

ON THE EDGE

Preventing Violence in the Workplace

version 1.0

Participant's Booklet

by

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For Preview Purp

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Important Note

No one can guarantee the prevention or elimination of violence in the workplace. These training materials are designed to be an awareness training program and in no way implies, nor does it constitute, any legal, security, or psychological advice. Businesses and organizations should contact their own resources or experts to obtain any legal, security, or psychological advice when dealing with workplace violence issues or concerns.

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Introduction

“When OSHA was created 25 years ago, no one imagined that violent individuals would pose the greatest safety and health threat to women or the second highest risk to men on the job,” say the head of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Assistant Secretary of Labor, Joseph A. Dear. This federal agency, formed in the 1970’s to help make workplaces safer from the industrial accidents, falls, chemical exposures, and other deadly hazards encountered by employees, now faces the reality that workplace violence is perhaps the greatest single threat to today’s employee.

Violence in today’s workplace is the leading cause of death for women at work. Over 41% of the women who are fatally injured on the job are the victims of homicide. Homicide is the second leading cause of death for men on the job (a very close second only to traffic accidents that claim the lives of a handful more men than violence).

Workplace violence can have a devastating effect on the quality of life for employees and on the productivity of our organizations. Just one violent incident can create massive costs to a business - costs for medical and psychological care, liability lawsuits, repairs and cleanup, increased insurance rates, increases in security, lost productivity, lost business, not to mention the death or injury of valued employees and coworkers.

Over 1,000 employees are killed in the U.S. every year. Over 7,000 are seriously injured. In just the time it takes you to read this book, at least one more American worker will die as a result of workplace violence.

Many of those workers are killed in robberies or crimes committed by strangers - another taxi driver or police officer or convenience store clerk losing their life because they hold a high-risk job in today’s crime-ridden society. Some are killed by their domestic partners, the evil of domestic violence spilling over into the workplace. Others are killed by those they have known and worked with on a daily basis.

This book will address violence in the workplace committed by non-strangers -- those horrifying acts by customers, spouses, co-workers that we read about in the newspapers, or hear about on the nightly news shows. The distraught husband, the disgruntled employee, the dismissed worker out for revenge and taking the lives of employees almost indiscriminately. Many of these violent incidents could be predicted and prevented. This book will help give you the tools to accomplish that goal.

The Edmond Post Office Massacre

Patrick Henry Sherrill was an angry man. Angry and surly. Neighbors in Edmond, Oklahoma sometimes referred to him as “Crazy Pat” because of his strange behavior - sneaking around at night in combat fatigues, tying up dogs with baling wire, peering into neighbor’s windows, mowing his lawn at midnight. His grip on reality often seemed rather tenuous.

Sherrill’s work record was also inconsistent and he seemed to take up a disproportionate amount of his supervisor’s time. His relationships with co-workers were strained at best. His performance was spotty, his productivity decreasing. He would make the same mistakes over and over again. It was obvious to his co-workers that Patrick Sherrill was a “problem employee”.

Sherrill, aged 44, had worked for 18 months as a full-time substitute letter carrier for the U.S. Postal Service. On August 20, 1986, Sherrill put on his postal uniform a final time and made preparations for what would be his last day on the job. Sherrill knew that his supervisor planned to talk with him that day about his performance problems. The supervisor considered it merely a counseling session. Sherrill evidently convinced himself that he was about to be fired.

Just after dawn, Sherrill reported to the Edmond Post Office and entered the rear door with a pistol in each hand. Without a word, he walked up to two supervisors and shot them at point-blank range. Sherrill then began stalking still more victims in the corridors of the post office.

As one survivor later described it, “I heard two quick shots and then a single shot. I thought it was a bunch of the guys clowning around, that maybe one of them had dropped a mail tray or something. But then I saw a guy fall with blood all over him. Then I heard another shot. And someone yelled, ‘No! No!’ Then another shot...He didn’t have any preference about who he was shooting. Women and men, black and white. He shot anything that moved. People were scrambling everywhere, and he was shooting at everyone who was moving.”

