

Safety Spotlight

Workplace Violence: The Basics

Every year, millions of American workers report having been victims of workplace violence. In 2017 alone, workplace assaults resulted in 18,400 injuries and 458 fatalities. While certain industries – such as healthcare, service providers, and education – are more prone to violence than others, workplace violence can occur anywhere.¹

What is Workplace Violence?

Workplace violence is any act or threat of physical violence, harassment, intimidation, or other threatening disruptive behavior that occurs at the work site. It ranges from threats and verbal abuse to physical assaults and even homicide. It can affect and involve employees, clients, customers and visitors.²

Who is at Risk of Workplace Violence?

According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), workplace violence falls into four categories: Criminal intent, customer/client, worker-on-worker and personal relationship, which overwhelmingly targets women.¹ Research has identified factors that may increase the risk of violence for some workers at certain worksites. Such factors include exchanging money with the public and working with volatile, unstable people. Working alone or in isolated areas may also contribute to the potential for violence. Providing services and care, and working where alcohol is served may also impact the likelihood of violence. Additionally, time of day and location of work, such as working late at night or in areas with high crime rates, are also risk factors that should be considered when addressing issues of workplace violence.²

How Can Workplace Violence be Reduced?

One of the best protections employers can offer their workers is to establish a zero-tolerance policy toward workplace violence. This policy should cover all workers, patients, clients, visitors, contractors, and anyone else who may come in contact with company personnel.² This policy should include:¹

- Employee training (including mock exercises)
- Creation of an emergency action plan

Recognizing the following warning signs can also help employers see behaviors in coworkers that might signal future violence including: excessive use of drugs/alcohol, unexplained absenteeism, changes in behavior (including violation of company policies), decline in job performance, and emotional responses to criticism (i.e., mood swings)¹

¹ "Assaults Fourth Leading Cause of Workplace Deaths." *Workplace Violence*, National Safety Council, www.nsc.org/work-safety/safety-topics/workplace-violence.

² "Workplace Violence." *Safety and Health Topics*, Occupational Safety and Health Administration, www.osha.gov/SLTC/workplaceviolence/.

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