Workplace Violence Prevention

Goal

This violence prevention program provides ideas and suggestions for reducing violence in the workplace.

Objective

This information will assist businesses in identifying preventive measures to promote a safer work environment. For our purposes workplace violence will include homicide, attempted homicide, harassment, threats, assaults or attacks inflicted on people in a company by people with some past or present relationship either to the company, or one of its employees.

Background

The bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries (CFOI) reported 551 workplace homicides in 2004. Simple assault is the most common type of workplace violent crime, with retail sales workers the most numerous victims of attack. Homicide is still the leading cause of death for women in the workplace. While robbery still continues to be the primary motive for job-related homicide, disputes among co-workers and with customers account for about one-tenth of all homicides.

A 1993 study by Northwestern Life Insurance Company (the only national study conducted to date) concluded that in the United States between July 1992 and July 1993 "one out of four full-time workers was harassed, threatened, or attacked on the job". The same study also found that employees whose employers implemented programs to prevent violence and harassment in the workplace were far less likely to experience such incidents.

The first step in prevention for employers and employees is recognizing that workplace violence is not just a law enforcement problem. Implementing an effective prevention plan will have a far greater impact on the reduction of workplace violence than focusing on what steps will be taken after an incident has occurred. Employers who implement effective programs to handle grievances, train employees in security issues, provide adequate physical security, reduce job stress, and promote teamwork and a supportive work environment, are more likely to see increased productivity and a reduction in violent incidents.

Prevention Procedures

Good Working Relationships between employers, employees and customers must be established. Teamwork and a harmonious working atmosphere help to reduce job stress. Managers who encourage responsibility and allow employees adequate job control create a supportive environment. In grocery and convenience stores, management has found a friendly and alert employee acts as a deterrent to potential criminal activity.

Training Managers and Supervisors with Conflict Resolution Skills help to maintain good working relationships. Programs in behavior recognition, response to violent behavior, stress reduction, personal protection measures, hiring and firing strategies, recognition of domestic violence, communication skills, and team building are powerful tools for building self-esteem and self confidence. Employers and employees who understand how to reduce job stress and maintain compassion for their coworkers are actively participating in violence prevention.

Established Workplace Policies help protect workers from harassment and threats. These policies are as important as policies which prevent discrimination or drug use on the job. Some effective prevention tools are:

- a twenty-four hour hot line for employees to report threats of violence, unusual behavior, depression, alcohol or drug abuse, or other disturbing occurrences;
- a suggestion box;
- any method of encouraging feedback from employees and allowing them to express their grievances; and
- establish fair and prompt procedures for dealing with grievances.

Employees who feel that they are working in a caring environment where they are treated fairly are less prone to aggressive outbursts.

Effective Security Measures provide employees with an environment where they can produce their best work without anxiety. Well-lit, uncluttered premises, both inside and out, deter criminal activity. Other measures that help to ensure workplace safety may include:

- posted information and restrictions;
- security guards and monitoring devices;
- strict visitor sign-in policies;
- employee identification badges;
- door controls;
- limited access key cards and cipher locks;
- careful screening and testing of new employees;
- regular safety awareness; and
- training of the workforce.

Job Counseling / Training Assistance provides support for employees during traumatic times like layoffs, financial or marital

problems. Stress is recognized as the first cause of illness by the World Health Organization. Stress is caused by operational changes, lack of promotion opportunities, financial concerns and personal relationships. A well-informed and sensitive supervisor can provide employees with information about services offered by employee assistance programs and other service agencies in the areas of emotional counseling, debt relief, stress reduction and job retraining.

Crisis Management Plans can be developed for dealing with violence in the workplace. A team can be formed including representatives from security, human resources, medical, legal, line management and other experts. The team can consider how to report incidents of violence, the key authorities to be alerted, security precautions to be taken, and how to maintain safety for workers not in the immediate vicinity. Prompt trauma counseling for employees who have suffered from exposure to workplace violence has been found to help in the recovery process. A debriefing team can be brought in immediately to work with the survivors of workplace violence to aid in restoring their mental and emotional health. Survivors of catastrophic events find relief in being able to express the feelings and fears aroused in them. The process of speaking about the event assists in recovery.

Recognition and Response To the Potentially Violent Person is another way to reduce the danger of violence. Employees who are trained to react calmly and cooperatively have a better chance of surviving a threatening situation. A calm and courteous manner, a positive and cooperative attitude, a step by step explanation of one's actions and a warning of potential surprises can greatly increase the chances of survival. Any action capable of causing an escalation in violence has the potential to end in death. Even if they perceive a threat, employees should be discouraged from carrying firearms. A supervisor who is trained to recognize threatening behavior, depression, signs of domestic violence, possible alcohol or drug abuse, or even frequent absences as signs of distress, can be helpful in reducing the potential for violence through timely intervention.

Make A Resource List of service agencies in your area that would be helpful in terms of emotional counseling, debt relief, stress reduction and job retraining. Workers' assistance programs are a good place to begin.

Review

1. List five effective security measures that an employer can use.
2. Name six kinds of training that can be used to help reduce workplace violence.
3. What factors contribute to job stress?
4. How can a crisis management team be effective?
5. Why is a good working relationship between employer and employee important?
6. How does customer service help to prevent violence in the workplace?

Review question answers

1. Monitoring devices; badges; sign-in procedures; security guards; well-lit premises.
2. Stress reduction, communication skills, recognition and defusing of violence, personal protection, hiring and firing strategies.
3. Domestic issues, layoffs, financial troubles, relationship problems.
4. Provides a swift response to any incidents that may occur.
5. When employees feel they are heard and treated fairly, there is less likelihood of violent acts.
6. Customers who feel they have received good service are less likely to retaliate against the company.

Resources

The Texas Department of Insurance, Division of Workers' Compensation (TDI/DWC) Resource Center offers a workers' health and safety video tape library. Call (512) 804-4620 for more information or visit our web site at www.tdi.state.tx.us.

Disclaimer: Information contained in this training program is considered accurate at time of publication.

Additional Information:

Cornell University Press 1999, :The Violence – Prone Workplace" – Richard Denenberg, Mark Braverman

Gavin De Becker "The Gift of Fear", Little Brown and Company,

1997;

Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, 2000, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Safety Violations Hotline
1-800-452-9595
safetyhotline@tdi.state.tx.us