One employee was able to slip out an exit door and then leaped on the hood of a passing car, screaming at the driver to take him to the nearby police station. The workplace was not filled with the din of screaming, moaning, weeping, terrified voices. Sherrill walked through it all, unhurried, searching out groups of huddled employees and shooting them.

Within a few minutes, he had fired 50 rounds at co-workers and supervisors, wounding six and killing fourteen employees. As police SWAT teams and ambulances raced toward the scene, Sherrill turned the weapon on himself and took his own life.

It was one of the worst mass murders by a single gunman in American history. And it was the first of what would become an all too familiar string of violent episodes within the U.S. Postal Service. Patrick Henry Sherrill was only the first “disgruntled postal worker” to bring headline-making violence to the workplace. In the years since the Edmond massacre, there have been more than a dozen incidents of workplace violence at postal facilities, killing nearly forty people, wounding at least twenty.

Violence in Today's Workplace

Violence in the workplace has only begun to be recognized and studied as an occupational health hazard in recent years. Estimates of the impact of violence and statistical information about incidents vary widely depending on the definitions and methodologies used. But what we do know of the extent of workplace violence is staggering:

- Over 1,000 employees are killed each year in incidents of workplace violence. Over 7,000 are seriously injured.
- Homicide is the second leading cause of death overall in the workplace, and the leading cause of death for women in the workplace.
- According to recent U.S. Department of Justice statistics, approximately 1,000,000 individuals are victims of some form of violent crime in the workplace each year. About 60% of these crimes were categorized as "simple assault" by the Department of Justice.
- The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) learned in a recent study that one-third of all managers surveyed had experienced at least one violent incident in the workplace. Twenty-five percent of these incidents were shootings or stabbings. Seventy-five percent were fistfights.
- Another government study estimates that violent crime in the workplace causes some 500,000 employees to miss 1,751,000 days of work each year, or an average of 3.5 days per incident. This missed work equates to approximately \$55,000,000 in lost wages.

While many of the homicides which occur in the workplace each year result from robberies or other crimes committed by strangers, the vast majority of violent crimes in the workplace, and almost 20% of the homicides, are committed by employees against employees.

Recent Cases

February, 1996 - Fort Lauderdale, FL - A former city maintenance employee, fired two years earlier for failing a drug test and making threats against co-workers, walked into a meeting of his former co-workers shouting "Everyone is going to die!" He began shooting, killing five people and injuring another, pausing only to reload. One woman escaped without injury.

February, 1996 - Honolulu, HI - An employee fired from Seal Master the previous week returned to the workplace and held his former boss and six co-workers hostage for six hours, shooting and injuring the boss. The former employee then held a shotgun to the head of one co-worker for several hours while negotiating with police. After he threatened to shoot the hostage and began a "countdown" to pulling the trigger, the hostage was able to grab the shotgun barrel, giving police the opportunity to shoot and kill the former employee.

December, 1995 - Evendale, OH - A recently fired employee returned to the TransContinental Systems offices, killing three employees and wounding a fourth. After the shootings, the ex-employee surrendered quietly to authorities.

November, 1995 - Columbus, OH - Nearly a year after being fired on charges of sexual harassment, a 38-year old white male forced his way into two homes of former co-workers and fatally shot four people (including a 4-month old infant) and wounded two others. He was captured by police while attempting to flee the city by automobile.

October, 1995 - Carmel, IN - A husband entered the bank where his wife was employed, chased the other employees from the building, then shot and killed his wife. The man then committed suicide with the same gun.

October 1995 - San Jose, CA - One day after receiving his first performance counseling session, an accountant (on the job only six weeks) shot and killed his female supervisor, then killed himself.

August, 1995 - Palantine, IL - A postal worker reported to work with a handgun and shot two co-workers. The shooter had worked at that location for nearly twenty years and his victims were said to be his friends.

