

Reporting Workplace Violence

Introduction

A timely, accurate report of potential or actual workplace violence is a critical component of any prevention program.

Failure to report

Failure to report potential problems is, perhaps, the biggest obstacle to overcome in dealing with potential violence in the workplace. Employees may not be quick to report violent or potentially violent acts for the following reasons:

- A belief that the employee really did not mean what he or she said
- A belief that, by ignoring the threat, it will go away
- A belief that the incident is an isolated one and will pass with time
- A fear that reporting the incident will be viewed as “overreacting” or trying to get a coworker in trouble
- A desire to not get involved

While these excuses may have been accepted in the past, failure to report an incident can no longer be condoned or tolerated. Supervisors and employees who become aware of actual or potential problems must address the situation through proper reporting and action. Failure to do so places an unnecessary risk on the workforce as a whole. Further, reporting a problem may assist a troubled individual get needed help. It is better to err on the side of safety than to risk having a situation turn violent.

Reporting signs of potential workplace violence

In a potentially violent situation, the longer you wait to intervene, the poorer are the chances of preventing a violent act. If you observe behavior that you believe may turn violent, follow these specific reporting procedures:

- Alert your supervisor, another supervisor, or your local Security Control Center.
- Make a complete, written record of any threats, remarks, or observations of the harassing, disruptive, or bizarre behavior.
- Provide the written record to your supervisor for use by the Security Control Center.

Reporting an actual incident

If you observe an incident of workplace violence that is imminent or in progress, follow these procedures:

- Call your local Security Control Center.
- As briefly and calmly as possible, describe what is happening and where it is happening.
- Let the Security Control Center know if emergency medical assistance appears necessary.
- Attempt to clear the immediate area of anyone not directly involved in the incident.
- If possible, separate the people involved but do not, under any circumstances, expose yourself or others to risk of harm or injury.
- Send someone to the building entrance, stairwell, and/or elevator nearest the incident to direct those responding to the incident.
- Alert your supervisor after the incident is over, if this has not already occurred.
- Make a complete, written record of the incident for use by the Security Control Center.

Handling telephone threats

Telephone threats often follow physical incidents of workplace violence and should be taken as seriously as physical threats. Follow these guidelines in handling telephone threats:

- Keep calm.
- Keep talking; do not hang up.
- Signal a coworker to listen on an extension.
- Ask the caller to repeat the message and write it down.
- Repeat questions, if necessary.
- For a bomb threat, ask where the bomb is and when it is set to go off.
- Listen for background noises and write down a description.
- Write down whether the caller is male or female, pitch of voice, accent, and anything else that may assist authorities.

- Try to get the person's name, exact location, and telephone number.
- Signal a coworker to immediately call the Security Control Center.
- Notify your immediate supervisor.