**Violence on the Job**

Did you know...

An average of 1.7 million people were victims of   violent crime while working or on duty in the United States, according to a report published by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), each year from 1993 through 1999. An estimated 1.3 million (75%) of these incidents were simple assaults while an additional 19% were aggravated assaults. Of the occupations examined, police officers, corrections officers, and taxi drivers were victimized at the highest rates.
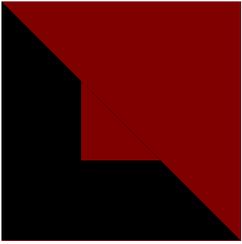
The Bureau of Labor Statistics' Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries (CFOI) reported 11,613 workplace homicide victims between 1992 and 2006. Averaging just under 800 homicides per year, the largest number of homicides in one year (n=1080) occurred in 1994, while the lowest number (n=540) occurred in 2006.

www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/violence/
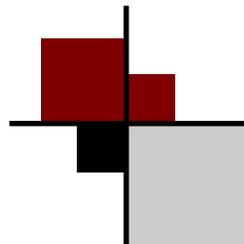
Identifying and Assessing Workplace Violence Hazards

Many factors have led to an increase in workplace violence both within the workplace and our society. Guns and other weapons are on the street and more people are willing to address their problems through violence. Much of this violence spills over into workplaces, such as hospital emergency rooms, social service offices, schools, as well as neighborhoods where housing inspectors, road workers, home health workers and child welfare workers must work.

Budget and policy decisions can have direct and negative effects on workplace safety. Staffing levels in many public institutions and agencies are not adequate in settings where workers are dealing with inmates, patients, clients or others who pose a risk of violence. Changes in policy, such as in public assistance, can cause frustration and hostility among recipients, who in turn may direct their anger at the workers whose job it is to administer the programs.

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Although many people believe that workplace violence is random and unpredictable, a number of factors have been identified that may increase a worker's risk for violence. Identifying these risk factors involves looking at the work environment and work practices along with victim and perpetrator characteristics:

Working conditions associated with workplace violence include:

- low staffing levels
- working alone
- working late at night or early in the morning
- working with money or prescription drugs
- poor lighting
- lack of quick communication
- lack of controlled access to workplace
- long waits for services by customers, clients or patients, and/or the lack of available services

Victim characteristics include:

- employees who work in homes or in the community;
- workers who handle money or prescription drugs;
- workers in correctional institutions or institutions for the mentally ill or developmentally disabled who are not trained in violence avoidance or self-defense;
- employees who provide care, advice or information, such as health care workers, mental health workers, emergency room and admission workers, and social services workers;
- workers who handle complaints, such as social service, child welfare and unemployment workers; and/or workers who have the authority to act against the public, inspect premises and enforce laws, such as inspectors, child welfare workers, law enforcement/corrections officers and security guards.

- Source courtesy of AFSME

Perpetrator characteristics include:

- persons with a history of violent behavior
- gang members
- relatives of injured persons
- drug users

Although some employers and so-called workplace violence "experts" promote profiling of perpetrators to predict violence, it is often inaccurate and can lead to mislabeling and possible discrimination against groups of people and workers.

Identifying hazards, collecting information and document:

Identifying hazards, collecting information and documenting incidents is a very important part of addressing workplace violence problems. A hazard assessment is a method of identifying, analyzing and documenting workplace hazards. Assessing workplace violence hazards involves some of the same tools used to document any other workplace safety or health problem. These include checklists and surveys, investigating incidents and reviewing available records.

- **Inspect the Workplace** — While inspecting for workplace violence risk factors, review the physical facility and note the presence or absence of security measures. Local law enforcement officials may also be able to conduct a security audit or provide information about their experiences with crime in the area.
- **Conduct a Survey** — The most important source of information on workplace hazards is workers. In fact, workers may be the only source of information on workplace violence hazards since management may not document incidents (or near misses). In addition, conducting regular surveys may also enable the local union to evaluate workplace violence prevention measures. Information can be collected either through a written questionnaire distributed to workers or through one-on-one personal interviews. A written survey may be appropriate if the union wants personal or sensitive information. For example, a worker may be reluctant to voice to a union representative fears about a co-worker, but may be more willing to describe the problem in an anonymous questionnaire. Alternatively, a one-on-one interview is a good technique for organizing as it gets people talking about their jobs and working conditions. Oral surveys are also a way to involve workers who do not read well.
- **Analyze Safety Records** — By reviewing records of prior instances of workplace violence, local unions may be able to identify factors that contributed to the incident. Some of these documents must be requested from the employer. Others (for example, medical records or workers' compensation records) may require permission from the affected worker. Sensitive or confidential information may not be necessary to analyze the incidents; a summary of the information that includes at least the nature of the injury and type of treatment needed may be sufficient.

www.afscme.org/publications/2957.cfm

- Source courtesy of AFSME

Records and reports on prior incidents may help determine:

- If a workplace violence problem exists and how serious the problem is.
- If management is aware, or should be aware, that a workplace violence problem exists.
- Trends in a particular department or work area, at a certain time of day or night, among specific job titles or job tasks, or under a particular supervisor or manager.

Once the risks for workplace violence have been identified and documented, the local union may not be able to address all of them at once. Rank issues based on how many people are affected, how easily they can be resolved, how serious they are or other criteria based upon local needs.

Types of Records to Review

Request from the Employer:

- Injury and Illness Log (OSHA Form 300) for the past two years to determine if any assaults or injuries associated with violence have been reported.*
- Workers' compensation records for the past two years to see if any worker has applied for medical or lost-time benefits due to a workplace violence injury.
- Employee medical records to check if workers ever sought treatment for minor or severe workplace violence injuries.
- Incident reports (including threats) to detect any patterns of workplace violence.
- Reports conducted by security personnel, such as an onsite security review.
- Minutes or records from labor/management or safety committee meetings where issues of workplace violence were discussed or raised. Complaints made by employees, citizens, clients, patients or customers about violent or threatening incidents.

Other Records to Obtain:

- Police reports on violent incidents or suspicious activity in and around the workplace.
- Grievances and arbitrations related to workplace violence such as harassment, assaults, security hazards or threats.
- Correspondence between the union, management, OSHA or any other official pertaining to workplace violence or security.

- Source courtesy of AFSME
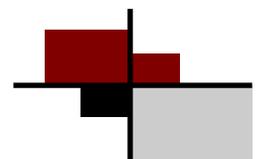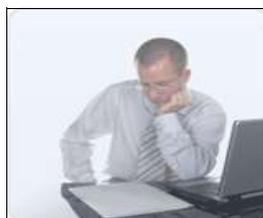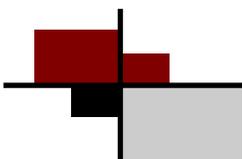
As you can see from this report, we all are responsible for preventing, identifying and reporting workplace violence. If you observe someone acting out of character, stressed, overwhelmed or easily angered; report it! It is better to be safe than to be sorry; meaning, it is better to let management know if you sense something is not quite right with a co-worker, so something can be done to help that individual rather than finding out too late that that person needed serious help. Unfortunately, at that point, others lives are in danger which could have been prevented had you only spoke up and advised management as to what was going on.

Look out for your *co-workers* and *yourself*!

Think...
SAFETY ~ SAFETY ~ SAFETY

- Melinda Neal, Executive Assistant