July, 1995 - Los Angeles, CA - A city electrician with a 12-year work history shot and killed four supervisors after learning that he faced possible dismissal for poor performance. He was heard to say that he "felt he was being picked on and singled out" by his victims. After the shooting, the man quietly waited for police to arrive and arrest him.

July, 1995 - City of Industry, CA - A postal employee described as "quiet" and "unassuming" who had been on the job for 22 years shot and killed his supervisor, before being disarmed by co-workers.

May, 1995 - Asheville, NC - A loner just fired from his job with a machine tool company returned the next day with a rifle and a pistol, killing three workers and wounding four others before surrendering to police.

April, 1995 - Richmond, CA - A Housing Authority employee went to his car after being fired, retrieved a handgun, and returned to shoot and kill a supervisor and a co-worker.

April, 1995 - Corpus Christi, TX - A former employee walked into a refinery inspection company with a .32-caliber revolver and a 9mm pistol, killing five workers and then himself.

Recognizing Warning Signs

It's important to realize that many violent incidents are predictable. They rarely come as a complete surprise. The employee, ex-employee, or employee's domestic partner are often known to be problems or potential threats in the workplace. What is critically important is that we recognize the warning signs in time to take action, before the violence occurs.

Profile of a violent worker

In the vast majority of employee vs. employee violence, the perpetrator meets many of the following characteristics:

- White male
- 25 to 50 years old
- tends to be a loner
- has a history of violence
- demonstrates a fascination with weapons
- has a history of conflict with others
- may exhibit signs of depression
- may appear paranoid or exhibit other behaviors characteristic of personality disorders
- likely to exhibit self-destructive behaviors such as substance abuse

It should be carefully noted that these characteristics are not prerequisites, but merely factors which are common to many known violent employees. Simply because an employee does not display all of these characteristics is no reason to disregard their potential for violent behavior. White males are the predominant perpetrators of these crimes to date, but recent workplace homicides have been committed by females, Asians, African-American, and others besides white males.

In addition to knowing the typical profile of the violent employee, you should be aware of the behavioral indicators that trouble is brewing. These behavioral warning signs may include some of the following:

Behavioral Indicators

Reduced productivity

When a previously efficient and productive worker shows a sudden or sustained decrease in performance, there is reason for concern. This is a classic warning sign of dissatisfaction or stress and should not be ignored.

Increased need for supervision

The typical employee requires less supervision as they become more proficient in their work. An employee with whom the supervisor must spend an increasing or inordinate amount of time could be signaling a need for help.

❑ Externalization of blame

An employee who constantly blames others for his poor performance, is hyper-sensitive to criticism, or who is incapable of taking personal responsibility for his failures may be one who needs assistance.

❑ Inconsistency

Employees are usually quite consistent in their work habits. Should this change, there may be a need for intervention.

❑ Excessive tardiness or absences

A particularly significant indication of a problem in an individual who has typically been prompt and committed to a full work day.

❑ Unreciprocated romantic obsession (Erotomania)

Employees who are romantically obsessed with another employee may behave normally in all other conduct, except for their bizarre behavior in this one area. This is not a sexual attraction, but rather an erotic delusion of idealized romantic love. The obsessed person may engage in spying, stalking, sending love letters, giving gifts, and making phone calls to the object of their romantic obsession.

❑ Strained workplace relationships

Disruptive behavior in the workplace is cause for immediate concern and it is imperative that some sort of intervention take place to diffuse a potentially violent situation.

❑ Stress

Stress is a serious and widespread problem in the workplace. An organization should have procedures in place to identify workers who are suffering from stress and provide some sort of effective intervention.

❑ Unusual behavior

A sustained change in behavior is often indicative of an employee in trouble. Co-workers are typically quite familiar with their peer's personality traits and are quick to notice significant changes which may indicate a need for assistance.

❑ Substance abuse

Alcohol and drugs may agitate, cause aggressive behavior, and create paranoia in some employees. An employee who may have been on the margins of trouble may be pushed over the edge by the effects of chemical dependence.

