



Workplace Violence

TALKING POINTS

What Is Workplace Violence?

Workplace violence can be an act of physical violence, threats of physical harm, harassment, intimidation, or other threatening behavior. Even when violence does not cause physical injury, it can inflict psychological and emotional damage.

Violence at work includes assaults, stalking, verbal threats, sexual harassment, theft, arson, sabotage, and extortion. It is a leading cause of workplace fatalities. Workplace violence could occur anywhere, but it is more common where employees exchange money, work alone or at night, handle valuables, work in high crime areas, interact with the public, or perform field work.

Types of Workplace Violence

There are four recognized types of workplace violence:

- Category 1: Violence by Strangers. These are violent acts by criminals who have no legitimate business relationship to the employer. They enter to commit robbery or another crime. This typically occurs to workers who work in late night retail establishments and to livery drivers.
- Category 2: Violence by Customers or Clients. Violence is committed by an assailant who has a legitimate relationship to the employer, directed at employees by customers, clients, patients, students, inmates, or any others for whom an organization provides services.
- Category 3: Violence by Co-Workers. The person committing the violent behavior has some employment-related involvement in the workplace. Malicious acts are directed against coworkers, supervisors, or managers by a present or former employee.
- Category 4: Violence by Personal Relations. Violence committed in the workplace by someone who doesn't work there but has a personal relationship with an employee—an abusive spouse or domestic partner, for example.

Workplace Violence Prevention

The best protection is a workplace violence prevention program with a zero-tolerance policy towards all forms of workplace violence. It is also vital to train staff on violence prevention and how to react to violent threats. Adequately securing the workplace is also very important.

According to the FBI, most incidents that employees/managers must deal with are lesser cases of assaults, domestic violence, stalking, threats, harassment (including sexual harassment), and physical and/or emotional abuse. These incidents typically make no headlines and most of them are not reported to company officials or police.



Recognizing Warning Signs

Be aware of the warning signs – behavior that an employee exhibits leading up to an act of violence. Warning signs include:

- Indirect threats
- Loud outbursts
- Direct threats
- Sudden mood and behavior changes
- Withdrawal

Meeting with a Hostile Employee or Visitor

Sometimes you can't avoid meeting or dealing with a hostile person, either an employee or a visitor. Some ways to prevent problems if this occurs:

- Let others know when and where you are meeting.
- Have a piece of furniture between you and the person you are meeting.
- Position yourself so you don't have to touch the subject accidentally to leave.
- If possible, meet the person away from their peer group to avoid them acting out in front of an audience.
- Use helpful, non-challenging body language – face the person, with your arms out in front but not aggressively.
- Don't make any sudden moves.

Securing the Workplace

Guests should be signed in, verified with the person they are visiting, and escorted while in the workplace. Workers should report intruders or unauthorized persons to their supervisors or security personnel. Treat all threats very seriously. Periodic surveys of the premises can uncover security problems.

Some preventive steps can keep intruders out. Delivery doors should be locked, and windows secured to prevent trespassers. Change locks and codes when employees leave and collect their identification badges and electronic keys. Depending on the workplace, more elaborate protective measures may be necessary. These include video cameras, panic buttons, and lighting and alarm systems.

Employees working outside the premises, or in the field, should be instructed to avoid entering any location where they feel unsafe. Supervisors should know their field staffs' itineraries.

Active Shooters

Although rare, the workplace sometimes attracts active shooters – people actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill in a confined and populated area. Unlike robbers, shooters seek to maximize casualties. The incident may be over quickly. In some cases, the shooter is subdued by workers or bystanders.



Many shooters have little or no connection to their victims. Sometimes, the threat is internal, or has terror overtones.

Workplace violence threats from active shooters must be addressed by emergency plans and employee training. Everyone must know what they are expected to do – this includes communicating, listening for announcements, alerting authorities, and taking appropriate action. In certain workplaces, experts recommend simulation drills and practice evacuations. Practice and preparation are critical to counter the fear that typically occurs during active shooter situations. Panic is the enemy.

There are no absolute ways to guarantee a safe outcome, but common-sense measures can help prevent disaster. These include staying alert, remaining calm and relying on training. Many emergencies, including active shooting situations, stand a much better chance of successful outcomes with proper preparation and forethought.

Security experts recommend implementing active shooter drills as part of an effective workplace violence prevention program. Like drills for a fire or weather emergency, active shooter drills allow workers to practice what they would do if someone with a gun entered the facility.

The Department of Homeland Security and other law enforcement authorities advise that workers have three major options: run, hide or fight depending on the circumstance.

- The first option is to run. Escape if it is safe to do so. The best exit may not be the usual fire evacuation route.
- If escape is not possible, then the next-best option is to hide. If possible, get to a location that can be locked or barricaded. Use heavy tables or desks to block doors, and stay away from windows.
- Fight back as a last resort; use improvised weapons within reach. Ordinary items such as chairs, keys, fire extinguishers, etc., can be used to stop or delay a shooter. A bright flashlight can temporarily blind attackers, making it easier to disarm them.

In all workplace violence circumstances, keep a cool head and use common sense. Lives depend on it.