



Workplace Violence: Understanding the Issue

Workplace violence is an unfortunate but important topic that all employers and employees need to consider. The issue of violence in the workplace has been addressed by OSHA, the CDC's NIOSH (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health), the FBI, the DOJ, and the National Center of Victims of Crime. According to OSHA, workplace violence is any act or threat of physical violence, harassment, intimidation, or other threatening or disruptive behavior that occurs at the work site.

The news media sensationalizes workplace violence episodes like the Fort Hood shooting, the shooting of a Virginia news crew during a live broadcast, the shooting at Chattanooga military facilities, or the Washington Navy Yard shooting. While these are tragic and alarming episodes, the truth is that the majority of workplace violence that employers and managers have to deal with on a daily basis is along the lines of domestic violence, harassment, emotional abuse, and threats - not armed gunmen. Being prepared for an active shooter is, of course, an essential aspect of a good risk management plan. But the prevalence of workplace violence (especially the type that can be detected beforehand) means that it should also be included in a good risk management plan.



Evaluate, assess, and employ strategies that mitigate risk of intelligent threats, specializing in active shooters.

The fact is that the law requires employers to provide their workers with safe and healthful workplaces. The Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 mandates that employers provide their employees with working conditions that are free of known dangers, and this includes the dangers associated with workplace violence.

Quick Points

- In general, workplace violence and workplace homicides are in decline
- Active shooter incidents and mass shootings are on the rise
- Law enforcement, security guards, and bartenders face the highest levels of overall workplace violence
- Workplace assaults are highest for health care workers and social services workers
- Workplace violence costs the American workforce more than \$30 billion dollars annually
- Employers have a legal and ethical obligation to provide a workplace free of threats and violence

Workplace violence causes ripple effects in terms of costs to the American economy. The Department of Justice estimates that workplace violence costs the American workforce over \$30 billion annually; the FBI further explains this loss to include lost work time, lost wages, reduced productivity, medical costs, workers' compensation payments, legal expenses, and security expenses. Beyond these tangible costs, workplace violence also creates anxiety, fear, and a climate of distrust in the workplace.

It is easier to get employers and managers to think about risk management (including workplace violence) after an incident has occurred. However, making the decision to plan ahead, assess your risks, and put a risk management plan in to place is a more logical decision than waiting until after a disturbance. Something that you can do today to get started on addressing the issue of workplace violence is to understand some of the problem situations and risk factors that lead to workplace violence. While fatal violence is the most tragic type of workplace violence, there are many other forms of violence, and most instances of workplace violence begin with erratic behavior by the perpetrator.



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The FBI indicates that there is no profile or litmus test that exists to demonstrate whether an employee might become violent. There are, however, some problem situations that may give rise to violence – personality conflicts between coworkers; mishandled termination or disciplinary action; weapons at the worksite; or drug or alcohol abuse at the worksite. Other risk factors are personal but spill over into the workplace – the breakup of a marriage or romantic relationship; family conflict; financial or legal problems; or emotional problems.

It is well documented that individuals rarely snap and engage in workplace violence without first exhibiting behaviors of concern. Knowing and reporting these behaviors of concern is just as important as understanding the problem situations and risk factors that often precede behaviors of concern. Such behaviors of concern could include depression, threats, menacing behavior, erratic behavior, aggressive outburst, offensive conversation, jokes referring to violence, increasing tardiness, increasing absenteeism, worsening relationships with coworkers, decreased productivity, homicidal comments, increasing belligerence, hypersensitivity to criticism, and verbal abuse. Of course any of these behaviors alone is not necessarily more suggestive of potential workplace violence, but many of these behaviors taken together should raise warning flags.



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As important as noticing risk situations and erratic behavior is, the fact is that the greatest proportion of workplace violence is committed by strangers. From 2005-2009, 53% of incidents were perpetrated by strangers, 26% by work relationships (e.g., customer, coworker, patient), 11% by acquaintances, 2% by relatives and domestic partners, and the other 8% by individuals with an unknown relationship to the victim or establishment. Specialists in the field of workplace violence have come to the consensus that there are four broad categories of violence:

Type I - offender has no relationship with either victims or establishment

Type II - offender currently receives services (retail, health, service) from the facility where they commit violence

Type III - offender is a current or former employee acting out against current or former place of employment

Type IV - offender has relationship with employee (e.g., domestic disputes between offender and employee spill over into the workplace)

In fact, certain occupational groups are at higher risks for workplace violence by strangers than other occupational groups. Type I cases are most prevalent in occupational groups whose jobs make them vulnerable like taxi drivers, late night retail clerks, gas station clerks, individuals who work in isolated locations or dangerous neighborhoods, and individuals who carry cash. Type II cases typically occur in occupational groups where dealing with dangerous persons is inherent in the job like police officers, security guards, and health care workers. Type III and Type IV



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cases do not seem to occur more frequently in certain occupational sectors, although these are the cases where targeted workplace violence prevention strategies have the most impact, and where warning signs could be more important.

