Resources and Tips for Preventing Workplace Violence

TIPS FOR PREVENTING WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

Workplace homicides accounted for 392 of the 4,764 fatal workplace injuries that happened in the U.S. in 2020, according to the Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries (CFOI). Workplace violence is a serious issue that affects the safety and health of workers each year. Employers and managers must take preventive measures to combat the possibility of workplace violence and ensure employee safety.

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE STATISTICS

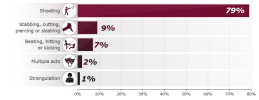
Workplace violence is "any act or threat of physical violence, harassment, intimidation, or other threatening disruptive behavior that occurs at the work site," according to the U.S. Department of Labor. "It ranges from threats and verbal abuse to physical assaults and even homicide."

NONFATAL WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

From 2015 to 2019:

- About **1.3 million** U.S. workers reported being victims of nonfatal workplace violence.
- Eight violent crimes were reported for every **1,000** workers.
  - **18.9** out of every **1,000** government employees reported being victims of simple assault.
- Strangers committed **47%** of nonfatal incidents.
- The victim was injured in **12%** of nonfatal incidents.
- **15%** of victims suffered severe emotional distress due to the incident.
- Roughly 529,800 nonfatal injuries resulting from workplace violence were treated in hospital emergency rooms.
  - **33%** treated for contusions and abrasions
  - **13%** treated for sprains and strains
  - **11%** treated for traumatic brain injuries

WORKPLACE HOMICIDES BY METHOD (2015–2019)



SITUATIONS WITH INCREASED RISK OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

- The jobsite serves alcohol.
- The risk becomes greater when employees exchange money with the public, work alone, or provide services and care.
- The jobsite area has a high crime rate.

JOBS WITH INCREASED RISK OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

- Delivery drivers
- Customer service agents
- Health care professionals
- Law enforcement personnel
- Public service workers

In 2020, homicide was the fourth most common cause of fatal workplace injuries in the country after:

- Transportation incidents
- Falls, trips and falls
- Contact with objects and equipment

Workplace fatalities by type

- 705 fatalities caused by violence and injuries due to other people or animals

Top fatalities by job role:

- Retail: 132
- Leisure and hospitality: 72
- Government agencies: 132
- Public administration: 68

WARNING SIGNS OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

While clear warning signs don't always precede workplace violence, it may be possible to mitigate violent escalation by paying attention to indications of troubled or disgruntled employees.

WORK-RELATED SIGNS

- Inconsistent work quality
- Decreased productivity and attendance
- Blame shifting
- Disrespect for authority

BEHAVIORAL SIGNS

- Poor hygiene
- Inappropriate language
- Social isolation
- Unpredictable change in energy level

PHYSICAL/NONVERBAL SIGNS

- Sweat
- Flushed face
- Violent gestures
- Personal space violation

OTHER WARNING SIGNS

- Personal history of violence
- Threatening or intimidating behaviors, such as written or verbal threats
- Increase in personal stress
- Substance misuse

SOME BEHAVIORAL SIGNS MAY ALSO BE INDICATIVE OF OTHER ISSUES (NOT WORKPLACE VIOLENCE)

- Depression
- Bereavement
- Illness

IMPACT OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE ON WORKFORCE

- Psychological damage
- Loss of staff
- Increased security, personnel and workers' compensation costs
- Property damage

TIPS FOR PREVENTING WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

Employers and managers have easy and free access to many government resources that can help stop a workplace incident before it starts.

OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH ADMINISTRATION (OSHA) TIPS FOR PREVENTING WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

- Invest in security systems.
- Provide employee safety training.
- Establish a zero-tolerance policy for workplace violence.
- Encourage employees to report erratic behaviors.
- Provide a "buddy system" or security escort service for nighttime employees.
- OSHA also provides reference materials to prevent general workplace violence, as well as guidance for specific professions, including the following:
  - Drive-through restaurant workers
  - Restaurant servers
  - Late-night retail workers
  - Taxi/ride-hailing drivers
  - Social service workers
  - Health care/hospital workers

LEVELS OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

Level One: Early warning signs
Intimidation, disrespect and uncooperative behaviors and attitudes

Level Two: Escalation
Arguments, insubordination, threats, victimization claims, criminal behaviors (e.g., theft)

Level Three: Further escalation
typically requiring emergency response
Physical altercations, suicidal threats, property destruction, use of weapons

TIPS FOR RESPONDING TO WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

Response to early warning signs

- Observing and documenting behavior
- Reporting concerns to the appropriate level of supervision
- Supervisor meeting with the employee in question in private
  - Supervisor should directly identify problem, ask for employee input and establish a time frame for resolution

Response to escalation

- Documenting observed behavior
- Calling 911, if warranted
- Immediately alerting the appropriate work contact, such as a supervisor
- Securing personal safety, if possible
- Supervisor meeting with the employee in question in a private area
  - Supervisor should ask relevant questions regarding the response level
    - What can the employee do to regain self-control?
    - How can the supervisor help?
    - What does the employee want to achieve by acting out?

Response to further escalation

- Calling 911
- Remaining calm
- Immediately alerting the appropriate work contact, such as a supervisor
- Securing personal safety
- Leaving the area if staying may compromise safety
- Cooperating with law enforcement

MAINTAIN A SAFE, SECURE WORKPLACE

Thanks to the efforts of government agencies and employers, workplace homicide levels have decreased significantly in the past few decades. Safety, science and emergency management personnel must address the challenges of developing stronger preventive procedures to keep workplaces safe and secure.

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