

Our Workplace: A Growing Problem

Occurring at the workplace or outside the workplace, you may be victimized by co-workers, patrons, thieves, and personnel relationships. This can range from threats and verbal abuse to physical assaults and homicide. It is one of the leading causes of job-related deaths. However it manifests itself, *workplace violence* is a growing concern for employers and employees nationwide.

Each year two million American workers are victims of workplace violence. Some workers, however, are at increased risk. Among them are workers who exchange money with the public; or work alone or in small groups, during late night or early morning hours, in high-crime areas, or in community settings and homes where they have extensive contact with the public.

What can these employers do to help protect these employees?

The best protection employers can offer is to establish a zero-tolerance policy toward workplace violence against or by their employees. Each employer 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 additional protections such as the following:

- Provide safety education for 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 and 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 cellular phones and hand-held 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.
- Develop policies and procedures covering visits by home health-care providers.

How can the employees protect themselves?

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.
- Carry only minimal money and required identification into community settings.

What should employers do following an incident of workplace violence?

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