



Workplace Violence

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) defines workplace violence as “violent acts (including physical assaults and threats of assaults) directed toward persons at work or on duty.” Because of this threat, OSHA encourages employers to establish violence prevention programs and to track their success in reducing work-related assaults. While not every incident can be prevented, many can, and the severity of injuries sustained by employees can be reduced.

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Risk Factors

Health care, long-term care and social service workers face an increased risk of work-related assaults stemming from several factors. OSHA identifies some of these risks as:

- The prevalence of handguns and other weapons among patients, their families or friends.
- The increasing use of hospitals by police and the criminal justice system for criminal holds and the care of acutely disturbed, violent individuals.
- The increasing number of acute and chronic mentally ill patients being released from hospitals without follow-up care (these patients have the right to refuse medicine and can no longer be hospitalized involuntarily unless they pose an immediate threat to themselves or others).
- In long-term care facilities, patients with dementia may perceive attempts to offer care as a threat to themselves or others around them.
- The availability of drugs or money at hospitals, clinics and pharmacies, making them likely robbery targets.
- Factors such as the unrestricted movement of the public in clinics and hospitals and long waits in emergency or clinic areas that lead to client frustration over an inability to obtain needed services promptly.
- The increasing presence of gang members, drug or alcohol abusers, trauma patients or distraught family members.
- Low staffing levels during times of increased activity such as meal times, visiting times and when staff are transporting patients.
- Isolated work with clients during examinations or treatment.
- Solo work, often in remote locations with no backup or way to get assistance, such as communication devices or alarm systems (this is particularly true in high-crime settings).
- Lack of staff training in recognizing and managing escalating hostile and assaultive behavior.
- Poorly lit parking areas.

Training

Training is an important part of any safety program, and our staff can help by reviewing your training needs and offering consultation to improve its effectiveness. We have video and online training resources available for customers who wish to complement their current training systems.

Contact your United Heartland Loss Control representative for more information at 800-258-2667.

