

SO, WHAT ABOUT VIOLENCE AT YOUR PLACE OF BUSINESS?

Did you know that the Employee Assistance Professionals Association has been trying to address the issue of violence in the workplace for at least the last 15 years? It's an easy extrapolation from the workplace to schools, from schools to public places.

One employer I know provides the EAP service for one of the largest steel mills in the world. Commonly weapons are brought to work and usually left in the employee's vehicle. The mill considers it a good month when no one is shot.

An outpatient mental health clinic has lockers in their lobby for weapons storage and a metal detector mounted in the threshold between the lobby and the counseling offices.

For those of you working at a campus-based Children's Home without a gate or guard get a friend to help you with the following: drive onto campus in a fairly late model clean vehicle while dressed nicely, drive around the campus, smile and wave at everyone you see. See if you are stopped (as a stranger on campus) or if the response is a smile and wave in return.

Resources are available to help. OSHA requires that employers must provide a safe working environment. The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health publications is a good start, and the standards promulgated by some industries provide excellent specific direction. Check too with local law enforcement for any tips they can provide.

Here are some additional items for your risk manager, Organization, or Company to consider:

- Develop and implement a zero tolerance policy.
- Define violence for your employees.
- Define what a weapon is and do not tolerate weapons of any kind carried by your employees or on your property.
- Conduct an assessment of the exposure to violence at your "shop". Consider access, your typical customers, hiding spots, security, and potential isolation of employees or clients.
- Consider the lighting in your parking lot, the location of the parking lot, and the need for escorts to the parking lot.
- Are the doors and windows meant to be locked, actually locked?
- Does the phone system protect employees who work in isolation? What protects your employees while working out of the building?
- Train staff in the techniques of recognizing and handling a violent person. Policy and procedure should define how employees respond to unusual or erratic behavior on the part of fellow employees or visitors. Social services may train their employees in non-violent crisis management; however, these situations require training in crisis techniques for handling and dealing with violence.
- Develop and maintain a good relationship with local law enforcement.
- Develop and practice disaster protocols that include debriefing following any incident.

- Do not tolerate any threats, assaults, or use of intimidation to create fear (in any fashion) in your workplace.
- Remember that the person(s) who is your first line contact with the public is extremely vulnerable.
- Make sure that your employment practices are solid. This includes background checks, retention, and supervision as well as an employee assistance policy and procedure.
- Remind your employees that safety is everyone's concern.
- Hire a consultant to inspect the physical plant and to help provide training.

It's not possible to make your workplace absolutely safe. It is possible to take a little time to assure that should violence occur you and your employees are prepared.