



If There Is a Workplace Shooting, Don't Just Lie Down and Be a Target

Insights

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One would think that we are all desensitized to these terrible workplace shootings, but I find myself wrestling with the “*whys*” and “*what to do next*” following the San Bernardino mass murder. We’ll write and post more on the subject of workplace violence and active shooters, but one point stuck out to me in the early coverage.

Party attendees laid down and were shot while on the floor.

Human nature seems to be to drop to the floor when one hears a gun shot, but this action flies in the face of guidance provided by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and other experts. As we have explained before, if a shooting occurs, run. If you cannot run, hide. If you cannot run or hide, then fight. In mass shootings, the shooter’s goal is to kill as many people as possible, and by simply laying down, one only presents a more readily accessible target. Every employee should be required to watch [the DHS video on YouTube describing the “run-hide-fight” response](#). I’ve written about this [concern before](#) and will continue to remind employers.

Hopefully, some good will come out of the Colorado and San Bernardino shootings. All employers should and probably do maintain an evacuation plan, but few employees even drill about the plan. Moreover, responding to a tornado, hurricane or other natural disaster is far different from responding to a fire, explosion, shooting, or collapse of the electrical grid.

- Have you as an employer even thought about how you should respond to such events and protect your employees?
- Do you maintain an emergency action plan (EAP) under OSHA regulations?
- Do you even know what triggers the obligation to have an EAP?

There is much talk about workplace violence, but have you access your operation to determine where risks are presented? Do you have employees making deliveries or going to customers’ homes unaccompanied? Have you professionally accessed entrance and exits? Do management and HR know when they should be concerned about potentially dangerous employee behavior and what to do next?

If your answer is to simply point to the binder on a shelf or to assure me that you have “*competent people to take care of such matters*,” then I would suggest that you roll up your sleeves and check.

OSHA Focus on Workplace Violence

If you want additional motivation, OSHA is dead serious about inspecting employers for workplace violence exposures and issuing citations under its general duty powers. To the extent OSHA can find manpower amidst its many competing emphasis areas,

Special Focus on Workplace Violence in Healthcare

OSHA is also quite serious about conducting hospital inspections which focus on workplace violence and ergonomic concerns. [OSHA Press Release on Emphasis on Hospital Emphasis](#). Just last month, OSHA issued a [Willful Citation against a VA Medical Center for Workplace Violence issues](#). At the end of November, [Cal-OSHA proposed Workplace Violence Prevention Procedures](#). And yesterday, I saw this article even before we knew about a shooting: [RN Workplace Violence Prevention Efforts Highlighted in OSHA Publication](#). Finally, here's a [LINK to a good article](#) today about preventing Workplace Violence.

Given the poor mental health and narcissistic behavior of many shooters and the possibility of home grown or copycat terrorist acts, we must get serious about preparing plans and training employees. I fear that the problem will become worse before it becomes better.

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