

Workplace Violence— Are You Vulnerable?

*How to Understand and Manage
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Each year approximately 2 million people are victims of workplace violence in the US [National Institute for Occupational Safety & Health (NIOSH) July 2010]. While the majority (1.3 million)¹ of these incidents were considered “minor” assaults, an average of 564 workplace homicides occurred each year, from 2004 through 2008², representing nearly 12% of all work related fatalities in the US.

Almost 9% of businesses reporting an incident had no program or policy in place to address workplace violence.³ The potential for a violent “event” in your workplace means you should understand the potential risks, develop a plan to respond to such events, and know what measures to implement in order to reduce the severity of the loss you might experience.

In this white paper, we will highlight some key steps involved in developing a prevention plan and identify available resources to help in your planning. The time invested in this planning will be invaluable to you, your employees and your company.

What Is Workplace Violence?

According to NIOSH, workplace violence is defined as a “physical assault, threatening behavior or verbal abuse occurring in the work setting. Workplace violence can vary from threats, intimidation, and harassment to violence, physical assault, and homicide.”⁴

While workplace homicides receive most of the attention, it’s important to remember that there are many other forms of workplace violence that result in physical injuries. However, the long-term emotional and psychological impact of an incident can be much more significant. Even if there are no physical injuries, the emotional stress experienced by employees can take an enormous toll on them. Will they carry the memories of the incident with them for years to come? Most likely, they will never forget.

How Do I Determine If My Facility Is At Risk?

Several factors⁵ have been identified as red flags that indicate your facility is at risk. Among the most common are:

1. On-going or chronic labor/management issues
2. Frequent grievances or unfair labor claims against the company
3. Unusually high number of frivolous claims for work-related injuries
4. Employees routinely working excessive overtime
5. Excessive demands placed on employees (typically production related)
6. Large number of overstressed employees
7. A very rigid or overbearing management style
8. Employees who feel they are not treated with dignity or respect

An assessment should be conducted to determine if any of the red flags exist in your facility.

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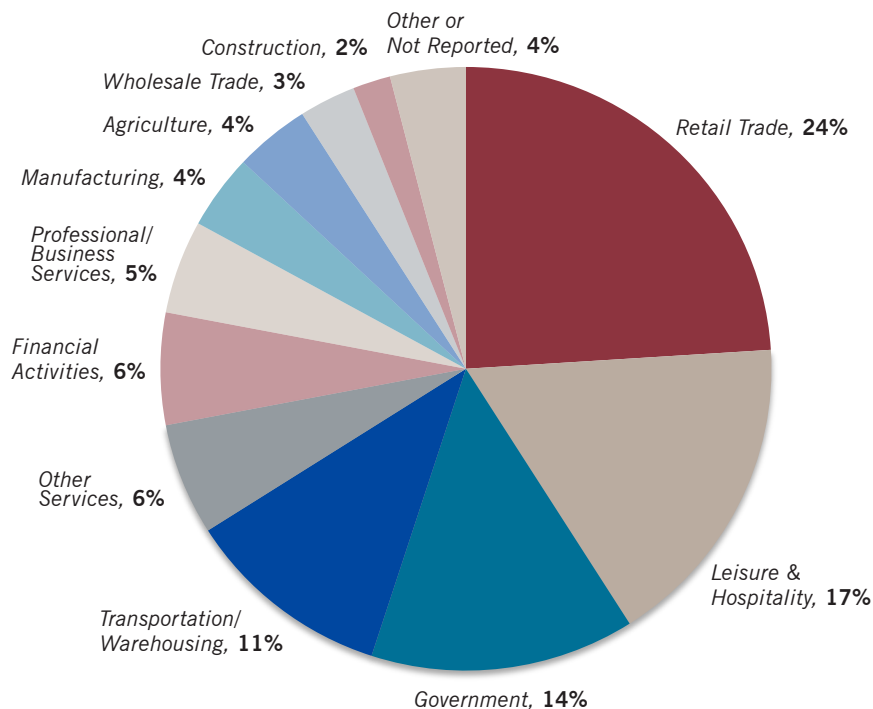
Are My Employees More Susceptible Because of the Work They Do?

