

March 15, 2002

Identifying Violence On-The-Job

It's easy to think about safety when you are working around dangerous machinery. But does safety come to mind when you think of your coworkers, clients, or customers? As many as 1.5 million workers are assaulted while at work each year in the U.S. It's a reality both men and women face every day.



Preventing workplace violence can be complicated, but once you know what situations to look for, you can start thinking about what to do when you are faced with a situation that is becoming uncomfortable.

Say "NO"

Make it clear to the aggressor that you are not interested in this situation. Remain calm if this is possible, but communicate "NO" clearly.

Remove Yourself

Removing yourself from an uncomfortable situation is one of the best ways to avoid a potentially violent incident. The potential for a violent act can often be removed when aggressors have time to cool down.

Report the incident to management. Chances are that your company has procedures to curb violence in the workplace. These policies are there for your safety and protection, so don't hesitate to use them if you feel threatened.

What is workplace violence? Workplace violence has a broad definition that includes aggressive acts like intimidation, harassment, verbal and/or physical assault, and murder.

Intimidation

Intimidation ranges from threatening body language to threatening letters. Someone blocking your path can also be intimidation.

Harassment

Most people tell jokes about their friends and give them unflattering nicknames, but this is not considered harassment until that person says "NO" and it continues anyway. Unwanted calls from a coworker that don't stop or being continually called into the office for no acceptable reason: both are patterns that fall into harassment.

Verbal assault

Yelling, screaming, and name-calling are just three examples of verbal assault. It also includes threats to you or your property.

Physical Assault

We all know what physical assault is. **Or do we?** As well as direct physical harm done to you, it can also include someone tossing you materials that are too heavy to catch.

Homicide

Homicide is another name for murder. There were 856 homicides in U.S. workplaces in 1999.

Workplace violence is not always between co-workers, nor does someone a worker knows always commit it. A former employee, or a stranger, can commit workplace violence.

How Do you Identify and prevent a potential situation? There are some key facts you ought to know. Most violent incidents take place at night or in the early morning hours.

Many victims are working alone or in small groups. If you are guarding property or working in high-crime areas you are at risk.

Safety Tip:

Knowing what workplace violence is and what you can do about it goes a long way in ensuring your safety. Becoming familiar with your company's safety and security policy on workplace violence will be an even bigger step to curbing violence in your work place.



Special Announcement:

Don't forget the DOI Safety Week, April 1-5, 2002

Theme: "Protecting Employees with Effective Strategies"

Plan your safety week activities now!!!

William C. Bass

Safety and Occupational Health Manager

