

Workplace Violence

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Workplace violence is an important safety issue in today's workplace. It can be defined as "violence or the threat of violence against workers." Workplace violence 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 death. Essential in reducing workplace violence is being able to identify dangerous conditions and implementing control strategies to manage violent acts.

There are many factors that may increase a worker's risk for workplace assault including:

- Contact with the public.
- Exchange of money.
- Delivery of passengers, goods or services.
- Working alone or in small numbers.
- Working late at night or during early morning hours.
- Working in high crime areas.

So, what can employers do to help protect these employees? Management must provide the motivation and resources to deal effectively with workplace violence. The visible commitment of management to worker safety and health is essential for success. The best protection employers can offer is to establish a zero-tolerance policy toward workplace violence against or by their employees. 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.

While management commitment is critical to the success of a workplace violence prevention program, employee involvement is also important, especially for front line employees. Front line employees are a vital source of information about the operations of the business and the environment in which the business operates. This is particularly true for employees who work during hours when higher-level managers may not routinely be on duty. Including a broad range of employees in the violence prevention program has the advantage of harnessing a wider range of experience and insight than that of management alone. Employees who have a role in developing prevention programs are more likely to support and carry out those programs.

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

Some 2 million American workers are victims of workplace violence each year. As we are finding out, either through the media or our own personal experiences, workplace violence can strike anywhere and no one is immune. Unfortunately, there is no sure way to predict human behavior and, while there may be warning signs, there is no specific profile of a potentially dangerous individual. Our best approach for a successful workplace violence prevention program is for employers to enforce a strict, no tolerance policy, and for employees to be complimentary elements of this management commitment by participating and getting involved in your company's program.

References:

Occupational Safety and Health Administration
www.osha.gov