



Implementing workplace violence intervention strategies in these tough economic times is essential

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The phrase "workplace violence" is frightening when mentioned. It should be. It should create a sense of awareness that any person in our midst, employees and non-employees, can unleash harm and destruction at anytime without notice. The continued pressure to meet budgets doesn't go away. The world situation, to say the least is untenable. The current state of the economy is disastrous, corporate downsizing and the resulting affect on the job market increases levels of uncertainty and stress among employees at all levels. As the job market becomes precarious and as competitive pressures mount, behavioral patterns modify. Just as management continually strives to make their operations more productive and profitable, under any adverse conditions of natural or man-made emergency and crisis proportions, there is the growing need to address the issues of abnormal behavior and potential violence in the workplace.

Due to the nature or the severity of workplace violence, and there is documented evidence of horrific rampage in the workplace, it should generate a concern for personal safety which if not addressed could result in physical injury or death.

In order to provide a secure work environment, management, supervisors and employees must be assured that not only the hazards from violence will be controlled, but also that management is taking every step necessary to recognize and deal with potential violence indicators. A commitment to employee well being, and security, is good business and makes a lot of sense.

Workplace violence is commonly defined as the threatened, attempted or even actual conduct of a person who is likely to imperil the safety and health of a worker. This includes any threatening statements, behavior or harassment that gives a worker sufficient reason to believe that his/her health and safety are at risk. Workplace violence may be non-employees, i.e., by strangers, clients, co-workers and even personal relationships.

Places of business must have management-endorsed workplace violence prevention and response programs. These programs must include the physical layout and conditions of the workplace, work organization practices and procedures, controls such as visitor control and after hours control, provision for personal protection alert devices and training in the appropriate responses. Management must plan strategies to prevent workplace violence incidents and to evaluate their ability and preparedness in the areas of crisis management.

Human resources (HR) and security organizations share in the responsibilities for workplace violence prevention and response strategies. Where HR should play a leadership role in the preparation of written policies, procedures and strategies, security will more likely be the first responders to address an out-of-control incident. Initial risk screening, background investigations and law enforcement intervention coordination are generally administered by security as well.

It is often difficult even for a trained professional to reliably predict a worker's potential violence, but

there are observable indicators of excessive stress that might point to impending, dangerous behavior.

Some of these indicators are: inconsistent social behavior, social pressure such as divorce or finances, a sudden decrease in productivity, a need for increased supervision, excessive tardiness, absences or worker's compensation claims, chronic labor-management disputes, drug or alcohol abuse, changes in health or hygiene, more aggressive physical and verbal actions, acts of graffiti, acts of destroying company property, disregard of safety procedures, strained workplace relationships, romantic obsession, excuses, inability to concentrate, notable withdrawal or depression and, of course, a demonstrable negative reaction to an actual or perceived layoff.

Please take a minute to read the last paragraph again. It includes many early warning or tell-tale signs.

A threat management team comprised of management and employees should perform monthly reviews in accordance with an issued workplace violence prevention and response manual. There should be clear and open channels of communication to management, to provide outlets to employees who wish to express their professional or personal frustrations.

Workplace stress does not have to result in employee violence. It is important that employers listen attentively to employees. An employee complaint or suggestion should allow employees to voice their concerns to management without fear of reprisal. There should be employee participation in the process designed to receive workplace violence information and incident reports, facility inspection reports and security problem issues.

Identify warning signs, risk factors and work patterns, whether they are apparent stress, disorientation, lack of communications or fatigue. Determine what company contributing environmental factors there might be, if any, such as poor facility lighting, excessive noise levels or over burdening workloads. All unusual or erratic behavior must be documented and there should be prompt and accurate reporting of incidents with and without injury.

Your organization must learn how to identify, and deal with, the "angry employee" to the extent of bringing in a trained professional for psychological intervention if necessary. You must learn to recognize the early warning signs of negative behavior, the means of predicting and preventing violent acts, diffusing volatile situations, methods of self-protection and the protection of co-workers, and emergency evacuation planning.

For assistance with workplace violence intervention programs, a safer workplace and a secure bottom line, Safeguards International's workplace violence professionals are prepared to support all property owners and managers, and corporate tenants, by performing violence prevention seminars and preparing in-house violence prevention manuals.

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