

## Growing Risk

# Is Your Workplace Prepared for Violence?

IN 2020, more than 20,000 people were injured in workplace assaults; almost 400 died. The number of workplace injuries and fatalities from violent incidents has climbed steadily over the past decade.

While some workplaces, such as health care facilities, are at greater risk than others of these incidents, no workplace is immune. Advance preparation for and prevention of such violence has never been more important than it is today.

How can an employer prepare for the unthinkable? Workplace safety experts advise several measures:

- **Assess the risk** – In which departments and locations in the workplace are attacks most likely to occur? It could be the human resources department, where employees may be subject to disciplinary action. It could be the reception area where random members of the public enter the premises. Or it could be the offices of the company's upper managers.
- **Form a threat management team** – These will be the people that other employees look to during an event to manage and possibly defuse the situation or summon help. They should be individuals who can be counted on to remain calm during a crisis, and they should come from different departments within your organization.
- **Create a plan** – This does not have to be created out of thin air; there are plenty of resources employers can draw from. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration offers sample prevention and employee training programs. The Society for Human Resources Management offers its members a toolkit, and even the FBI has a guide to preventing workplace violence.
- **Train employees on how to recognize potential threats, actual incidents** – The federal Department of Homeland Security provides many resources to help prepare employees for active shooter situations. Their program educates workers on behavioral indicators of potential violence, possible attack methods, emergency action plans, and what to do during an incident.

### Look for warning signs

Employees should be trained to watch for warning signs of a potential for violence in their co-workers, including:

- A history of troubling behavior.
- Sudden changes in behavior.
- Interpreting their perceptions as reality.
- Showing a desire to take or regain control.
- Listening only to information that confirms their beliefs.

You should implement policies encouraging employees who notice these warning signs to discuss them with a manager or an HR staff member. Another option is to implement an anonymous tip line for reporting troubling behavior.

### In case of emergency

In addition, employees should be trained to react in specific ways should a workplace violence incident erupt:

- **Run** – If feasible without putting themselves in more danger, they should leave the premises through the nearest available exit. Employers should clearly inform employees of the exits' locations.
- **Hide** – If vacating the premises is not feasible, take cover in a place out of the attacker's view.
- **Fight** – As a last resort, attempt to disable the attacker. However, this may increase the danger to the employee.

### The takeaway

No amount of preparation will protect an organization with 100% certainty against workplace violence.

However, thoughtful analysis and planning, coupled with employee training, can make these incidents less likely to occur – and make the ones that do occur less severe. It is an unfortunate fact of the times we live in, but organizations of all sizes need to prepare for the possibility of assaults in their workplaces.❖