

The Safety & Health Advisor

Winter 2010



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Workplace Violence

Violence in the workplace is a pervasive and possibly deadly event that could strike anywhere and at any time. People tend to view workplace violence as instantaneous occurrences; however, there are typically many opportunities to interrupt the progression leading to an incident. With proper planning and effective programs, employers can dramatically reduce incidents of workplace violence.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, homicide is now the third leading cause of fatal occupation injuries in the U.S. According to a national survey conducted by McMaster University, 47 million Americans experience psychological or physical aggression while on the job. These numbers are staggering and employers cannot afford to ignore them.

In a study conducted in 1995, the Workplace Research Institute found that the annual cost to American businesses exceeds \$36 billion. The calculations included the monetary cost of lost productivity, loss of life, injuries, counseling, legal fees, court awards, management time spent dealing with the crises, and other factors resulting in actual cash losses to a business.

USA Today ran a series on workplace violence under the headline, "Managers not prepared for workplace violence" The article noted:

- In an average week in the U.S., one employee is killed and 25 are seriously injured in violent assaults by current or former co-workers.
- In 8 of 10 cases, killers left behind clear warning signs, such as:
 - Showing guns to co-workers;
 - Threatening their bosses; or
 - Talking about attacking.

The USA series also deflated a prominent myth – that violence in the workplace cannot be prevented but found in its analysis that:

- Many companies fail to identify risks or to teach managers how to defuse tensions that can precipitate an attack;
- Supervisors frequently fail to react when workers say they are scared;
- Management often fails to take extra precautions, even after an event that could trigger an attack;
- Honeywell hired back an employee who served four (4) years in prison for fatally strangling a co-worker; then he killed again.

So what can we do?

The best protection employers can offer is to establish a zero-tolerance policy toward workplace violence. It is critical to ensure that all employees know the policy and understand that all claims of workplace violence will be investigated and remedied promptly. The following steps are essential for a successful program:

Endorsement of top management

The most senior leader in the organization should assign a senior member of the management team to take responsibility for program development. This needs to be supported with appropriate financial resources. Establish a multidisciplinary steering committee.

Risk Assessment

Perform a comprehensive risk assessment for your operation. Making sure you understand your environment and surrounding community, looking at the type of incidents that you are experiencing and analyzing them to find out the greatest area of risk. For health care organizations, the type of patients and clients they are caring for, as well as the care strategies they are using should be part of the risk assessment.

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Policy Development

Define violence and properly categorize the different types as part of your prevention policy. There are four categories of violence that should be clearly defined within the policy: criminal intent or violence by a stranger, where a perpetrator has no relationship with the organization; patient-or client-provoked violence; worker-to-worker violence, and domestic violence that occurs at the workplace. Included in this third level of approach are the associated procedures that tie in with the policy: reporting, emergency response, investigation and what to do following a workplace violence incident.

More specifically, when developing your reporting procedures, it is important to establish a confidential information and evaluation center. This is where employees can, anonymously and without fear of retribution, report abnormal behavior or dramatic behavior changes by co-worker, stranger, client or any violations of the company's zero tolerance policy to the center (which could be handled by human resources or a selected committee). Once this information is received, it is evaluated and response is planned.

Additionally, when developing your policy we recommend you look at your hiring practices to ensure they include adequate *pre-employment screening*. With guidance of your legal counsel, the following are recommended: interview questions (ask behavior-based questions that test how applicants would react in a given situation), background checks, (criminal record checks (CORI) if working in Massachusetts) prior employer reference checks, and drug testing if it is appropriate for the position under consideration and consistent with Federal laws and regulations.

Communicate

Management needs to communicate and educate employees. Implementing a workplace violence prevention program may require a cultural shift. Ensure that policies and procedures are communicated thoroughly, using various forums, to all persons concerned – staff, physicians, families and visitors. When training employees, workplace violence topics should not only be included during orientation training, it should also

be a frequent topic of discussion during department meetings and in company newsletters and awareness campaigns.

Reminder - OSHA 300A Summary Posting due February 1st.

After completing and validating the information on your OSHA 300 log for calendar year 2009, the next step is to complete the OSHA 300A summary form. On February 1, 2010, employers must post a summary of the total number of work-related injuries and illnesses that occurred in 2009. Employers are required to post only the Log Summary (OSHA Form 300A) from February 1, 2008 to April 30, 2010. They must retain logs and summaries for 5 years.

The summary must list the total number of work-related injury and illness cases that occurred in 2009 and were logged on the OSHA 300 form. Company information about annual average number of employees and total hours worked during the calendar year is also required to assist in calculating incidence rates. Companies with no recordable cases in 2009 must post the form with zeros on the total line.

All establishment summaries must be certified by a company executive. The form is to be displayed in a common area wherever notices to employees are usually posted.