Overall, law enforcement occupations have the highest rate of workplace violence, followed by mental health occupations (professionals and care takers), transportation occupations (bus and cab drivers), retail occupations (store clerks, gas station attendants, bartenders, retail sales), teaching occupations (prek-12, higher education, special education), and medical occupations (physician, nurse, technician). As for workplace homicide, robbers and other assailants account for the majority of perpetrators, with shootings accounting for 80% of all workplace homicides. Interestingly, only 5% of nonfatal workplace violence involves firearms.

The FBI acknowledges that there are numerous hurdles to violence prevention when it comes to small businesses. With few exceptions, small businesses do not have their own security force, training capability, employee assistance program, medical service, legal advisers, or human resources department. Small businesses also have fewer resources to properly screen job applicants, are less likely to have formal policies and procedures for reporting threats and violence, and are less likely to have an established and ongoing relationship with local law enforcement agencies.

There must be support from the top of a business or organization if there is going to be any meaningful action taken to address workplace violence. It is important to understand that here is no one-size-fits-all strategy to this issue. Each business, each organization, each campus or location will have different risks associated with it and thus require a unique plan.

What can you do to being addressing the issue of workplace violence?

- You've already begun to address this issue by reading this report.
 - Understand that workplace violence is more than just an armed gunman in the building. Workplace violence also includes threats, intimidation, harassment, and violent behavior.
 - Understand that some situations are more likely to bring out violence – mishandled termination, the breakup of a marriage, drug or alcohol abuse.
 - Understand some of the behaviors that are warning signs – increasing belligerence, worsening relationships with coworkers or bosses, aggressive outbursts.



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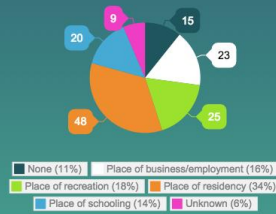
- Know your rights as an employee for a safe work environment. Know your obligations as an employer to provide this to your employees.
- Have a physical security survey and assessment done of your premises.
- Create a risk management plan and put it into effect.
- Contact a [physical security and risk consulting firm](#) to discuss how security professionals can guide you through this process.



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Workplace Violence

Shooter's Relationship to Incident Location



Since 2000, roughly 16% of mass shooter events have occurred at a place of business or the shooter's place of employment.

However, according to the FBI, multiple homicides represent a very small number of workplace violence incidents. The majority of workplace violence incidents involve assault, domestic violence spilling over in to the workplace, harassment, threats, and physical or emotional abuse.

Types of Workplace Violence



Type 1
Violence committed by criminals who have no connection to the workplace

Type 2
Violence directed at employees by customers, clients, patients, students, inmates

Type 3
Violence directed at employees by present or former employees

Type 4
Violence directed at an employee by someone with a personal relationship with the victim

What Can You Do?

Recognize Warning Signs



Examples include aggressive outbursts, hypersensitivity to perceived slights, diminished work performance, erratic behavior, threats, etc.

Educate Your Employees About Workplace Violence



Create or update your employee handbook, hold seminars about workplace violence, and establish a zero-tolerance policy towards workplace violence.

Create an Emergency Action Plan



Have a risk assessment done for your place of business and create an emergency action plan for workplace violence, active shooter, and other potentially violent or fatal situations.



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Active Shooter

An active shooter is defined as an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area, typically through the use of firearms.

Motives

MOTIVES FOR MASS SHOOTINGS IN THE US, 2000-2015

Motives

The motives of active shooters vary quite a bit.

Characteristics

The characteristics of an active shooter aren't nearly as varied as their motives. Most active shooters are male (93%), white (over 50%), between the ages of 18 and 45 (75%).

Since the turn of the twenty-first century there have been over 220 mass shooting incidents in the U.S.

Type of Gun Used in Active Shooter Events in the US, 2000-2015

25%

25%

25%

25%

Basic steps to take in the event of an active shooter: Avoid, Deny, Defend

AVOID

Avoid the shooter at all costs; evacuate the area if possible; keep out of sight; hide.

DENY

Deny the shooter access to your area; lock doors; barricade doors; move to a protected spot.

DEFEND

Defend yourself as a last alternative when avoid and deny tactics haven't worked; use any object available (scissors, chair, fire extinguisher) to injure the shooter and defend yourself.

What Can You Do to Prepare?

Risk Assessment

Have a risk assessment done for your business, campus, building, or company

Emergency Action Plan

Create an emergency action plan in case an unthinkable incident occurs

Making the world safer, one partnership at a time.

Sources: FBI; Stanford Geospatial Center; U.S. Department of Homeland Security; U.S. Department of Justice.

