



Conference Room

Workplace Violence:

Understanding and Managing the Risk

SIX DEAD IN FACTORY SHOOTING — A HEAVILY ARMED MAN DRESSED IN A BLACK T-SHIRT AND CAMOUFLAGE PANTS WITH A BANDOLIER OF AMMUNITION AROUND HIS SHOULDER BEGAN FIRING ON FELLOW WORKERS. THE GUNMAN KILLED FIVE PEOPLE AT CLOSE RANGE AND WOUNDED NINE OTHERS BEFORE SHOOTING HIMSELF, AUTHORITIES SAID.



News accounts like this, chronicling incidents of workplace violence in the U.S., have become all too frequent. The potential loss of life alone is a compelling reason for companies to proactively develop a loss control plan and process to address the behavioral risk of workplace violence. Too many companies, however, do not give workplace violence as high a priority in their annual risk planning process as they should.

MISUNDERSTANDING AND MISCONCEPTIONS

Today, all companies and employees are familiar with the term “workplace violence.” When asked to define workplace violence, they are apt to comment, “You mean someone who goes postal* or shoots up the office.” They have seen and read news coverage about tragic events. But news coverage generally picks up on the most dramatic events and stories, usually involving weapons and death. Using these accounts alone can result in companies and employees misunderstanding the broader scope and true impact of workplace violence, and forming misconceptions about such violence. For example, one common misstatement is, “Violent incidents don’t or won’t happen where I work or live.” Other comments include, “We work in a nice, non-violent area of town,” “Our company only hires quality employees” and “Our business is not engaged in high-risk activities.” Comments like these reflect a belief that workplace violence is too random and unpredictable to validate the expenditure of time and money on prevention efforts.

Companies or individuals that make these kinds of statements are either in denial or have not been exposed to the multitude of ways in which violence can negatively affect the workplace and achievement of overall business objectives. Granted, the statistical odds of a co-worker bringing an AK47 to work and firing on employees are very small. However, when this type of event occurs, the outcome is devastating in loss of life, interruption in business, decline in employee morale and legal consequences, all of which can have long-term effects on the company. With small- to medium-sized companies, this kind of event can affect their ability to survive as a business.

Headline-making incidents are dramatic, but they are only part of the workplace violence issue. There are also many less obvious but inappropriate behaviors, actions, statements, events and incidents, which are often not understood or considered when evaluating the potential risk of violence in the workplace. Because of the many ways in which violence can affect the workplace, no company is immune to the risk. Workplace violence can and does affect companies large and small; high and low tech; in sales, service, design and manufacturing; and in cities and rural areas.

WHY TAKE A PROACTIVE APPROACH?

Companies take a proactive approach to managing violence for a variety of reasons. These may include a close call with an out-of-control employee, significant other or customer. Some companies are aware of the high costs to employers in the aftermath of a violent incident. Others consider compliance issues and OSHA guidelines or the risk of litigation. In many cases, companies simply believe it is the right thing to do. They understand that properly addressed, behavioral risk management can have a positive effect on overall business operations.

VIOLENCE FROM INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL SOURCES

Far too often there is misunderstanding about what can or should be done to reduce and manage the risk of violence in the workplace. The good news is that much can be done to reduce the risk. When developing a plan to manage and lessen the impact of workplace violence, a good place to start is with a basic principle:

Violence can arise from any incident that could increase in intensity and threaten the safety of an employee, customer or vendor, have an impact on the physical or psychological well-being of any employee, customer or vendor, cause damage to company property or interrupt normal business operations.

*In fairness to the US Postal Service, they do not have more than their share of problems with workplace violence.



4 Types of Perpetrator

	PERPETRATOR	RISK	PROACTIVE/REACTIVE ACTIONS
TYPE I	No legitimate relationship to the workplace (thieves, extremists, vandals)	Robbery, terrorism, vandalism, etc.	<p>Hard Targeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Vulnerability assessment – Structural deterrents – Live or electronic security, video surveillance – Training, safety issues, safe conduct policies – Threat assessment advisor <p>Disaster Preparation/Business Continuation Plans</p>
TYPE II	Legitimate relationship to the workplace from outside (customers, vendors, contractors)	Enraged customers/clients, vendors/contractors	<p>Customers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Employee training (difficult/enraged customers) – Visible deterrents – Threat assessment advisor <p>Vendors/Contractors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Compliance with company policies – Training – Threat assessment advisor
TYPE III	Employment relationship with the workplace (current or former employee)	Fighting, termination retaliation, harassment, etc.	<p>Internal/external issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Crisis Management Team – Violence policy – Threat assessment advisor – Emergency response plan – Training (early threat recognition, reporting, etc.) – Customer considerations – Disaster Preparation/Business Continuation Plans
TYPE IV	Personal relationship with current or former employee (boyfriend, girlfriend, domestic partner)	Romantic triangle conflicts, domestic violence, stalking, etc.	<p>Internal/external issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Crisis Management Team – Violence policy – Threat assessment advisor – Emergency response plan – Training (early threat recognition) – Disaster Preparation/Business Continuation Plans



