

Workplace Violence Awareness

Key Points

What is Workplace Violence?

- The workplace is any location, permanent or temporary, where an employee performs work or work-related activities. Workplace facilities include lunchrooms, restrooms, break rooms, vehicles used for work and parking facilities.
- According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), workplace violence is any physical assault, including unwanted touching or any other offensive physical contact, threatening behavior or verbal abuse.
- Examples of workplace violence could include -
 - Harassment of any nature, such as being followed, sworn at or shouted at.
 - Psychological traumas, such as threats, obscene phone calls, bomb threats or an intimidating presence.
 - Physical violence, such as hitting, grabbing, beating, stabbing, attempted suicide, suicide, rape or shooting.
- A United States Department of Justice National Crime Victimization Survey reports that approximately 2 million assaults and threats of violence occur each year in the workplace.
- Workplace violence contributes to employee injuries, stress, increased sick days, reduced morale, lost wages and higher health-care costs.

What are the categories of Workplace Violence?

- The categories of Workplace Violence depend on the relationship between the employee and the person who is committing the violence. They are -
 - Stranger on Employee
 - Customer on Employee
 - Partner on Employee
 - Employee on Employee
- The most frequently occurring category of workplace violence is stranger on employee. The stranger enters the workplace to commit a robbery or engage in another violent act.
- With a stranger, customer or someone else's partner, you may only have a few seconds to recognize if there is a potential problem before it occurs.
- With an employee, you may have had the opportunity to observe the employee over months or even years and be able to notice behavior changes that might signal a potential for violence.

Recognizing the Warning Signals

- Potential warning signals may alert you to any employee or person in the workplace who could become violent.
- Changes in behavior are important to note in most cases.
- Look for patterns of changing behavior.
- No single warning signal, in isolation, is a reliable predictor of violence. Some factors may include -
 - Major changes in personal appearance, attitude or behavior
 - Change in personal relationships
 - Reduction in job efficiency or productivity
 - History of violent, reckless or antisocial behavior
 - Unusual interest in or unexplained preoccupation with weapons or bringing weapons to work
 - Serious stress in the employee's life
 - Substance abuse
 - Unexplained signals of physical injury
 - Agitation
 - Unexplained interest in what you do at work

Escalating Levels of Violence and what to do

- The inappropriate behavior of a person prone to Workplace Violence usually escalates over time.
- Violent situations may progress through three escalating levels. Regardless of the level of violence, ensuring your safety and the safety of others is the most important action you can take.
- For levels one and two, responses may include -
 - Stay calm, listen attentively and ask the person to sit down
 - Ask the person questions relevant to his or her complaint, such as, "What can I do to help you?"
 - Acknowledge the person's concerns and try to find solutions.
 - Maintain eye contact.
 - Speak slowly, softly and clearly.
 - Avoid being defensive.
 - Identify violent behaviors, especially before they escalate.
 - Set ground rules/boundaries, such as "When you shout at me, I can't understand what you're saying."
 - Signal a co-worker or supervisor that you need help by using a panic button or pre-determined code word or signal.
 - Do not make any calls yourself. Have someone notify security or the local police.
 - Keep the situation in your control.
Talk with your supervisor.
- To respond to level three violence -
 - Get yourself and others away from the potentially violent person.

- Know and follow the workplace emergency action plan.
- Call 911 or your workplace emergency number.
- Get out or hide. Evacuate the area.