Employers with ten (10) or fewer employees and employers in certain industry groups are normally exempt from federal OSHA injury and illness recordkeeping and posting requirements. A complete list of exempt industries in the retail, services, finance and real estate is posted on OSHA's website at: <http://www.osha.gov/recordkeeping/ppt1/RK1exempttable.html>. However, if your organization is selected to participate in the annual OSHA survey the exemption does not apply.

Copies of Forms 300, 300A and 301 are available at <http://www.osha.gov/recordkeeping/RKforms.html> in either Adobe PDF or Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet format

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Evaluate

This step is essential to ensuring the program has achieved its objective, which is to safeguard staff. With staff training, for example, there should be a program infrastructure to help establish the effectiveness of the training. If you are just training workers and you do not have the accompanying program that documents the policies and procedures than you are not going to sustain the effect of the education.

Other Prevention Strategies

- Secure workplaces (where appropriate to the type of business) install video surveillance, extra lighting, and alarm systems and minimize access by outsiders through identification badges, electronic keys, and guards.
- Provide drop safes to limit the amount of cash on hand. Keep a minimal amount of cash in registers during evening s and late night hours.
- Equip field staff with cellular phones and hand-held alarms or noise devices and require them to prepare a daily work plan and keep a contact person informed of their location throughout the day. Keep employer-provided vehicles properly maintained.
- Instruct employees not to enter any location where they feel unsafe. Introduce a “buddy system” or provide an escort service or police assistance in potentially dangerous situations or at night.
- Develop policies and procedures covering visits by home health-care providers. Address the conduct of home visits, the presence of others in the home during visits, and the worker’s right to refuse to provide services in a clearly hazardous situation.
- Employees should learn how to recognize, avoid, or diffuse potentially violent situations by attending personal safety training programs.
- Employees should 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 amount of money and required identification into community settings.

There is no good reason for a business, large or small, not to have a Workplace Violence Prevention Program in place. It protects employees, avoids costly litigations, preserves the company’s reputation and improves the bottom line. Everyone who earns a living has a right to a safe and secure work environment.

Additional Resources:

- OSHA (www.osha.gov)
- Oregon OSHA online course (www.cbs.state.or.us/external/osha/educate/training/pages/120outline.html)
- NIOSH (www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/violence)
- ASIA (www.asisonline.org/guidelines/guidelinesw/vfinal.pdf)

If you need assistance in evaluating your ergonomics or safety and health program, please contact Neal Freedman, John Cotnam, Margie Lobaton, or Mark Hickox from Atlantic Charter’s Safety and Health Department at (617) 488-6500.

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Winter Safety Reminder

With winter now upon us, hopefully your organization has made preparations for extreme winter weather hazards. For the next several months it is essential for everyone to focus efforts daily to help prevent slips, trips and falls, motor vehicle accidents, and other weather-related incidents.

Below is a list of some of the actions that can be taken to reduce the risk for injuries associated with inclement weather conditions. Please share this information with your staff. It may be necessary to formally assign some of these responsibilities to specific individuals to ensure they are not overlooked. With everyone's help we can make this an injury free winter season.

Ice and Snow Removal

- Maintain an ample supply of ice melting chemicals. Keep containers in accessible locations near all entrance/exit doors.
- Facilities with large grounds, parking lots, and long sidewalks should consider contracting out snow removal if possible, and/or utilize snow throwers or special shovels.
- Assess where standing water collects in parking lots and walkways which can form black ice. Areas near building downspouts and other poor draining spots along sidewalks should be carefully evaluated. These slippery spots may need additional attention throughout the course of the day.
- Inspect and safely remove (from the ground) icicles that pose a hazard. You may consider temporarily redirecting pedestrian traffic as well.

Safe Tips for Shoveling Snow

- Shoveling snow can be excellent exercise, but also hazardous to people who overdo it.
- If you are older than 40, or if you aren't in good shape, be careful.
- If you have a history of heart trouble, check with your doctor before grabbing that snow shovel and clearing the driveway or sidewalk.
- Don't shovel snow just after you eat.
- Pace yourself. Snow shoveling is a strenuous exercise that raises both your pulse and blood pressure. Treat shoveling like an athletic event: warm up before you start, and stretch during and after shoveling.
- Try to shovel fresh snow, which is easier to handle than snow that has partly melted or become packed-down.
- Try pushing the snow forward instead of scooping and lifting it.
- Push or pick up small amounts at a time.
- Concentrate on using your legs instead of your back. Bend your legs and keep your back straight.
- Take breaks. And don't work until you are exhausted.
- If your chest feels tight, stop immediately.
- Wear layers of clothing, and keep your hands and feet warm.