As is evident from this definition, violence can and does affect the workplace in a variety of ways. Although extreme employee-on-employee violence most often makes the headlines, there are four types of perpetrators and varying actions to consider when developing a plan to manage the risk of workplace violence.

Type I Perpetrators are individuals or groups that have no legitimate relationship to the workplace. They usually enter the workplace to commit a robbery or other criminal act. Terrorist acts involving the workplace are considered Type I.

Type II Perpetrators are customers or clients who are either the recipient or the object of services or products provided by the organization or have a legitimate relationship with it (e.g., vendors, contractors or visitors). The risk of violence could result from enraged, out-of-control customers, contractors or visitors.

Type III Perpetrators are individuals who have an employment relationship with the organization, as a current or former employee, supervisor or manager. Some of the risks include harassment, romantic obsession, fighting, suicide and physical retaliation after discipline or termination.

Type IV Perpetrators are individuals who have a personal relationship with a current or former employee and are usually a friend, acquaintance, relative, boyfriend, girlfriend or domestic partner. Romantic triangle conflicts, domestic violence and stalking can arise from these perpetrators.

Most companies are exposed to all four types of perpetrators to varying degrees. These four types can threaten the safety, and have an impact on the physical or psychological well-being, of employees, customers or vendors. They can cause damage to company property or interrupt normal business operations. They are responsible for the homicides as well as many of the less obvious behavioral risks that occur in America's workplaces and sometimes go unreported.

When considering issues related to workplace violence, do not forget the events that seem most random: Type I violence perpetrators. Assess vulnerability and consider proactive actions that can make the company a hard target. Is there a need for structural deterrents, live or electronic security, video surveillance, etc.? Consider policy and training needs like safe conduct policies and safe cash handling procedures. The

more difficult the target is made for perpetrators, the lower the risk. Most perpetrators are opportunists and prey on the least prepared.

When considering actions by extremists/terrorists, again proper assessment and understanding of risk are good proactive preparation. Your company may not be considered a high-value target like a government facility or national icon, but you could be close enough to a target to be affected. Forty percent of small businesses do not reopen after major disasters, including terrorism, and man-made and natural disasters. Planning and preparation can save lives and help businesses continue and prosper in the future.

When dealing with issues of violence in the workplace, it is important to develop a comprehensive plan, including a violence policy and procedures. The plan must be systematic, communicated effectively and consistent throughout the organization. The plan should be proactive, with a goal of preventing incidents or lessening their impact by encouraging reporting and action. The plan needs to be reactive to articulated procedures, allowing for immediate and appropriate response depending on the circumstances.





KEY COMPONENTS OF A LOSS PREVENTION PLAN AND PROCESS

There are several effective components to consider when developing a workplace violence loss control plan and process. These include a trained team, policy, threat assessment professional, emergency response plan and training plan.

Crisis Management/Threat Assessment Team.

For medium to large companies, the Crisis Management/Threat Assessment Team approach has proven a critical element of the workplace protection plan. The team should be composed of representatives from functional areas of the company, who work together to ensure that the workplace violence prevention plan is properly implemented and supported.

The Crisis Management Team receives incident reports, makes the initial situational assessment, involves threat assessment professionals as needed, directs the workplace violence prevention initiative, and administers, communicates and maintains the established workplace violence prevention policies, procedures and guidelines companywide. Team members should have the knowledge to coach managers and supervisors who are confronted with potentially violent situations.

Workplace Violence Policy.

Every company should have a policy addressing workplace violence. Without a policy, the employee engaged in the inappropriate behaviors associated with violence (e.g., abusing others verbally) is not breaking any rules. At a minimum, the policy should state that the company has zero tolerance for all acts and threats of violence. Threats will not be permitted even when made in jest. All acts and threats of violence will be taken seriously, investigated and result in discipline up to and including termination. The policy should prohibit weapons on company property, in company vehicles or at company-sponsored events. It is also a good idea to give examples of threats, language and gestures considered threatening.