❑ Depression

Depression is the most common problem treated by counselors. Almost one out of seven persons with a depressive illness will commit acts of violence on themselves or others, including suicide and homicide.

❑ Threats

Any employee who makes threats in the workplace should be taken seriously. All such incidents should be reported and investigated to determine the potential for violence.

In addition to these general behavioral indicators, you should know that two recognized personality disorders appear to be linked to many incidents of violence (and especially homicide) committed by employees or ex-employees. These disorders are Antisocial Personality Disorder and Borderline Personality Disorder. Some of the behaviors associated with these disorders are listed below:

Antisocial Personality Disorder

- Disregard for the rights of others
- Persistent non-conformance to laws, regulations, and social norms
- Deceitfulness and lying
- Impulsive and erratic behavior
- Irritability and aggressiveness
- Reckless disregard for the safety of others
- Consistent irresponsibility
- Lack of remorse for harmful actions to others
- Indifference to others
- More prevalent in males than females

Borderline Personality Disorder

- Significant fear of real or imagined abandonment
- Pattern of unstable interpersonal relationships
- Unstable sense of self or self-identify
- Impulsive, self-damaging behavior
- Suicidal behavior
- Behavior threatening to self or others
- Unstable moods and reactions
- Chronic feelings of emptiness
- Inappropriate and intense outburst of anger

- Fighting and other forms of physical aggression
- Paranoid ideation or severe dissociative symptoms
- More prevalent in females than males

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Taking Action

There are some important Do's and Don'ts to keep in mind if you are confronted by a person in the workplace and fear that the situation might be on the edge of violence. One important rule is that if at any time a person's conduct begins to escalate beyond your self-defined comfort zone, you should try to disengage from contact with that person. With that in mind, let's look at some other suggestions of things you can do:

Do:

- Project calmness - move and speak quietly, slowly, and with confidence.
 - Listen with empathy - encourage the person to talk and listen patiently to him or her.
 - Let them know that you are interested in what they are saying - focus your attention on them.
 - Keep your posture relaxed but attentive - position yourself at a right angle rather than directly in front of the other person in a confrontational position.
 - Acknowledge the person's feelings and indicate that you can see they are upset.
 - Establish ground rules if the unacceptable behavior continues - calmly describe the consequences of any violent behavior.
 - Ask for specific, small favors such as asking the person to move to a quiet area.
 - Use delaying tactics in order to give the person time to calm down - you might offer a drink of water (preferably in a paper cup!)
 - Break big problems down into manageable units - be reassuring and point out available choices.
 - Accept criticism positively.
 - Ask for recommendations and repeat back what is requested.
- Position yourself so that your access to an exit is not blocked.

Don't:

- Use communications styles which generate hostility - these might include apathy, condescension, brushing off, coldness, going strictly by the rules, or giving the run-around.
- Reject all of the person's demands from the start.
- Pose in challenging stances, such as standing directly opposite them with your hands on hips or your arms crossed.
- Engage in physical contact, finger-pointing, or staring them down.
- Make sudden or threatening movements.
- Threaten, dare, challenge, belittle, or make the person feel foolish.
- Act impatiently or criticize the person.
- Attempt to bargain with a threatening person.

- Make false statements or promises you cannot or will not keep.
- Take sides or agree with distorted points of view.
- Invade the person's personal space - usually a zone of 3 to 6 feet between you and the agitated individual.

You should report all violent threats and any other behavior which you feel might indicate a tendency toward violence. You should make this report immediately to an appropriate person in your organization. This appropriate person may be defined within your organization's policy, or you may choose to inform your supervisor, another supervisor, or someone within the human resources department.

Take all threats and unusual behavior very seriously. Many tragic incidents could have been prevented from happening if co-workers had not concluded that "something like that couldn't happen here."

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Video Exercises

The following pages offer an opportunity for you to review nine video vignettes, take notes on each of them, and then respond to a series of discussion questions about each of the scenarios.