Once you've assessed your facility, the next step should involve an assessment of your employees and the jobs you expect them to perform. There are a number of factors^{6,7} that if present and uncontrolled, may increase the likelihood that an employee may be assaulted by a customer, fellow employee or an intentional perpetrator. Such factors include:

1. Contact with the public
2. Exchange of money (with the public)
3. Delivery of passengers, goods or services
4. Having a mobile workplace such as taxicab or police cruiser
5. Working with unstable or volatile persons in healthcare, social service, or criminal justice settings
6. Working alone or in small numbers
7. Working late at night or during early morning hours
8. Working in high crime areas
9. Guarding valuable property or possessions
10. Working in community based settings

Are Workplace Shootings Common in My Industry?

The Bureau of Labor Statistics provides a wealth of information specific to workplace shootings. Their most recent survey, which was updated in July 2010, provides the following information⁸ with respect to fatal workplace shootings across industries:



The largest percentage of fatal workplace shootings occurs in the Retail Trades. This type of work can involve many of the risk factors that potentially expose workers to the potential for workplace violence as listed above (contact with the public, exchange of money, etc.). All employers should carefully consider each of the risk factors and look carefully at their operation to determine if changes to work assignments and/or business practices can mitigate their exposure to workplace violence.

What Can Employers and Employees Do?

Regardless of the steps an employer takes to reduce the likelihood of a potential violent act in their workplace, there are risks. The following steps⁹ can be taken by every employee to help reduce the chance of a workplace act of violence occurring:

- Learn how to recognize, avoid, or diffuse potentially violent situations by attending personal safety training programs.
- Alert supervisors to any concerns about safety or security and report all incidents immediately in writing.
- Avoid traveling alone into unfamiliar locations or situations whenever possible.
- Carry only minimal amounts of cash and required identifications into community settings.

To most employers, the task of identifying potential threats may appear overwhelming. Breaking the components into small, manageable areas of focus will make the task less intimidating. You should include the following steps¹⁰ in your action plan:

1. Enhance your pre-employment interview and selection process.

- a) The interview and selection process should be designed to primarily assess three characteristics for each candidate:
 - Ensure the candidate possesses the education, experience and expertise required for the specific position.
 - Ensure the candidate has the ability (and tendency) to demonstrate the desired behaviors you expect from your employees.
 - Ensure the candidate has (and has demonstrated) the ability to work well and get along with others.
- b) References should be adequately checked for every candidate.
- c) Look for and identify any inconsistencies or significant gaps in the candidate's employment history (as provided on the employment application).
- d) Conduct criminal background checks or Motor Vehicle Report reviews.
- e) Incorporate "behavioral" based questions in your interview process.

Sample questions to consider during the interview process:

- i. Based upon a prior work experience, please describe a situation where you may have had a conflict with a co-worker, briefly discuss the situation and how you handled the conflict.
- ii. Please describe a situation during any previous work experience where you have had a deadline to complete your assignment that was rapidly approaching and how you dealt with the stress associated with achieving the deadline.
- iii. If you found yourself in a situation that created a serious difference of opinion between you and a co-worker, how would you settle the issue?
- iv. If you found yourself being asked by your supervisor to perform a task that you didn't feel comfortable performing, how would you respond?

Sample questions are offered in this text for demonstration purposes only. Have your human resources department and legal counsel review and approve each question you plan to use in the interview process, before conducting the actual interview.

2. Create and implement prevention strategies.

- a) Design and implement a crisis plan.
 - Conduct table top and/or mock drills of the crisis intervention and response plan.
- b) Develop clear policies on violence, harassment and substance abuse.
 - All policies must be effectively communicated to all employees.
 - Establish an environment of “zero tolerance.”
 - Policies must clearly describe the wide range of aggressive behaviors that will not be tolerated within the workplace.
 - Clearly specify what is expected of employees and management team, in terms of their own behavior and what to do if they encounter behaviors of concern.
 - All threats must be taken seriously.
- c) Establish complaint procedures for employees and/or customers.
 - Procedures must be clearly written, so that the company’s commitment to the issue is clearly established and communicated.
- d) Establish procedures for handling threats.
 - Policy must clearly explain the reporting process and how to activate the response plan.
- e) Conduct exit interviews for all employees leaving the company.
 - Pay particular attention to the reason the employee offers for leaving.
 - Closely watch their posture, facial expressions and physical characteristics and vocal tone during the exit interview.
- f) Review and update security programs and procedures.
 - Conduct an assessment of your physical security systems.
- g) Acquaint yourself with local law enforcement agencies.
 - During an actual event is not the time to “get acquainted.”
 - Offer facility tours to local law enforcement and emergency response personnel.