Workplace Violence Statistics

According to widely accepted statistics, workplace violence is having a major impact on the U.S. A few of the alarming statistics:

- Annually, there are over 1.7 million incidents of workplace violence.
- Workplace homicide has been described as the fastest-growing form of homicide in the country.
- The leading cause of death on the job for women is homicide.
- The number two cause of death on the job for men is homicide.
- Eighty-seven percent of the perpetrators of violence are male.
- Corporate America spends an estimated \$4.2 billion to \$6.4 billion per year in the aftermath of workplace violence.

The Cost of Workplace Violence

Companies can face significant costs in the aftermath of a major incident:

- Increased security
- Building repair
- Business interruption
- Loss of productivity
- Lost time
- Employee turnover
- Increased workers compensation claims
- Increased medical claims
- Litigation expenses
- Legal issues:
 - Negligent hiring
 - Negligent security
 - Negligent retention
 - Negligent response
 - Negligent termination.

Threat Assessment Professional.

Retaining the assistance of a threat assessment professional can be highly beneficial to companies of all sizes. Companies too small to justify the team approach (*see Crisis Management/Threat Assessment Team*) gain the benefit of having a professional resource to contact on behavioral risk issues, to review incidents, provide advice and share best practices.

The purpose of using a professional, outside resource to conduct a threat assessment is that this can reduce the company's potential liability and increase the potential for a successful conclusion to an incident. The threat assessment professional will determine the extent to which the actions of a specific person are a threat to the well being and safety of co-workers, the organization and the person him/herself. Professionals retained for this service should be well credentialed,

experienced and qualified to give advice based on best practices. After this has been determined, a reasonable and prudent course of action should be developed, which minimizes or eliminates the possibility of injury to any involved individuals.

Emergency Response Plan.

Workplace violence risk reduction plans should include well-defined emergency response procedures for non-traumatic threats and acts, and traumatic events. A relationship with outside support services (police, fire, ambulance, hazardous materials, etc.) should be developed and maintained. Specific attention should be given to reporting and investigation procedures, counseling and terminating difficult employees. Other important components include procedures to avoid further trauma, trauma response, media relations and critical incident stress debriefing.

Training.

As mentioned earlier, true behavioral excellence cannot be fully realized without properly addressing behavioral risk issues. Workplace violence encompasses many behavioral risks, including biases, harassment and discrimination. These subjects are often interrelated, create conflict, and should be addressed through effective, motivating and informative training.

Effective training that addresses the facts, dispels the myths, identifies the risk factors and warning signs, and stresses the importance of early reporting of incidents and threats can overcome much of the resistance by managers, supervisors and employees to reporting inappropriate behaviors and threats. To remain effective, training must be given to all new hires during company orientation and updated annually for all employees.



Workplace Violence: A Loss Prevention Perspective

THE FOLLOWING COMMENTS, FROM LOSS PREVENTION (LP) CONSULTANTS FROM WAUSAU INSURANCE COMPANIES (A MEMBER OF LIBERTY MUTUAL GROUP), REFLECT A SHARED CONVICTION THAT WORKPLACE VIOLENCE IS — OR SHOULD BE — AN ISSUE OF CONCERN FOR EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES IN INDUSTRIES OF EVERY KIND.

“Today, hospitality companies routinely include workplace violence in their emergency procedures plans. Where this was once a unique initiative, the level of violence we encounter today, both internal and external, has made this kind of planning a mainstream issue.... If you do not have an effective workplace violence protocol, you are not serving the best interests of your employees or guests.”

— JIM STOVER, LP SERVICE DIRECTOR, IRVING, TEXAS (SPECIALIST IN LOSS PREVENTION FOR THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY)

“Two of the key concepts I learned about in the Professional Workplace Interaction Inc. [PWI] seminar were identifying the three stages of violence, and training first-level supervisors and managers. Training people what to look for is key, because once they know what the telltale signs are [of potential violence], they can act on them immediately. Depending on the size of the account, I would recommend training sessions for managers or relaying information to safety committees.”

— MATTHEW MCGRAIL, LP CONSULTANT, WAUSAU, WISCONSIN

“My experience is primarily with hospitals and nursing homes, whose incidents of workplace violence come in two forms: injuries related to a disoriented patient or resident with dementia who strikes out at a health care provider, and injuries from the public (for example, in an emergency room where a patient’s family becomes violent). Health care facilities are very concerned about both of these and typically raise the topic during my site visits to their facilities.”

