

## **MINNESOTA TRAGEDY: A STARK REMINDER TO IMPLEMENT ANTI-VIOLENCE POLICIES**

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A recent shooting-death at a business in Minneapolis serves as a somber reminder to employers of the perils of workplace violence.

On September 27, an employee killed five co-workers and injured three others before taking his own life at the workplace. The shootings occurred during a meeting in which managers were terminating the employee for his chronic tardiness and poor performance. The employee, who had received a written reprimand for his performance issues one week earlier, apparently pulled out a concealed handgun and began shooting immediately after his managers terminated him and handed him his final paycheck. There are reports that the employee may have suffered from a mental illness and that he had begun acting aggressively at work. However, the employee apparently had no history of making actual threats against co-workers.

As the tragedy in Minnesota demonstrates, there will not always be obvious warning signs before an incident of workplace violence occurs. As a result, employers should not wait until an employee makes a direct threat before addressing the issue. Employers should look for more subtle red flags from potentially troubled employees. For example, employers should take note of employees who exhibit dramatic changes of attitude, erratic behavior, or loss of productivity. Employers need to regularly gauge the morale of their workforce and monitor situations that could develop into physical confrontations.

Properly educating employees about handling workplace disputes is critical. Employers should use this recent tragedy as an opportunity to update and re-introduce "anti-violence" work policies so that employees are on notice that such behavior will not be tolerated. A "zero tolerance" policy is the best means of communicating the seriousness with which employers take the issue. Managers and

supervisors should be trained (or re-trained) on conflict resolution policies. Looking for criminal convictions for violence when conducting background checks on job applicants is another good way of addressing the problem before it ever develops.

There are a number of legal and interpersonal issues that employers must consider in order minimize the risk of violent episodes in the workplace. The best way that employers can minimize these risks is through education, regular training, proactive monitoring and consistent enforcement of anti-violence policies. By fostering an atmosphere that prioritizes mutual respect and free communication, employers are less likely to experience tragedies such as the recent Minnesota shooting.

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