Try to place yourself in each of these scenarios, which are based on actual events. Try to imagine how you would respond if you were in that situation. Consider carefully how you should respond if you were to actually face those circumstances in your organization.

The resolution to each of these situations may differ depending on your organization. One of the objectives of this training is for you and others in your group to discuss each of the situations presented and come up with the best possible answer for your group, business, or organization. There are no easy “cookie cutter” answers to these situations. That’s why they are so realistic. If there are situations you or your group do not feel comfortable resolving, please do not hesitate to ask your leaders to assist you.

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Vignette 1

Adam is a data entry clerk in your employee benefits area. His work involves computer entry of confidential employee medical information. Over the past several months, Adam's performance has been marginal at best. You hold a performance discussion with Adam.

He blames all his problems on fellow employees, whom Adam says are "out to get him". He also blames you and the company for picking on him. He threatens you, the other employees, and the company, saying he's going to "get you".

Your notes on the video:

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Just Try to Fire Me!

What are you going to do right now?

What are you going to do with Adam as an employee?

Who are you going to talk to?

Where and when are you going to talk to Adam again? About what?

What did your group decide?

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Vignette 2

Ray has been a janitor in your office for approximately six years. Always known as a loner. Ray usually doesn't have much to say to office employees and is better known for his surly attitude.

As Ray is working in front of your office, he bends over and you notice the handle of a pistol sticking out from under his jacket.

Your notes on the video:

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Broom, Rags, Gun, Mop

What are you going to do right now?

What follow-up action will you take?

What will you say to Ray?

What did your group decide?

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Vignette 3

Jane has been an employee of the company for about two years. While a short-term employee, she is very bright and can handle almost any assignment given to her. She also has a violent temper and has, on occasion, lost her cool with fellow employees, as well as her supervisor, Karen.

Earlier in the shift, Karen had to have a discussion with Jane about another temper tantrum she had with a fellow employee. Jane was very upset with Karen for “picking” on her. She commented that she was going to show this company a “bad attitude” by hitting them where it hurts, in the pocketbook.

You observe Jane intentionally trying to erase computer disks by rubbing them over a magnetic paperclip dispenser.

Your notes on the video:

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Magnetic Personality

What are you going to do right now?

Who are you going to tell about what you observed?

What could have been done to prevent this incident from occurring?

What did your group decide to do?

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Vignette 4

John has worked for the company for 17 years. He has been a very good employee, never missing work and always making a contribution.

About a year ago John's wife, also an employee of the company, filed for divorce after 16 years of marriage. Since that time, John has experienced serious episodes of depression. He has been to the medical department, been through the Employee Assistance Program and attended counseling. John thinks his situation is hopeless and there is no reason to live.

John confides in you that he is thinking about doing something to end all his pain and suffering. While he doesn't tell you all that is going through his mind, he does hint that his ex-wife will also be with him. You have never seen John this depressed.

Your notes on the video:

For Preview Purposes Only

Dear John

You are seated across the desk from John.

What would you say to John now?

What would you do?

Who would you discuss this situation with?

When and where would you talk to John again?

What did your group decide?

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Vignette 5

Sandy, one of your better employees, has worked for you for about seven years. Until recently, Sandy's performance has been above average, but now something is bothering her. She confides in you that an ex-boyfriend has been harassing her at work, making phone calls to her, and stalking her. Sandy is very upset by his actions and does not know what to do.

As you leave the office together, you see him sitting in the parking lot next to Sandy's car.

Your notes on the video:

For Preview Purposes Only

A Walk in the Parking Lot

What are you going to do right now?

Could you have done anything differently?

What do you say to Sandy?

Who else do you need to talk to?

What are you going to do for Sandy?

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Vignette 6

Jerry just won't leave you alone. You got the job he wanted and now he's acting like it's your fault for getting the job over him. He constantly gives you dirty looks, makes snide remarks about you to other employees, and is spreading rumors about you in your department. Jerry has always been a little "different" and he scares you. Anything you say to him is greeted with greater and greater hostility.