— LOIS ZANGL, RN, SENIOR LP CONSULTANT, MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN (SPECIALIST IN LOSS PREVENTION FOR HEALTH CARE FACILITIES)



WHO BENEFITS FROM TRAINING?

The simple answer is that everyone in a company benefits, since training promotes a safer, more secure workplace.

Executive Management Training.

Training for upper management should include an understanding of the inappropriate behaviors/risk factors, warning signs, the benefits of a violence policy and proper response. They should receive an overview of the plan and process, liabilities and costs to employers. One of the most important features of any workplace violence risk reduction process is upper management buy-in. When the executive staff acknowledges the significance of a process, others in the company are more likely to support the policies and procedures.

Manager/Supervisor Training.

Managers and supervisors are often the eyes and ears of the company. They should be trained to recognize inappropriate behaviors/risk factors, warning signs, and to understand the importance of early reporting and intervention. In addition, because managers and supervisors are often called upon to intervene when emotions become heated or discipline or termination is required, they should receive training in techniques and procedures for safe and appropriate responses to situations of threat.

Employee Training.

A comprehensive prevention program includes training of all employees to ensure that everyone in the company understands the scope of violence and their role in prevention. Employees should be trained to recognize inappropriate behaviors/risk factors and warning signs. They need to understand that it is important and necessary to report all incidents and threats of violence. Training can be done via internet or intranet to accommodate isolated work sites or unusual schedules.

INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR AND VIOLENCE

It is essential to communicate to all employees a clear understanding of what the early indicators of potential violence look and sound like, and what is considered inappropriate behavior in the workplace. Clearly defining and communicating that inappropriate behaviors are unacceptable and will not be tolerated is an important step in the risk reduction process. Then, action must be taken when inappropriate or threatening behaviors occur. Taking action will show that the behaviors are not condoned, reduce the uneasiness and fear of co-workers and begin the intervention process.

The ability to take action depends on knowing that the problem or threat exists. Sometimes, in the aftermath of an undeniably violent event, comments by interviewed employees indicate prior awareness of a problem, but failure to report it to management. Experts in the field of violence suggest that as many as 43 percent of those who are threatened and 24 percent of those who are attacked in the workplace don't report the incident.

Reasons for not reporting include not wanting to get involved, worry about causing someone's job loss, denial and fear of becoming the perpetrator's target of retaliation.

Following a homicide in the workplace, inappropriate behaviors associated with the incident are described in news coverage. In the process of discovering more about an assailant, reporters interview co-workers and neighbors, and ask them to describe the perpetrator. Oftentimes, inappropriate behaviors preceding the hands-on violence are described. In the press, as in the workplace, these behaviors are often misinterpreted, ignored, or denied as being potentially relevant or dangerous.

Without training and an understanding of violence, co-workers, supervisors and managers sometimes write off inappropriate behaviors and statements as the perpetrator "just blowing off steam." They lack the tools or guidance to make the connection. For example, co-workers who worked with individuals who committed homicides at work have made the following statements: "I thought it was just part of his unpleasant personality to speak badly about others. I never thought he would really do anything;" "At lunch a few times, he did talk about his assault-type rifle and the size hole it would blow in a human body. I thought the conversation wasn't really suited for the lunchroom, but didn't think he would kill someone;" "He would warn his manager and fellow employees that he had a short fuse some days and could go off very easily, so stay away on those days." When asked, "Did you tell anyone?," the answer was, "No, I didn't tell anyone; on his bad days I just stayed away."





Professional Workplace Interaction, Inc. (PWI) has worked with Liberty Mutual and their clients since 1998, and has professionals with nearly four decades of experience with violence and employment-related issues. PWI services include live and web-based training, threat assessment, personal coaching, expert witness services and customized services in the areas of “Behavioral Risk Management™”.

PWI professionals conduct training and provide consultation for all levels of a company, from entry-level employees to CEOs. In addition to violence prevention, PWI addresses harassment, diversity, disaster preparedness, effective management and leadership. For more information, visit www.pwiusa.com or call 858.484.9112 / 619.265.9244.

PREDICTING THE UNIMAGINABLE

A common misconception about violence in the workplace is that violence is random and unpredictable. That is a myth. The act of becoming violent to the point of physically harming someone is a process. Just like a car can't go from zero to sixty instantaneously, a person does not escalate and resort to hands-on violence out of the clear blue. There are risk factors and warning signs that precede acts of hands-on violence. Once understood and reported, early intervention is possible and tragedy can be avoided.