Source: www.safetycenter.navy.mil

Inside Facility Factors

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- Implement a policy to regularly inspect entryways and halls to keep them free from excessive snow and water. Consider the winter related materials (e.g., shovels, buckets) stored near doorways which may pose tripping hazards as well.
- Use signs to warn of wet floor hazards and make sure they are removed when floor is dry.
- Evaluate winter entrance carpets/mats at all entryways to make sure they are not ripped or curling at the edges. They should be inspected regularly to make sure they do not become buckled and create tripping hazards as well.

Motor Vehicle Safety

- Plan your route before driving and allow for extra travel time during inclement weather.
- Listen to local radio stations and/or dial 511 on your cell phone, which provides real-time traffic, construction and weather conditions. Limit trips outside the facility during poor weather conditions when possible.
- Prepare your vehicle
 - Carry supplies to help you keep windows clear at all times, including a scraper, brush, and extra windshield washer antifreeze.
 - Perform regular inspections of your vehicle: check tires, lights, and windshield wipers.
 - Keep Emergency Supplies In Your Car: cell phone, jumper cables, first aid kit, blanket, and a flashlight.
 - Winterize Your Car – check antifreeze, check battery, appropriate snow tires, windshield washer fluid, and winter wiper blades before the cold sets in. Encourage employees to keep a supply of ice melt in their cars that they can spread as needed.
- Before you leave your home or office,
 - Clean the entire car of snow and ice before you begin to drive including all windows, the roof and lights.
 - Let your car warm up and fully defrost for a few minutes before driving.
 - Make sure all lights and heater/defroster are working properly.
- Driving Safety Tips
 - Start off slowly on ice or snow so the wheels won't spin or lose traction.
 - Drive smoothly and allow plenty of space between your vehicle and the one ahead when poor weather reduces visibility.
 - Leave plenty of extra space between you and other vehicles whether your vehicle is moving or stopped.
 - Don't talk on cell phones while driving or engage in any other distracting activities.

Parking Lot/Walkway Maintenance

- Consider emergency repairs or marking areas in parking lots and walkways where there may be pot holes or raised pavement due to frost heaving.
- Be sure painted markings and signs in parking lots are in good condition and visible particularly when snow banks get high.
- Mark speed bumps, curbs and driveway perimeter with appropriate markers to prevent damage during plowing.
- Consider implementing a "directed parking program" during storms to maximize the ability to clear the parking lots of ice and snow. For example employees during each shift are directed to park in designated areas so that the other areas are open to plowing.

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Footwear

- Encourage employees to wear safe, slip-resistant footwear when working or walking outside. Provide employees and visitors with a place to change from outside footwear such as boots to inside footwear (i.e., bench or chair).
- Investigate a program to assist employees with the purchase of ice traction cleats if your workforce is outside frequently. There are several different brands, many are inexpensive. They are easy to use and are amazingly efficient. Some vendors are:

Yaktrax Walker: www.yaktrax.com/ProductsWalker.aspx Approx \$19.95/pair (4 sizes) - Use coil springs, not spikes. Also at: www.noslipstore.com and others.

STABILicers™ Lite Icewalker: www.32north.com/Products/Work/STABILicersLite
Approx \$21.95/pair (4 sizes) - steel cleats.

Ice Trekkers: www.shoechoain.com/prodIceTrekkers.htm Approx. \$23.95/pair (4 sizes) - carbide spikes

Various Styles: www.cozywinters.com/ice-cleats/ice-cleats.html

Clients have purchased these devices at substantial savings at retailers such as Ocean State Job Lot and Wal-Mart so you might want to look around for the best deals.

Working Outdoors

- Dress warmly and stay dry
- wear a hat, scarf or knit mask to cover face and mouth, sleeves that are snug at the wrist, mittens (they are warmer than gloves), water-resistant coat and boots and several layers of loose-fitting clothing. Do not ignore shivering. It's an important first sign that the body is losing heat. Persistent shivering is a signal to return indoors.
- Prolonged exposure to cold temperatures can cause hypothermia.
 - Watch for these symptoms:
 - shivering, exhaustion
 - confusion, fumbling hands
 - memory loss, slurred speech
 - drowsiness
- If a person's body temperature drops below 95 degrees Fahrenheit, get emergency medical assistance immediately! Remove wet clothing, wrap the person in warm blankets and give warm, non-alcoholic, non-caffeinated liquids until help arrives.

People working outdoors during the winter can develop frostbite and not even know it. There is no pain associated with the early stages of frostbite, so learn to watch for these danger signs:

- The skin may feel numb and can become flushed. It then turns white or grayish-yellow.
- Frostbitten skin feels cold to the touch.
- If frostbite is suspected, move the person to a warm area. Cover the affected area with something warm and dry and seek medical attention.