ESSENTIAL 29: Workplace Violence Awareness and Prevention



Key Takeaways:

- Understanding workplace violence.
- Recognizing job tasks and occupations at increased risk for workplace violence.
- Comprehending the categories of perpetrators of workplace violence.
- Appreciating precautions to help prevent workplace violence.
- Identifying warning signs of violent behavior and how to respond to them.
- Learning the appropriate response to a violent event occurring in the workplace.
- Learning what to do after a violent incident takes place.

Course Description

OSHA has defined workplace violence as violence or the threat of physical violence against workers. Workplace violence can occur at the workplace or anywhere a job takes an individual, and can also range from threats and verbal abuse to physical assaults and murder. Perhaps obviously, Active Shooter events are categorized as workplace violence.

In some cases, domestic abuse creeps into the workplace, or a disgruntled current or former employees with an agenda. In other cases, heated arguments between colleagues turn violent, or customers threaten and physically intimidate workers. Workplace violence also includes acts of aggression such as stalking, brandishing a weapon on company property, or behavior that indicates lack of respect and worth of an individual (i.e. verbal abuse, bullying, harassment, and emotional abuse). For every job, workplace violence is different, but there are common standards for deterring incidents of violence at work.

Training and education are fundamental in responding to and reducing violence in the workplace. When an employee is trained on how to avoid and handle workplace violence, they have a far greater chance of coming out of a violent situation unharmed. Of course, sometimes certain acts of violence are beyond anyone’s

control, and in these types of situations, training on how to quickly get to safety is crucial. Lastly, training helps employees deter and alleviate a potentially violent situation before it escalates.

While training your workforce, it’s highly beneficial to incorporate assets like engaging visuals, current statistics, and periodic knowledge test questions to help workers retain important safety information. As well, using a series of videos that teaches safety lessons through progressive storytelling can also play a significant factor in knowledge retention.

Those who are most vulnerable to workplace violence:

- Exchange money with the public
- Transport passengers, goods, or services
- Are alone at work or are in small groups during late night or early morning hours
- Regularly work in high-crime areas
- Work either in healthcare and social services
- Regularly work in community settings and homes where they have extensive contact with the public, industries such as:
- Gas and water utility employees
- Phone and cable TV installers
- Letter carriers
- Retail workers
- Taxi drivers

Types of Perpetrators

Type 1: Criminal Intent
In the first type, the perpetrator has no legitimate relationship with the business or its employees, although they may pretend to be a customer to gain entrance into the workplace. Usually, theft is the motive and there may be a deadly weapon involved, which significantly increases the risk of fatal injury. Examples of criminal intent incidents include robbery, shoplifting, trespassing, and most workplace homicides.

Type 2: Customer
In the second type, the perpetrator has a legitimate customer relationship with the business and proceeds to become violent while receiving service from the business. This type includes any group the business provides services for (e.g. customers, patients, students, and inmates).

Type 3: Worker on Worker
In the third type, the perpetrator has some employment-related involvement with the affected workplace (i.e. an employee, past employee, or prospective employee) and they attack or threaten another employee in the workplace. Usually, these events will take place after a series of increasingly hostile behaviors from the perpetrator. Nearly 7% of all workplace violence homicides come from worker-on-worker hostile events.

Type 4: Personal Relationship
Lastly, in the fourth type, the perpetrator is not or has been an employee and does not have a relationship with the business, but they have a personal relationship with the intended victim, who is an employee. Typically, this event will be domestic violence following the victim into the workplace. Perpetrators

include current or former spouses or partners, relatives, or a friends.

Regular safeguards against workplace violence

- Try not to travel alone in unfamiliar locations or situations whenever possible.
- Only carry the minimal money and required identification into community settings with extensive contact with the public.
- Secure your workplace.
- Reduce cash on hand.
- When necessary, use cellular phones and hand-held alarms.
- When necessary, implement the buddy system.
- Create and follow an off-site visit policy.

Personal Practices

- Lock your vehicle at all times.
- Try to walk with others when you leave or return to your vehicle.
- Keep your keys quickly available as you approach your vehicle.
- Lock your doors after entering the vehicle.
- In the case that you must work late or alone, ensure you know how to get assistance quickly if it becomes necessary.
- Always ensure someone knows where you are.
- Ensure your work area is always well lit and remain alert to your surroundings.
- Have extra caution when using rest rooms, stairs, and elevators.
- Notify someone when you leave the workplace.
- Memorize and follow your company’s policy for responding to strangers in the workplace.