Workplace Violence Prevention

The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) defines workplace violence as any physical assault, threatening behavior or verbal abuse occurring in the work setting. It includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Beatings
- Stabbings
- Suicide (or near suicide)
- Shootings

- Rapes
- Threats
- Obscene phone calls
- An intimidating presence

- Harassment such as being followed, sworn at or shouted at

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Warning Signs of Potential Workplace Violence

While it's difficult to develop a precise profile of a worker who could turn violent, be on the alert when an employee:

- Appears to be going through a difficult time
- Acts paranoid
- Shows contempt for fellow workers and/or superiors
- Suddenly starts showing up late or not at all
- Exhibits intimidating or aggressive behavior
- Issues direct threats
- Brings a weapon to the workplace or seems overly fascinated with firearms and/or violence

As an employer, you should:

- Encourage employees to report suspicious or threatening incidents at work.
- Provide training in stress management for workers.
- Offer employee assistance programs to help workers deal with stress.

Why Do I Need a Violence Prevention Program?

Violent crime is a serious problem with nearly 2 million American workers reporting incidents of workplace violence each year with many more going unreported. Workplace violence is a particular risk in service industries, such as restaurants and convenience stores, and in health care and public service settings. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries (CFOI), of the 4,679 fatal workplace injuries that occurred in the United States in 2014, 403 were workplace homicides, making homicide the fourth-leading cause of fatal occupational injuries in the United States.

Establishing a workplace violence prevention program is an important way of helping to keep your employees safe. In addition, your employees will be more comfortable and productive knowing your workplace has policies and procedures in place to guard against threats to their safety.

Key Elements of a Proactive Safety Program

Is your organization ready to make a strong commitment to workplace violence prevention? Following are the key elements needed for your organization to be proactive and successful:

- Visual management support, commitment and involvement
- Written policies and procedures
- Annual planning to establish goals, objectives, action plans, internal controls and evaluation of results
  - This process should include strategic planning (long-term goals), tactical planning (mid-term goals) and task-specific (short-term goals).
- Regular, effective communication of safety and health issues throughout your organization
- Continual education and training

Components of a Crisis Plan

The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) recommends the following as components of an organization's crisis plan:

- Designated escape routes for all employees
- Code words to alert personnel of a threatening situation
- Regular check-in times for employees or supervisors who work alone or in isolated areas
- A resource directory containing all important telephone numbers, referral sources, consultants and emergency procedures
- A clearly defined chain of command to ensure that the proper people are notified in the event of an emergency
- Pre-planned response units of management and security personnel, violence drills and simulations incorporated into all safety training programs
- Regular in-service training sessions designed to increase employee awareness and readiness

6 Steps for Establishing a Violence Prevention Program

There are many different approaches for developing a workplace violence prevention program. An approach that works well for one organization may not be suitable for another. However, with extensive planning and effective program management, organizations can dramatically reduce incidents of workplace violence.

Following are steps all organizations should take to develop a workplace violence prevention program:

1. Assess the organization's current ability to handle potentially violent situations. Specifically, examine these areas:
   - Physical security
   - Pre-employment screening programs
   - Termination practices
   - Outplacement procedures

2. Identify the in-house resources and skill levels needed for addressing a workplace violence incident, and provide training if skill levels are deficient.
   - Each job classification should identify the positions responsible and accountable for your organization's safety program.

3. Develop a written workplace violence prevention policy that includes:
   - Definitions
   - Incident reporting procedures
   - Response plans
   - Other categories of information

4. Develop a crisis plan. (See sidebar at left.)

5. Provide initial and annual training to employees.

6. Establish a schedule for periodically conducting mock simulations.

How to Get Started

For more information on workplace violence, visit the U.S. Office of Personnel Management website at www.opm.gov. United Heartland Loss Control also can direct you to additional workplace violence prevention resources. Contact your United Heartland Loss Control representative to discuss your current needs or explore the United Heartland Toolbox at UnitedHeartland.com/united-heartland-toolbox/ to find more loss control resources.

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