

Workplace Violence: Dealing with Immediate vs. Potential Threats

Workplace violence exacts a huge toll on both employees and employers. It impacts the physical and psychological wellbeing of employees, their productivity, morale, ethics and, in some cases, their very survival. Workplaces pay a price in having to cope with increased absenteeism, legal actions, declining workers' performance and weakened and challenged organizational culture.

A response to violence in progress or immediately evolving threats at work is different from a response to potential threats. Employees and management should learn to differentiate between the two and to respond appropriately.



Examples of Immediate Threats:

- ✓ Evidence of ongoing violence (e.g., sounds of shooting, signs of blood, screams, sighting of persons fighting, being attacked or fleeing)
- ✓ Evidence of ongoing damage to property (e.g., fire, water damage associated with evidence of violence)
- ✓ Evidence of direct or veiled threats by an employee or an outsider to harm or kill self or others
- ✓ Evidence of the presence of weapons (e.g., knives, guns, explosives) in a way that signifies intent to cause harm
- ✓ Statements or threats made by an employee or outsider to the effect that he/she is about to go retrieve a weapon
- ✓ An employee or an outsider behaving violently on the premises (e.g., throwing objects, screaming)

Responding to Violence in Progress or Immediate Threats:

- ✓ Contact police, security, HR, or any other designated authority and report nature and location of event, perpetrator, weapons, potential victims
- ✓ Evacuate self and others from the immediate threat area by any means possible, even some that might not immediately come to mind (breaking through a window, through little used egress points, etc.)
- ✓ If impossible to evacuate, isolate self and others from perceived threat (e.g., locking/blocking doors with heavy objects)
- ✓ Hide to the best of your ability
- ✓ If discovered by perpetrator, fight for your life with anything available (chair, desk accessories, tools, etc.)

Contact Us:

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Examples of Potential Threats:

- ✓ An employee or outsider that appears to be preoccupied with discussing violence or the use of weapons for violent purposes
- ✓ An employee or outsider that appears to be overly confrontational, angry, unpredictable, or agitated
- ✓ An employee or outsider that exhibits frequent and alarming changes in personality, mood or behavior
- ✓ An employee or outsider that has a history of violent, reckless, or antisocial behavior
- ✓ An employee or outsider that blames others constantly, accusing others of “persecution”
- ✓ An employee or outsider that appears to be operating under great emotional stress
- ✓ An employee or outsider that appears to exhibit a marked and persistent decline in personal grooming
- ✓ An employee or outsider that appears to exhibit a marked decline in work or academic performance
- ✓ An employee or outsider that appears to grow progressively more isolated socially and who seems to respond stressfully to this isolation
- ✓ An employee or outsider that becomes a persistent advocate of some belief system to a degree that it becomes disruptive and causes friction with co-workers
- ✓ An employee or outsider that appears to be engaged in heavy substance abuse

Responding to Potential Threats:

- ✓ Contact management or HR and provide details of your concerns
- ✓ Make sure to include as much corroborative evidence as possible
- ✓ Verify that the responsible authorities have taken your concern to heart and have responded to them (e.g., require an update from whom the matter was reported to)
- ✓ If you do not notice any response to your concerns, escalate your appeal to management

Both employees and management can contribute significantly to increasing security and decreasing vulnerabilities. “See Something – Say Something” is not exclusively aimed at mitigating terror threats; it’s similarly useful in dealing with workplace violence.

Contact us to tell us about your concerns and to find ways to mitigate workplace threats.

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