

Safety Talk

Preventing Violence in the Workplace

Before you begin:

- Gather key personnel from your company to assess the violence prevention plan
- Review any existing policies and procedures for workplace violence
- Review company records for any prior violent or potential violent incidents at your company or near-by businesses
- Review security measures and procedures currently in place to control or respond to violent incidents at your company, including reporting of early warning signs or concerns



Introduction

Violence in the workplace can happen anytime and anywhere and may include actions such as workplace harassment, threats, verbal expressions of anger by an employee or customer, and physical violence that can result in injury or even death. Having a proactive violence prevention plan and training can help identify and prevent the potential for violence. This document is designed to assist any company to improve an existing violence prevention plan or create one if none currently exists.

Definitions

- **Workplace violence** – physical or psychological forms of harassment, threat, or attacks that cause fear, mental or physical harm, or unreasonable stress in the workplace
- **Disruptive behavior** – actions that disturb or prevent normal work functions or activities such as yelling, profanity, horseplay, waving arms or fists, verbally abuse, vandalism and sabotage
- **Threatening behavior** – actions with no physical contact which would cause a person of ordinary sensibilities fear of injury or harm including acts of aggression or direct or implicit threats
- **Violent behavior** – aggressive acts with or without the use of a weapon, including hitting, kicking, pushing, biting, scratching, sexual attack or any other such physical act which results in physical injury or death

Types of Violence

All businesses have the potential for violence. The types of violence, warning signs, and prevention measures may differ from one business to another based on many factors, including the nature of the business, hours of operation, and geographic location. Below is a list of four common types of workplace violence. Understanding these four types of violence may provide insight into which type(s) of violence your business is most susceptible to and which prevention strategies may be most effective.

- **Type 1 – Criminal Intent.** This type of violence is perpetrated by someone external to your business and is often the result of criminal activity (e.g. robbery). Some considerations to assess with Type 1 violence include: prior episodes of violence at your business or near-by businesses, high crime area, access to cash, working alone, working at night, or poor lighting or visibility.
- **Type 2 – Customer/Client.** This type of violence is perpetrated by a customer or client who has a business relationship with your company. Some considerations to assess with Type 2 violence include: customers with a history of agitated or aggressive behaviors, an increase in volume of customer complaints, customers who become argumentative or aggressive during an interaction.
- **Type 3 – Worker-on-Worker.** This type of violence is perpetrated by an employee of your company. Some considerations to assess with Type 3 violence include: employees with a history of past violent episodes, employees who become upset or aggressive toward coworkers or supervisors, disciplinary proceedings or terminations, labor grievances, vandalism, reports of bullying, or threats.
- **Type 4 – Personal Relationship.** This type of violence is perpetrated by a person who has a real or perceived personal relationship with an employee. This could be a spouse or significant other, coworker or supervisor, customer, or a stranger. Some considerations to assess with Type 4 violence include: internal employee relationships, complaints of unwelcomed advances, restraining orders, unwelcomed visitors in the parking lot or on premises, unwelcomed phone calls or gifts, inappropriate touching or comments, or other forms of sexual harassment.

Safety/Security Risk Assessment

One critical step in developing a workplace violence prevention plan is to conduct a safety and security risk assessment. The assessment analyzes conditions and processes inside and outside your company to identify potential vulnerabilities and security issues and address improvements for strengthening security of the building. Consider including local law enforcement in the security risk assessment or, at a minimum, invite local police to tour your company so they may become familiar with the layout and any obstacles they may encounter.

Include employees in the design and completion of the assessment so they can provide insight and suggestions that managers and outside resources may not consider. This step also offers employees a chance to communicate any difficulties they or their co-workers may have in understanding the employer's policies and procedures for violence in the workplace and security issues.

Following the assessment, the management team should discuss the results of the assessment and any changes to company policies and other security measures with all employees.

Develop and Implement Violence Prevention Plan

After determining which types of violence your company is most susceptible to and completing a comprehensive safety and security risk assessment, develop or enhance your violence prevention plan and communicate it to all your employees.

- Establish and enforce a zero-tolerance policy for all levels of violence in the workplace.
- Establish and enforce standards of conduct and provide resources to address conflicts early.
- Consider criminal background checks and drug testing for all new hire employees.
- Develop procedures for conducting employee interviews, disciplinary hearings, or terminations. In disciplinary hearings and terminations, establish procedures that include notification and presence of security personnel.
- Develop a reporting mechanism for employees who feel they are victims of workplace violence. This includes threats, harassment, and bullying. In the case of direct supervisor conflicts, make sure there are multiple levels of private, secure reporting so employees are not discouraged from filing complaints.
- Encourage your employees to report any breaches in security and any safety or security concerns they may encounter.
- Provide an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or other stress-management counseling services or provide information on how to access community-based programs that can help provide employees with skills for coping with various types of personal problems that may lead to workplace violence.
- Review and update your workplace violence prevention program at least annually or when any changes occur to your facility, operations, or work assignments, or when deficiencies are identified as a result of drills or an actual incident.

Post Incident Response

Violent incidents affect many people: the victims, witnesses, co-workers, as well as family members and friends of those involved. To avoid long-term difficulties following a violent event such as post-traumatic stress, be sure to take appropriate follow-up actions and interventions. Crisis management companies and counselors are available to guide you in taking the appropriate steps for post-event counseling and intervention. Having these services contracted or arranged in advance of an incident can speed the process when needed.

Conclusion

Conflict at work is normal, but must be addressed promptly and effectively, not avoided or suppressed. You can reduce or prevent disruptive behavior by facilitating an environment that promotes healthy, positive means of airing and resolving problems. Pre-planning and having a comprehensive workplace violence program is key in preventing and addressing workplace violence incidents. Management should develop or review and update all workplace violence prevention policies and procedures. Implementing effective employee training, hazard identification and awareness, and de-escalation techniques in the workplace are necessary for a safe work environment. Incorporating the principles outlined above will go a long way in preventing injuries and fatalities resulting from direct and indirect exposure to workplace violence hazards.

Resources

[Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Workplace Violence](#)

[National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, Occupational Violence](#)

[Department of Homeland Security, Active Shooter Preparedness](#)

[FBI Workplace Violence – Issues in Response](#)