Your notes on the video:

For Preview Purposes Only

Scary Jerry

You have just been confronted by Jerry.

What are you going to do?

What would you say to Jerry at this time?

Who would you discuss this incident with?

What would you do next?

What did your group decide to do?

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Vignette 7

The rumors are true. You just got the word that your area will be downsizing and you will be losing 13 jobs, about one-half of your group.

You have been confronted over the past several weeks by worried employees, as well as hostile employees. For the first time you now know what will happen, who will be terminated and who will be retained, as well as what the jobs will look like for those who will survive the cutback.

Your notes on the video:

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Bad News

Where do you start?

Who do you talk to?

What do you tell those who will lose their jobs?

What do you tell those who will be retained by the organization?

What can you do for the terminated employees?

What does your group say?

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Vignette 8

Al and Joe have been supervisors for your organization for about five years. They have always worked the same shift and, in fact, do a lot of hunting and fishing together outside of work. They are good friends.

Last week the organization announced a headcount reduction that would put 27 people out of work. Al and Joe are in the 27. Al's wife is having serious medical problems and Joe has been known to drink quite heavily. Neither graduated from high school and probably will not have an easy time finding another job that pays as well as their current one.

You observed them acting suspiciously near some chemical tanks and overheard them planning to do "something" on their last day that will make your organization remember them.

Your notes on the video:

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The Nitrogen Plan

What are you going to do right now?

Who do you talk to about what you heard?

You did not lose your job in the cutback. How does this affect your actions?

What did your group decide to do?

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Vignette 9

You and Jim have worked together for the past two years. During the past six months, Jim has been acting a little peculiar. Jim's work record is not very good. He got a written warning for "poor performance" yesterday.

After this disciplinary discussion with his supervisor, Jim made comments to you that he is about to "make a point" with his supervisor. When you ask Jim about this, he threatens to "go postal" and "take you out, too".

Your notes on the video:

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I'll Go Postal!

What are you going to say to Jim now?

What are you going to do?

Who are you going to talk to?

What did your group decide?

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ASSET Audit

Prevention is one of the keys to minimizing the threat of workplace violence in your organization. While no one can eliminate workplace violence entirely, there are some steps your organization can take to minimize your exposure.

The following pages should be used as an idea generator, and a checklist of areas your organization may want to evaluate. The topics cover the broad subject headings of administrative procedures, selection systems, security, empowerment, and training. As a reminder of these subjects, think of them as your ASSET audit for the prevention of violence. This acronym stands for:

- A = Administrative Procedures
- S = Selection Systems
- S = Security
- E = Empowerment
- T = Training

ASSET involves five broad topic areas which should be used by your organization as a memory jogger to help examine the organization and its preparations to prevent workplace violence. While we provide some general points to consider, your organization will want to augment this list with your own specific areas of concern as they become evident during the review process.

We also suggest involving a broad spectrum of employees in this review. Some organizations have developed individual teams around each of the ASSET topics in order to make the review more complete.

You should feel free to add to, delete from, or “localize” the following ASSET topic lists. This will insure that the ASSET audit reflects the needs of your organization, not someone else’s.

Administrative Procedures

Employers have a general duty to “furnish to each employee, employment and a place of employment which is free from recognized hazards that are causing, or likely to cause, death or serious harm to the employee” under federal and state OSHA regulations. It is incumbent upon all organizations to make sure that their administrative procedures and policies are clear, well-conceived, and reflect the need to provide a workplace which is safe and productive.

