

PUBLIC SAFETY BULLETIN: WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

WHAT IS WORKPLACE VIOLENCE?

According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), workplace violence is violence or the threat of violence against workers. It can occur at or outside the workplace and can range from threats and verbal abuse to physical assaults and homicide, one of the leading causes of job-related deaths. However it manifests itself, workplace violence is a growing concern for employers and employees nationwide.



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What Employers Can Do to Help Protect Employees

The best protection employers can offer is to establish a zero-tolerance policy toward workplace violence against or by their employees. Employers should establish a workplace violence prevention program or incorporate the information into an existing accident prevention program, employee handbook or manual of standard operating procedures. It is critical to ensure that all employees know the policy and understand that all claims of workplace violence will be investigated and remedied promptly. In addition, employers can offer protections such as the following:

- Provide safety education for all 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. Minimize access by outsiders through identification badges, electronic keys and guards.
- Provide drop safes to limit the amount of cash on hand. Keep a minimal amount of cash in registers during evenings and late-night hours.
- Equip field staff with cellphones and handheld 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.
- Develop policies and procedures covering visits by home healthcare providers. Address the conduct of home visits, the presence of others in the home during visits and the worker’s right to refuse to provide services in a clearly hazardous situation.

How Employees Can Protect Themselves

Nothing can guarantee that an employee will not become a victim of workplace violence; however, these steps can 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 in unfamiliar locations or situations whenever possible.
- Carry only minimal cash and required identification into community settings.

What Employers Should Do Following a Workplace Violence Incident

- 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 as soon as possible.
- 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 services to help workers recover from a violent incident.
- Investigate all violent incidents and threats, monitor trends in violent incidents by type or circumstances, and institute corrective actions.
- Discuss changes in the program during regular employee meetings.



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