

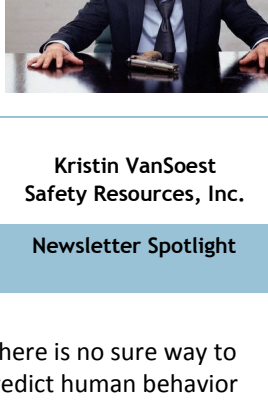


Workplace Violence

April 2010

Violence in the workplace is a serious safety and health issue. Its most extreme form, homicide, is the fourth-leading cause of fatal occupational injury in the United States. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries (CFOI), there were 564 workplace homicides in 2005 in the United States, out of a total of 5,702 fatal work injuries.

Workplace violence can be any act of physical violence, threats of physical violence, harassment, intimidation, or other threatening, disruptive behavior that occurs at the work site. Workplace violence can affect or involve employees, visitors, contractors, and other non employees. A number of different actions in the work environment can trigger or cause workplace violence. It may even be the result of non-work-related situations such as domestic violence or “road rage.” Workplace violence can be inflicted by an abusive employee, a manager, supervisor, co-worker, customer, family member, or even a stranger. Whatever the cause or whoever the perpetrator, workplace violence is not to be accepted or tolerated.



Kristin VanSoest
Safety Resources, Inc.

Newsletter Spotlight

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However, 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. The best prevention comes from identifying any problems early and dealing with them.

A sound prevention plan is the most important and, in the long run, the least costly portion of any company’s workplace violence program. Your company should have the following programs in place to help prevent workplace violence:

Pre-Employment Screening – A company should determine, with the assistance of its servicing personnel and legal offices, the pre-employment screening techniques which should be utilized, such as interview questions, background and reference checks, and drug testing if it is appropriate for the position under consideration.

Security – Maintaining a safe work place is part of any good prevention program. There are a variety of ways to help ensure safety, such as employee photo identification badges, guard services, and individual coded key cards for access to buildings and grounds. Different measures may be appropriate for different locations and work settings.

If you ever have concerns about a situation which may turn violent, alert your supervisor immediately and follow the specific reporting procedures provided by your company. It is better to err on the side of safety than to risk having a situation escalate.

The following are warning indicators of potential workplace violence:

- Intimidating, harassing, bullying, belligerent, or other inappropriate and aggressive behavior.
- Numerous conflicts with customers, co-workers, or supervisors.
- Bringing a weapon to the workplace (unless necessary for the job), making inappropriate references to guns, or making idle threats about using a weapon to harm someone.
- Statements showing fascination with incidents of workplace violence, statements indicating approval of the use of violence to resolve a problem, or statements indicating identification with perpetrators of workplace homicides.
- Statements indicating desperation (over family, financial, and other personal problems) to the point of contemplating suicide.
- Direct or veiled threats of harm.
- Substance abuse.
- Extreme changes in normal behaviors.

Once you have noticed a subordinate, co-worker, or customer showing any signs of the above indicators, you should take the following steps:

- If you are a co-worker, you should notify the employee’s supervisor immediately of your observations.
- If it is a customer, notify your supervisor immediately.
- If it is your subordinate, then you should evaluate the situation by taking into consideration what may be causing the employees problems.
- If it is your supervisor, notify that person’s manager.

It is very important to respond appropriately, i.e., not to overreact but also not to ignore a situation. Sometimes that may be difficult to determine. Managers should discuss the situation with expert resource staff to get help in determining how best to handle the situation.

No matter how effective a company’s policies and plans are in detecting and preventing incidents, there are no guarantees against workplace violence. Even the most responsive employers face this issue. When a violent incident does occur, it is essential the response be timely, appropriate to the situation, and carried out with the recognition that employees are traumatized and that the incident’s aftermath has just begun.

Because work situations and environments vary so greatly from company to company, it is up to each company to develop and publicize the specific procedures for responding to workplace violence incidents.

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