- Policies and procedures are viewed as fair and equitable
- Policies and procedures are well communicated and understood
- Policies and procedures are administered equally
- Disciplinary processes are well communicated and fairly administered
- The disciplinary process is progressive, with appeals built in
- The performance management system is well used
- Reporting procedures for incidents are clear and well communicated
- Employee assistance programs are in place and well known
- Emergency response systems are developed and well known
- Evacuation procedures are well known and practiced
- There is an emergency telephone number for everyone to use
- The definitions of harassment (sexual and otherwise) are understood by all

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Selection Process

A selection process is much more than interviewing. From the time the decision is made to fill an existing job, or create a new job, the selection process starts. The process does not end until a person has been selected to fill the vacant job and their performance is up to some acceptable level. The major points in a selection process may include the following:

- Determination of the key decision points in the process
- Development of job descriptions or task analysis
- Understanding the culture of your organization and identifying its key characteristics
- Keeping appropriate records
- EEOC/ADA considerations
- Interviewer training
- Behavioral-based interview questions
- Applicant testing
- Applicant notification procedures
- Drug screening
- Probationary guidelines and status

Security

Security continues to be a concern in today's organizations. Access to the workplace has become a matter of keys, electronic gates and doors, identification cards, metal detectors, controlled access, as well as policies and procedures to keep outsiders out of the workplace. In addition to the considerations for preventing violence are the related issues of theft and sabotage. In times of leaner organizations and tighter budgets, security is still an imperative that must be examined.

Areas to review include:

- Facility access
- Key and ID card control
- Exit interviews and procedures
- Product safety
- Computer security
- Information access and control

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Empowerment

An empowered workforce is a workforce that utilizes all of its capabilities to improve the business. As we ask employees to take more responsibility for their work, we must open doors of communications and decision-making that will allow empowerment to take place. An empowered workforce cares about the organizations they work for, cares about fellow employees, and wants to organization to flourish. Employee empowerment centers around two major areas: 1) the ability of employees to make decisions that affect their work, and 2) the employees functioning as business partners. The following are all functions which might be performed by employee groups:

- Select new employees
- Conduct safety audits
- Conduct security audits
- Train other employees
- Lead emergency response teams
- Lead first-aid teams
- Review and recommend changes to administrative procedures and processes

Business partnership relationships with employees can be reflected by:

- Regular business updates given to employees
- Employees have the opportunity to ask questions and surface issues
- Employees can solve problems related to their work
- Teams of employees meet regularly to improve the organization
- Members of the organization understand roles and responsibilities

Training

A properly trained workforce can be a strategic competitive advantage for an organization. Employees who know how to function beyond the basic job skills are a valued asset. Employees must be aware of workplace violence, what they can do to lessen the impact of workplace violence to your organization, and understand their roles and responsibilities in the event an incident should occur. By training employees in workplace violence awareness and prevention, you open the door to allowing employees to contribute to the well-being of fellow employees as well as the organization as a whole. Other examples of important training topics include:

- Communications skills/Listening skills
- Workforce diversity
- Sexual harassment
- Appropriate work habits
- Giving positive feedback
- Handling conflict/Handling emotion
- Establishing performance expectations
- Coaching
- Conducting termination interviews
- Using effective discipline
- Fundamentals of supervision
- Effective employee relations
- Working in teams

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Violence in Our Society

Reducing vs. Displacing violence

Many of the steps often taken to reduce violence in the workplace do not prevent violence, they merely displace it. A person who is screened out from being hired by one employer will probably be hired by another employer who has a less thorough screening procedure.

In order to actually reduce violence, communities need to prevent children from developing into violent adults. Some children get involved with violence because they lack adequate supervision and support, especially after school. Offering these kids an alternative to gangs, drugs, and other criminal activities can help to steer them away from a life of violence.

Organizations can assist in many ways that need not be expensive. Taking advantage of school, church, public housing, and park district facilities that are underutilized during certain periods is one way to keep down the costs. Peer programs where participants help provide instruction (more advanced pupils teaching the less advanced) can be both successful and cost-effective. Some businesses provide their employees and managers opportunities to donate their time as paid or unpaid volunteers.

We must act, and act immediately, to reduce the threat of violence in our workplaces, our communities, and our society at large. Educating ourselves about this problem is only the starting point. Now we must be prepared to act on the knowledge we have gained.

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