

Preventing Workplace Violence

Introduction

In addition to understanding workplace violence and recognizing behaviors of a potentially violent employee, managers and supervisors may also need to develop strategies to prevent workplace violence.

Environmental designs

There are several environmental designs that may prevent workplace violence:

- Physical separation—In several industries, physical separation of workers from customers, clients, and the general public through the use of enclosures has been effective. The height and depth of counters may protect workers, since they introduce physical distance between workers and potential attackers. However, when devising environmental strategies, consideration also must be given to the continued ease of conducting business. A safety device that increases frustration for workers or for customers, clients, or patients may be self-defeating.
- Visibility and lighting—Good visibility and lighting are important environmental design considerations. Making high-risk areas such as parking lots visible to more people and installing good external lighting should decrease the risk of workplace assaults.
- Access to and egress from the workplace—The number of entrances and exits, the ease with which non-employees can gain access to work areas, and the number of areas where potential attackers can hide are issues that should be addressed. This issue has implications for the design of buildings and parking areas, landscaping, and other areas that workers must use during a work shift.
- Security devices—Security devices may reduce the risk for assaults against workers and facilitate the identification and apprehension of perpetrators. Such devices include closed-circuit cameras, alarms, two-way mirrors, card-key access systems, panic-bar doors locked from the outside only, and trouble lights or geographic locating devices in mobile workplaces such as delivery trucks.

Administrative controls and policies

Administrative policies and controls can do much to prevent workplace violence:

- Staffing plans and work practices—Managers and supervisors should review staffing plans and work practices such as prohibiting unsupervised movement within and between areas. Security experts have also suggested the use of security guards or receptionists to screen persons entering the workplace and controlling access to actual work areas.
- Policies and procedures for assessing and reporting threats—Policies and procedures for assessing and reporting threats clearly indicate a zero tolerance of workplace violence. In addition, they allow employers to track and assess threats and violent incidents in the workplace and provide mechanisms by which incidents can be reported and handled. This information allows an agency to assess whether prevention strategies are appropriate and effective. These policies should also include the following:
 - Guidance on recognizing the potential for violence
 - Methods for defusing or de-escalating potentially violent situations
 - Instruction about the use of security devices and protective equipment
 - Procedures for obtaining medical care and psychological support following violent incidents

Training

The use of training is a critical component of any violence prevention strategy. Training assists managers, supervisors, and employees in finding and using resources to minimize the potential for violence and in implementing anti-violence initiatives. In addition, training employees in nonviolent response and conflict resolution may reduce the risk that volatile situations will escalate to physical violence. Training should not be regarded as the sole prevention strategy but as one component of a comprehensive approach to reducing workplace violence.