When we experience difficult times — a divorce, debt, ill children or parents, upsets with co-workers — the extra energy it takes to cope with problems can make life feel overwhelming. This distress can lead some people to an emotional flash point of violence.

Poor coping skills. With new technologies, global competition and workforce diversity, changes in the workplace occur with increasing frequency. Not everyone adjusts well to the changes. For some, the pressure leads them to make poor decisions, including the decision to become violent.

Use of alcohol and other drugs. Because many crimes take place while the perpetrator is under the influence of alcohol or other drugs, it can't be ruled out that substance abuse contributes to the problem.

Violence is a substantial contributor to death and injury on the job. Recent data indicate that homicide has become the second leading cause of oc-

cupational injury death, exceeded only by motor-vehicle related death.

Workplace violence is not distributed randomly across all workplaces, but is clustered in particular occupational settings. More than half (56%) of workplace homicides occurred in retail trade and service industries. Homicide is the leading cause of death in these industries as well as in finance, insurance, and real estate. The risk of workplace violence is associated with specific workplace factors such as dealing with the public, the exchange of money, and the delivery of services or goods. Consequently, great potential exists for workplace-specific prevention efforts such as bullet-resistant barriers and enclosures in taxicabs, convenience stores, gas stations, emergency departments, and other areas where workers come in direct contact with the public; locked drop safes and other cash-handling procedures in retail establishments; and threat assessment policies in all types of workplaces.

Types of violence

Physical attacks — shoving, pushing, hitting, slapping, kicking or using a weapon with intent to physically harm another person.

Threats — a written or spoken remark or unspoken gesture (raising a fist, pretending to strike another, showing a weapon) that shows intent to harm.

Harassment — abusive language or acts (such as stalking) intended to harm another person. Typically, the harassing behavior targets the victim's gender, nationality, culture, sexual orientation or appearance.

Property crimes — because the destruction of property, sabotage and theft are examples of