

Workplace Violence (part 1)

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Workplace violence

We hear about it daily on the news "Taxi driver shot, jealous husband shoots wife, coworker opens fire". In 1996, a postal worker opened fire at a post office, killing 14 people then killing himself. The only knowledge gained... a new term "Going Postal" making violence in the workplace a laughing matter. Workplace violence kills on average 20 people a day. 92% are due to high-risk jobs and the other 8% of which are due to direct or personal association.

High Risk Jobs

High risk jobs entail: Taxi services, gas stations, delivery services, conveyance and retail stores. The risk of violence gains momentum any time one is alone, moneys are exchanged, after daylight hours and/or if you are in a high crime area. The only way to ensure a safer work environment for these are to train the employees as to what the procedures are and how to best protect themselves. Believe it or not we still have no national regulations relating to workplace violence; however OSHA has provided us with a *voluntary* program of information.

- Health Care and Social Service Workers
<http://www.osha-slc.gov/Publications/osha3148.pdf>
- Workplace Violence
http://www.osha-slc.gov/OshDoc/data_General_Facts/factsheet-workplace-violence.pdf
- Taxi and Livery Drivers
<http://www.osha-slc.gov/OSHAfacts/taxi-livery-drivers.pdf>
- Preventing Workplace Violence
http://www.osha-slc.gov/fso/osp/oshspa/grassroots_worker_protection99/index.html#VIII
- Dealing with Workplace Violence: A Guide for Agency Planners.
<http://www.opm.gov/ehs/workplac/pdf/full.pdf>
- Late-Night Retail Establishments
<http://www.osha-slc.gov/Publications/osha3153.pdf>
- Violence in the Workplace
<http://www.crnns.ca/documents/violence.pdf>
- Keeping Your Workplace Safe
<http://www.osha-slc.gov/Publications/98-40brochure.pdf>
- Hospital
<http://www.osha-slc.gov/SLTC/etools/hospital/hazards/workplaceviolence/viol.html>
- Teen Worker Safety in Restaurants.
<http://www.osha-slc.gov/SLTC/youth/restaurant/index.html>
 - Drive-thru
http://www.osha-slc.gov/SLTC/youth/restaurant/drivethru_violence.html
 - Serving
<http://www.osha-slc.gov/SLTC/youth/restaurant/serving.html>
- NIOSH also provides the "Working with Stress"
<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/video/stress1.html> or for a CD Rom call 1-800-356-4674

Direct and personal association

Direct and personal association violence on the job takes a little more effort on the part of the employer and the employees. There has to be good communication and cooperation between the two. A plan has to be administered in the case of threats, when someone shows instability or a continued level of stress. The University of California, Davis or UC Davis has compiled a list of behavioral indicators and response steps that should be taken .

Indicator of problem behavior

Below is a list of behaviors and attitudes that may be indicators of disruptive, threatening, or violent behavior.

Behavior:

- Upset over recent event(s) [work or personal crisis]
- Recent major change in behavior, demeanor, appearance
- Recently has withdrawn from normal activities, family, friends, co-workers
- Intimidating, verbally abusive, harasses or mistreats others
- Challenges/resists authority
- Blames others for problems in life or work; suspicious, holds grudges
- Use/abuse of drugs and/or alcohol
- Unwelcome obsessive romantic attention
- Stalking
- Makes threatening references to other incidents of violence
- Makes threats to harm self, others, or property
- Weapons - has or is fascinated with weapons
- Has known history of violence
- Has communicated specific proposed act(s) of disruption or violence

Attitude:

- Is isolated or a loner
- Morally superior, self-righteous
- Feels entitled to special rights and that rules don't apply to them
- Feels wronged, humiliated, degraded; wants revenge
- Feels without choices or options for action except violence

How to respond to disruptive, threatening or violent behavior

STEP 1: General response to disruptive behavior (no threats or weapons)

- **Respond quietly and calmly.** Try to diffuse the situation.
- **Do not take the behavior personally.** Usually, the behavior has little to do with you, but you are used as a target in the situation.
- **Ask questions.** Respectful concern and interest may demonstrate that aggression is not necessary.
- **Consider offering an apology.** Even if you've done nothing wrong, an apology may calm the individual and encourage cooperation. *"I'm sorry that happened. What can we do now that will solve the problem?"*
- **Summarize what you hear the individual saying.** Make sure you are communicating clearly. In crisis, a person feels humiliated and wants respect and attention. Your summary of the individual's concerns reflects your attention. **Focus on areas of agreement** to help resolve the concern.

If this approach does not stop the disruption, assess whether the individual seems dangerous. If in your best judgment he/she is upset but not a threat, set limits and seek assistance as necessary.

STEP 2: Step 1 response ineffective, individual DOES NOT seem dangerous

- **Calmly and firmly set limits.** *"Please lower your voice. There will be no disruptions in this office." "Please be patient so that I can understand what you need and try to help you."*
- **Ask the individual to stop the behavior and warn that official action may be taken.** *"Disruption is subject to action. Stop or you may be reported."*
- **If the disruption continues despite a warning,** tell the individual that he/she may be disciplined or prosecuted, state that the discussion is over, and direct them to leave the office. *"Please leave now. If you do not leave, we will call the Police."*

- **If the individual refuses to leave after being directed to do so**, state that this refusal is also a violation subject to discipline, exclusion from work, or arrest.

STEP 3: Step 1 response ineffective and the individual SEEMS DANGEROUS

- **If possible, find a quiet, safe place to talk, but do not isolate yourself** with an individual you believe may be dangerous. Maintain a safe distance, do not turn your back, and stay seated if possible. Leave the door open or open a closed door, and sit near the door. Be sure a co-worker is near to help if needed.
- **Use a calm, non-confrontational approach to defuse the situation.** Indicate your desire to listen and understand the problem. Allow the person to describe the problem.
- **NEVER touch the individual yourself to try to remove him/her from the area.** Even a gentle push or holding the person's arm may be interpreted as an assault by an agitated individual who may respond with violence towards you or file a lawsuit later.
- **Set limits to indicate the behavior needed to deal with the concern.** *"Please lower your voice." "Please stop shouting (or using profanity) or I'll have to ask you to leave."*
- **Signal for assistance.** The individual may be antagonized if you call for assistance so use a prearranged 'distress' signal to have another staff member check on you to determine how you are. If you need help, the co-worker should alert your supervisor and/or the police.
- **Do not mention discipline or the police if you fear an angry or violent response.** *"You've raised some tough questions. I'll consult my supervisor to see what we can do."*

As always the only real avenue is prevention through education. Train employees' safety procedures and keep the line of communication and involvement open. These things will never eliminate workplace violence but it can give everyone the tools to better equip themselves in any violent situation they may come across.

*Plymouth Police Department

<http://www.plymouthpolice.com/newpage11.htm>

*Disaster-management.net

http://http://www.disaster-management.net/workplace_shoot.htm

*OSHA

<http://www.osha.gov/>

*UC Davis

<http://www.ucdavis.edu/index.html>