

Violence in the Workplace

What is Violence in the Workplace?

Violence in the Workplace is described as any act occurring either on company premises or during the performance of work-related duties that:

- threatens the safety of an employee, customer or other person;
- affects the health, life, or well-being of an employee, customer or other person;
- results in damage to the company, employee, customers, or others property.

Common Types of Violence:

Insubordination	Fist Fights
Verbal intimidation	Stabbings
Threats	Assaults
Beatings	Suicides
Harassment	Vandalism
Sexual assaults	Arson
Aggressive driving/road rage	Hostage taking
Stalking	Shootings
Theft	

Help Prevent Thefts from your Place of Business

Too often, employees become complacent in their place of work. Here are some suggestions, even if you work in a highly secure area:

- Keep your purse, wallet, keys, and other valuable items with you at all times or locked securely in a drawer or closet.
- Make certain the receptionist or front office personnel check the identity of any stranger entering the building/office. Someone should escort them to their destination or call the person they wish to meet up to the front. Never let a stranger wander the office areas unescorted.
- Always let someone know where you will be, including short jaunts to the mailroom, out to lunch, etc.
- Mark all personal items you bring to work, including calculators, CDs, radios, coffee pots/mugs, etc.
- Never leave money or other items of value in plain sight.
- Report any broken or flickering lights, halls, staircases and corridors which are dimly lit, doors or windows with broken locks or glass. Don't assume someone else reported the problem.

- Don't advertise your personal business, including social life, vacations, work schedules, etc. to strangers.

Violence in the Workplace Takes Many Forms

You may not recognize an action as violence in the workplace, but it takes many forms, including raised voices, profanities, and name calling, to sexual assault, harassment, robbery, and homicide. While homicide in the workplace is rising, approximately 75% of work-related homicides are committed by unknown assailants while in the commission of another crime (robbery, theft, etc.) Despite the number of media reports about this growing problem, the attacker usually isn't a disgruntled co-worker.

Has your company taken proper precautions?

- Is your office secure? Does everyone understand how to use the phone in case of an emergency (direct line to the police department, the need to dial "out" or standard calling.)
- Is there a sign-in policy for visitors, panic buttons, safe rooms, security guards, office access controls, good lighting, and safety training?
- In hiring new employees, does the employer take care in checking references, backgrounds, history, criminal records and education thoroughly?
- Are termination procedures defined clearly with attention to advance notice, severance pay, and placement services?
- Have you been trained in recognizing potentially violent employees? Signs of stress that could turn into violence include depression, frequent absences, talking in a louder than normal voice, being startled easily, increased irritability and impatience, and concentration and memory problems.
- Are you encouraged to report unusual or worrisome behavior? Do you feel comfortable expressing your concerns to a supervisor about a co-worker? Do you know who to report problems to? Do they take your concerns serious or do they brush it off?
- Do you have a pre-determined code word to use when you need immediate assistance from a supervisor or someone nearby?
- Is there a clear, written policy that spells out procedures in cases of violence and sanctions for violators?

Avoid Common Trouble Spots

Stairwells and isolated corridors - Don't go in these areas alone. Talk to someone about increased lighting in poorly lit areas. If you must use these areas, go with someone. Pay

attention to shadows, strange noises, or unusual smells. Let someone know what route you are taking.

Elevators – don't get into elevators with people who look out of place or behave in a strange or threatening manner. If you need to, wait until the next car. If you find yourself in an elevator with someone who makes you nervous, get off as soon as possible

Restrooms – attackers can hide in stalls and corners. Make sure restrooms are locked and only employees have keys. After ensuring the restroom is empty (except for other employees) make sure you lock the door behind you. This way strangers can't enter and catch you off guard or corner you. Be extra cautious when using restrooms that are isolated or poorly lighted. Encourage stronger lights and watch for strangers entering the restroom.

After hours – avoid working late alone. Create a buddy system for walking to the parking lot or public transportation, or ask security to escort you. Don't get complacent and assume no one is around.

Parking lots/garages – choose a well-lighted, well-guarded parking garage near your business. Always lock your car and roll the windows up. Have your car keys ready as you approach your car. If you notice strangers hanging around the parking lot, get back into an occupied area and notify a security guard or the police. Check the interior of the car, front and back seats, as well as under the car for anyone lurking in those areas. Lock your vehicle as soon as you are inside it, even before you buckle your seat belt.

Be aware of your surroundings. If you feel uncomfortable let someone know. Don't take unnecessary risks.

Coping with Threats and Violence

For an angry or hostile customer or co-worker:

- stay calm.
- maintain eye contact.
- listen attentively.
- be courteous and patient.
- keep the situation in your control.

For a person shouting, swearing and threatening:

- signal a co-worker or supervisor that you need help. Utilize the pre-determined code word.
- do not make any calls yourself.
- have someone call the police, security guards and the supervisor.

For someone threatening you with a gun, knife, or other weapon:

- Stay calm. At the first available opportunity quietly signal for help (pre-determined code word, duress alarm, etc.)
- Maintain eye contact.
- Stall for time.
- Keep talking, but follow instructions from the person who has the weapon.
- Don't risk harm to yourself or others.
- Never try to grab the weapon.
- Watch for a possible chance to escape to a safe area.
- Don't challenge the person with the weapon.
- Don't make sudden moves unless you advise the person with the weapon first.