Inappropriate behaviors linked to future hands-on violence have been identified and categorized by where they fit in the escalation process. Understanding the risk posed by these often overlooked and ignored behaviors can improve reporting of incidents and threats by employees, supervisors and managers.

In the field of violence, inappropriate behaviors are sometimes referred to as “levels,” “stages” or “steps” in the escalation process. It is generally agreed that there are three identifiable groupings of risk indicators in the escalation process:

Inappropriate Violent Behaviors (IVB) — Stage 1.

IVB-Stage 1 indicators are subtle and obscure, sometimes overlooked, most likely to be ignored, and often denied as a problem related to violence.

IVB-Stage 1 indicators include:

- Verbally abusive
- Frequently argumentative
- Inappropriate and sexually explicit comments
- Excessive use of profanity
- Suicidal thoughts expressed to others
- Noncompliance to policies and procedures
- Instigates and spreads harmful lies and rumors
- Angry outbursts and frequent signs of frustration
- Frequent complaints from customers and clients.

The inappropriate violent behaviors displayed at IVB-Stage 1 reveal a person who uses confrontation and challenge as coping mechanisms. The behavior is often minimized or not considered violent, when it actually is violent. This is the best and easiest time to intervene, even for co-workers.

Inappropriate Violent Behaviors — Stage 2.

IVB-Stage 2 indicators are more pronounced and there is generally an increased uneasiness among fellow workers, but the behaviors are still often ignored. Denial continues to be present. Some reporting may occur, but not as often as it should. IVB-Stage 2 indicators include:

- Argues frequently and intensely
- Acts out anger or frustration consistently
- Openly and blatantly disobedient of organizational policies and procedures
- Sets traps for others
- Vandalizes / steals from the company or from other employees for revenge
- Makes suicidal threats
- Makes verbal threats/expresses the intent to harm others
- Conveys unwanted sexual attention or violent intentions by letter, voice mail, or e-mail
- Feels persecuted by others / blames others for all problems or difficulties.

IVB-Stage 2 is considered to be the “bridge” stage, meaning that individuals displaying these behaviors can be very close to hands-on violence.



Extreme Violent Behaviors (EVB) — Stage 3.

EVB-Stage 3 is the most severe form of actual hands-on violence and cannot be denied. EVB-Stage 3 indicators include:

- Simple assaults, physical confrontations and altercations
- Aggravated assaults/weapons used
- Displays weapons/guns/knives/pepper spray, etc.
- Armed robbery
- Attempts/commits suicide/murder/rape/mayhem.

The individual who displays EVB-Stage 3 violence is very dangerous. These behaviors have clear intent to hurt. There is great potential for psychological harm, even if physical harm is narrowly avoided. Intervention is generally not appropriate for co-workers, supervisors or managers. It requires the assistance of law enforcement or mental health professionals.

Companies and employees should be familiar with the following warning signs, which are highly correlated to workplace violence:

- Fascination with weapons
- Substance abuse
- Severe stress
- Violent history
- Hostile behavior
- Romantically obsessed behavior
- Bizarre behavior or severe changes in psychological functioning
- Decreased or inconsistent productivity
- Social isolation and poor peer relationships
- Poor personal hygiene
- Signs of depression or other mental illness
- Emotionally erratic behavior with drastic changes in personality.

How many warning signs can signal a problem? Only one! These behaviors are not one-time occurrences. They are usually part of a pattern and suggestive of an overall style of inappropriate violent behavior. Once employees, supervisors and managers understand the potential implications of these behaviors better and earlier reporting follows, the pattern becomes more apparent.

PROACTIVE PLANNING

When dealing with workplace violence, be proactive and create a plan that is systematic, communicated effectively and consistent throughout the company. Proper planning and implementation can prevent incidents and lessen their impact by encouraging early reporting and action. Include articulated procedures that will allow for immediate and appropriate response depending on the circumstances.

Remember that when violence is a concern and action must be taken, it is important to consider the safety and security of the entire company's population. It is always better to consult with knowledgeable individuals, either internally or externally, and not make decisions or take actions in a vacuum or unilaterally, when possible. Finally, remember that violence prevention is the responsibility of every employee.

Sources of statistics used in this article: Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Study on Workplace Violence, U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Labor, National Safe Workplace Institute, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).

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