

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

What Is Workplace Violence?

Workplace violence, a leading cause of workplace fatalities, can be an act of physical violence, threats of physical harm, harassment, intimidation, or other threatening disruptive behavior. When violence does not cause a physical injury, it often inflicts the kind of psychological and emotional damage that lingers longer than any physical pain.

Violence at work can take several forms, including assaults, sexual harassment, stalking, verbal threats, theft, arson, sabotage, and extortion. Although workplace violence can occur anywhere, 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:

Category 1: Violence by Strangers

This type of violence typically occurs to workers who work in late night retail establishments and to livery drivers. It is often committed by a person who has no legitimate business relationship to the employer. The perpetrator enters the workplace to commit a criminal act. It can involve verbal threats, physical assaults, use of firearms and other threatening behavior.



Category 2: Violence by Customers or Clients

Violence is committed by an assailant who has a legitimate relationship to the employer. These can include former or current customers, clients, or passengers of a vehicle such as a car service.

Category 3: Violence by Co-Workers

The person committing the violent behavior has some employment-related involvement in the workplace.

It could be a current or former employee. Disgruntled employees may be seeking “payback” for what is perceived as “unfair treatment” or for termination.

Category 4: Violence by Personal Relations

Threatening behavior or physical assaults from individuals with whom some employee has or had a personal relationship outside of work. This could include a family member or current or former spouse.

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE PREVENTION

The best protection employers can offer is to establish a zero-tolerance policy toward workplace violence against or by their employees. A workplace violence program should be created and training provided on violence prevention and how to react to threats of violence in the workplace. Adequately securing the workplace is a key step in preventing acts of violence.

Recognizing Warning Signs

Part of training is teaching workers 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



Securing the Workplace

Install video cameras, extra lighting, and alarm systems, especially in areas such as parking lots, where workers are at risk of violence. Provide adequate barriers such as partitions with bullet-proof glass in taxi cabs, drive-through eateries and for bank tellers. These can protect workers who handle money and are exposed to the public. Panic buttons can alert police. Locate them in strategic places where they can be pressed surreptitiously in the event of a robbery, a threat or an assault.

Administrative Controls

To minimize access to the workplace by outsiders, identification badges and electronic keys should be issued to workers. Employ sign-in sheets for visitors and, where appropriate, hire security guards to limit entry by non-workers. Keep a minimal amount of cash in registers during late hour and use drop safes to reduce the risk of robbery.

Delivery doors should be locked and windows secured to prevent trespassers. To prevent access from former workers, their work identification badges and all keys must be returned, and computer access deleted, once employment ceases.

Protecting Field Staff

Equip field workers with cellular phones, have them prepare a daily work itinerary, and have them call into their office throughout the day. Employees should be instructed to not enter any location where they feel unsafe.