



How to Prepare for and Prevent Workplace Violence

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Ed Foulke's article "How to Prepare for and Prevent Workplace Violence" was featured in *Risk Management Magazine* on August 18, 2014.

Workplace violence and shootings are all too frequent. It's extremely difficult to handle an active shooting scenario as it is occurring without prior preparation, which is why it's so critical for every employer to develop a crisis management action plan.

In the article, Ed discusses the importance of implementing policies and procedures to greatly reduce the potential of a workplace violence occurring.

Ed provides employers with 12 things they can do to prepare for and hopefully prevent any type of workplace violence.

1. As part of the company's action plan to handle workplace violence, the employer should adopt and publicize a zero tolerance policy regarding threats, harassment and violence in the workplace.
2. The employer should update and review its employment application, as well as any pre-employment background checks and interview procedures, to identify signs of potential problem applicants. The EEOC has placed limits on criminal background checks that can be conducted on applicants, and employers should seek legal counsel to ensure that any background investigation meets all applicable federal and state laws.
3. The employer should prepare and use release forms for personnel records from previous employers, course transcripts from educational institutions, certification records from training and professional organizations, and credit reports from consumer credit reporting agencies.
4. The employer should update its personnel policies and employee handbook to include safety policies dealing with violence in the workplace, including any type of verbal or physical harassment and any type of physical altercations.

5. For employers using temporary employees, the employer should review with its temporary employee provider the procedures being used to screen their temporary employees for potential workplace violence problems prior to placement of those employees at the employer's worksite.
6. The employer should conduct periodic security audits and risk assessments at its facility. The security audit should determine whether there is adequate security at the facility, including access control in reception areas, parking areas, common areas, stairwells, cafeterias and lounges.
7. Each facility should prepare and distribute contact lists of all local emergency agencies and law enforcement.
8. The action plan should include the selection and training of management officials in conflict resolution and non-violent techniques for handling hostage, hijacking, crisis incidents and counseling situations. This is particularly important in situations involving termination of employment where, at a minimum, two management employees should be present during any type of employment action.
9. As part of the company's overall management safety and health training, the employer should instruct all managers and supervisors in how to identify and deal with early warning signs and potential safety problems associated with workplace violence as discussed above.
10. The employer should identify and publicize any internal or external employee assistance programs, employee support services and health care resources available to employees and their families. For small- and medium-sized employers that do not have a separate employee assistance program, many local and state assistance programs are available, and the employer should identify those resources and provide that information to employees who may need that assistance.
11. The employer should institute policies to investigate all threats and complaints of harassment and violence immediately. This would mean designating company officials and/or office staff to handle all threats and complaints in a confidential manner. It is critical that such investigations be conducted quickly and the appropriate action, including disciplinary action, is implemented as soon as possible. In most cases, during this investigation, the employee in question will be escorted from the building by company security or the local police and will not be allowed to return until the investigation into the incident has been completed.
12. The company should review and publicize the company-wide procedures in place, as well as the company management officials responsible for handling any employees' problems, complaints and concerns involving threats, harassment and actual violence.

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