3. Provide Training Programs

- a) Establish and train a crisis response team.
 - Designate responsibility to the team for developing and maintaining the company’s threat response plan.
 - Team members must have the skills to make the right decisions at the right time.
- b) Train personnel to recognize troubled employees and/or customers.
 - The key is to focus on behaviors, not personalities.
- c) Train personnel in conflict resolution.
- d) Provide employee safety education programs.

4. Capitalize on External Resources

- a) Provide assistance through qualified counselor(s) or employee assistance programs.
- b) Assure all employees are aware of outside resources that are available to them – and how to access each resource.
- c) Offer outplacement services for displaced/terminated employees.
- d) Provide post trauma services.

Conclusion:

Workplace violence is a critical concern that every organization needs to take seriously. It starts with having an awareness of the potential risks, and then putting programs in place to both prevent the potential for violence and effectively deal with violent situations that may arise.

PMA Companies urges employers to invest the time and resources needed to manage the risks associated with workplace violence. How well you've prepared your response to the event and your ability to execute appropriate measures quickly and effectively could significantly impact the severity of the loss you experience. Equally important is the comfort and well being of employees, knowing their employer has plans in place for their safety.

Remember that risks continue to evolve, and plans should be reviewed and updated regularly. There are many data sources for employers to keep abreast of current information and expertise on workplace violence prevention. Assessing your own business, identifying potential risks, and planning an appropriate response are critical to the continued safety of employees.

Additional Resources

OSHA Website (www.osha.gov)

- Guidelines for Preventing Workplace Violence for Healthcare and Social Service Workers (3148-01R 2004)
- OSHA Safety and Health Topics: Workplace Violence

NIOSH Website (<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh>)

- Workplace Safety & Health Topics: Occupational Violence
- Risk Factors and Prevention Strategies

New York State Department of Labor (www.labor.state.ny.us)

- Model Workplace Violence Prevention Plan
- Workplace Security Checklist

Engineering & Safety Services Technical Reports (<http://www.pmagroup.com>)

- Working through PMA's website, customers, agents and brokers can access the E&STM technical reports.
- Request PMA Risk Control Technical Bulletin #9000 from your local PMA representative for instructions on accessing this valuable site.

About the Author

Robert Bowman is the Corporate Risk Control Specialist for PMA Companies. During his 30-year career in occupational health and safety, he has focused on helping employers cultivate safe workplaces.

He serves as co-chair of PMA Companies' Organizational Improvement Group and Decision Based Safety Management® Assessment Team. An expert in Adult Learning, Robert has developed a multitude of adult training curriculums, including Interviewing Potential Employees from a Safety Perspective, Goal Setting for Improved Performance and Effective Safety Leadership.

Robert is a graduate of Plattsburgh State University with a B.S. in Health Education, and he has a Masters' degree in Occupational Health & Safety Management from Indiana State University.

About PMA Risk Control Services

At PMA Companies, our risk control professionals do much more than conduct checklist-driven inspections or manage compliance requirements. Our highly credentialed consultants evaluate our clients' businesses to determine where levels of risk may interrupt business results. We work with your organization to integrate safety and risk management into day-to-day decision making at every level of the organization. We help clients look forward to see hazards and control them before a loss occurs. Innovation combined with expertise is a formula we regularly use with clients to help them achieve results.

About PMA Companies

The PMA Companies (www.pmacompanies.com) provides risk management solutions and services, including workers' compensation and property & casualty insurance, throughout the United States. Headquartered in Blue Bell, PA, the PMA Companies is part of Old Republic International's family of companies. Old Republic International Corporation (NYSE: ORI) is one of the nation's 50 largest publicly held insurance organizations.

The PMA Companies includes the PMA Insurance Group, specializing in workers' compensation and other commercial property & casualty insurance products; PMA Management Corp. and PMA Management Corp. of New England, providing results-driven risk management services; and Midlands Management Corporation, offering program administration specializing in excess workers' compensation and specialty casualty claims services.

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IMPORTANT NOTICE: *The information and suggestions presented by PMA Companies in this Risk Control White Paper are for your consideration in your loss prevention efforts and are not legal advice. They are not intended to be complete or definitive in identifying all hazards associated with your business, preventing workplace accidents, or complying with any safety related, or other, laws or regulations. You are encouraged to alter them to fit the specific hazards of your business and to have your legal counsel review all of your plans and company policies.*