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Human Resources: Workplace Violence

Background Statistics

Homicide is now the third highest work-related cause of death in the United States. The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health conducted an in-depth study of homicides at work from 1980 to 1988. They found that homicide accounted for 12% of job-related deaths. It has been documented that 7,603 people were killed during the same time period, a rate of .7% homicides per 100,000 workers. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that homicide was the leading cause of death for women at work, accounting for 42% of on-the-job fatalities. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, after motor vehicle incidents, homicide is the leading cause of death in the workplace. BLS recorded 1,004 workers murdered on the job in 1992; about at one-third increase over workplace homicides than during the 1980's. The Justice Department reported in 1994 that one-sixth of all violent crimes in the United States occur in the workplace.

The American Management Association surveyed 500 companies and nearly one-fourth stated that a minimum of one worker had been attacked or murdered on the job since 1990. Almost one-third stated that a violent incident has occurred more than one time.

According to the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, guns account for 75% of workplace homicide deaths.

Types of Workplace Violence

According to studies by the National Safe Workplace Institute in Chicago, the most dramatically increasing type of workplace violence is employer-directed. Until late 1992, there was an average of one employer-directed homicide per month in the United States. Recently that has escalated to an average of five or six monthly. Workplace violence is identified by the following types:

1. **Employer directed** - violence against workplace authority: supervisor, manager, director.
2. **Domestic directed** - partner or would be partner engages in violence against the object of his or her affections.
3. **Property directed** - acts against any property that the company/employer owns.
4. **Commercial directed** - an employee participates in events against the company that can include theft of money or property and may also involve violence.

OSHA Reporting and Requirements

OSHA 29 CFR 1904.8 generally requires employers to orally report incidents, including those involving workplace violence, that result in 1) the hospitalization of three or more employees, or 2) a fatality. Oral reports must be made within 8 hours to the nearest OSHA Office or appropriate State OSH Act Enforcement Agency.

OSHA 29 CFR 1904.2 generally requires employers to keep a log and summary of all recordable occupational injuries and illnesses sustained by their employees. Injuries and illnesses that occur as a result of workplace violence are recordable where the event occurs on the employer's premises. If the event occurs off the employer's premises, it is recordable if the worker has engaged in work related activities, or was present at the site of the event as a condition of employment.

Preventive Measures

1. Be aware of the warning signs of violence
2. Mentally prepare for "what if" situations
3. Understand company procedures about violent situations
4. Be aware of weapons brought into the workplace
5. Take all threats seriously
6. Alert management immediately if any of the above occur

Warning Signs of Violence

Stage 1

- Unusual behavior changes
- Uncooperative with direct supervisor on a regular basis
- Curse profusely
- Argues with coworkers constantly
- Spreads gossip and rumors deliberately to harm others
- Unwanted sexual remarks
- Hostile toward customers or coworkers
- Irritability and anxiety escalates

- Sleep disturbances are mentioned on the job

Stage 2

- Plays the role of a victim
- Writes violent or sexual notes to other employees or management
- Verbalizes desires to harm coworkers or employer
- Sabotages equipment or steals property
- Disregards company policies and procedures
- Levels of arguments or altercations increase with all personnel
- Accidents increase; either physical or traffic-related
- Noted decrease in interest and confidence in work

Stage 3

- Intense anger is the frequent emotion displayed. It results in:

  - Depression or withdrawal - Property destruction - Physical fighting - Suicidal threats - Use of weapons to harm others

What You Can Do At Work

1. Treat each other with respect
2. Get to know the people around you and agree to look out for each other
3. Look intently for how everyone is doing
4. Improve communication throughout your company
5. Improve working conditions by offering suggestions for safety
6. Notify management of any suspicious activities
7. Watch for the warning signs of violence
8. Encourage each other to be alert for danger signals in coworkers
9. Promote workplace integrity between all employees
10. Listen for verbal intimidation on the job
11. Watch for psychological abuse on the job between employees
12. Be aware of behavioral pattern changes in fellow workers
13. Become more responsive to each other

Awareness is the first step in preventing workplace violence.
BE PROACTIVE.

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