



100: Workplace Violence

Causes of workplace violence

Workplace violence can occur after a person leaves the jobsite and returns with weapons or explosives. Weapons include vehicles, guns, and knives. It can also occur in a rage that seems sudden but has been brewing. The worker suddenly lashes out with fists, tools, or materials. The underlying cause, in nearly every case, is emotional upheaval. It may stem from:

- Abuse from coworkers or a supervisor. *Prevention:* Treat others with respect.
- Problems at home. *Prevention:* If someone seems depressed or complains about problems from home, be a friend. Take that person out for a drink or a meal and just listen. This is often all someone needs.
- Feelings of betrayal from being fired, laid off, not promoted, or the like. *Prevention:* As a line worker, you don't have much control over this. You can help others overcome the sting. Follow up after a lay-off or firing, and show some understanding. Offer to help with a referral or in some other way.
- A disagreement with another person, in which he or she lost face. *Prevention:* Approach the person whose pride may have been wounded and offer some support. Find something positive and say it. For example, "You handled yourself well back there by not making a big deal out of such a trivial issue." Move to a positive topic rather than continuing to dwell on the negative event.

Signs something is wrong

The person talks about killing people or committing other acts of violence in ways that don't fit the normal pattern of horsing around. *Prevention:* If you feel the slightest discomfort at the remark, don't dismiss this as joking. Report this to your foreman. If it's a first instance, ask the person who made the remark to explain it.

A coworker shows up late, wearing clothes that are well out of character or carrying objects that look suspicious. *Prevention:* Contact your foreman immediately to arrange the proper actions. Keep track of where this person goes.

A coworker starts yelling, throwing things, or making threats. *Prevention:* Contact your foreman immediately. Most likely, this person just needs to cool off. An effective measure is to acknowledge whatever the person thinks is wrong and offer to go for a walk. For example, "Yeah, George, this place sucks sometimes. Let's go for a walk. I need one, too."

A normally interactive coworker becomes silent. *Prevention:* Sometimes just a few kind words can turn the tide of rage. For example, "You seem quiet today. I just want you to know I really enjoy working with you and if you need to talk about anything you can talk to me." If this takes time from the job at hand, so be it. Follow up with your foreman.

Two people have just had an argument, and one suddenly stalks off. The "whipped dog syndrome" has probably taken place. *Prevention:* Be alert for possible reprisals.

Stopping an attacker

Conventional wisdom took a sharp turn toward common sense on September 11, 2001. It is safer to stop an attacker by whatever means is available than to simply

Discussion leader duties for this session:

Read your company's policy on workplace violence, and be prepared to answer questions and to advise the company how to update the policy to the post-9/11 era.

What this Safety Talk covers:

Preventing and coping with workplace violence.

Discussion notes :

Review and Discussion

What are some causes of workplace violence?

What are some ways you can prevent workplace violence?

What are some signs something is wrong?

What are some ways to stop a violent attack?

What should you do after workplace violence occurs?

hope others around you are victims instead of you. Back your foreman in a confrontation. This show of solidarity can often diffuse the situation. If you must physically stop an attacker:

- Anything is a weapon.
- A stick, such as a length of EMT, allows you to block and bludgeon.
- A screwdriver allows you to slash and stab.

You may be tempted to stop someone by using a powder-activated tool. These tools are not designed to direct their charge. You stand a good chance of missing the attacker, hitting a bystander, and drawing fire to yourself.

Lethal force is rarely necessary. However, unless you are trained in martial arts or police tactics, you should use as much force as you can against an attacker. The goal is to keep the casualty count as low as possible.

A violent person can harm only so many people before being overwhelmed. Use the power of numbers to stop the attacker.

In most situations, you should seek cover instead of attacking a shooter. But if there is no way out, attack may be your only hope of survival. Calling 911 will do too little too late, by the time authorities arrive. Do not count on site security—most of those people make minimum wage.

Don't be intimidated by superior weaponry. It is not a license to terrorize. Native islanders throwing stones defeated British Expeditionary Forces armed with rifles. A pipe fitting thrown from behind a protective barrier can stop an armed person.

After a trauma

In the moments following a workplace violence incident, people often fail to focus on their jobs. This is understandable. Allow for the lack of focus by delaying dangerous activities for another time when your mind is capable of functioning properly.

Nobody "wins" when workplace violence occurs. The stress that follows can distract coworkers from safety awareness for weeks afterward.

Discuss feelings as appropriate. There is no shame in asking for help or reaching out for solace. Get counseling, if needed.

Participant's Signature and Date
