



## ***CRIME PREVENTION BULLETIN***

### ***WORKPLACE VIOLENCE***

#### **Purpose**

Workplace violence is one of the fastest growing forms of murder in the United States according to the American Crime Prevention Institute. They estimate that in the U.S. 10% of men who die at work are as a result of murder, while that figure for women is 40%. It is the leading single cause of workplace death for women. It is estimated that annually, 1.7 million people are victims of violent crimes while working. According to the Department of Justice, one in six violent crimes occurs in the workplace. We feel it is important to look at this crime in more detail.

#### **Introduction**

There are many reasons why violence might take place at someone's work. Criminal offenses, domestic discord, poor leadership at work, organization reorganizing or reengineering, lay-offs or closings, and unmanaged stress are just a few examples.

One of the first things to consider is a victim profile. Certain employees can be more vulnerable, but you can implement strategies to help reduce your victimization. If you work with money, keep it out of the public view and do not have a routine. Review your policy for how you handle money. Keep a would-be offender off guard.

If you work with social services clients, the mentally challenged, or if you work away from an office alone, keep others informed of your whereabouts. Let someone know where you are going, who you are meeting, and when you should return. Think about self protection strategies for self defense. Park your vehicle facing forward to allow for a quicker escape if it comes to that.

Be alert to indicators of potential worker-on-worker violence. Do you have a policy in place for dealing with workplace violence? If not, encourage your workplace to implement one. Disgruntled employees should be identified and reported to management. Even small threats must be evaluated. Review the procedures for access to employee areas. Can anyone come and go as they please? Is there a policy for allowing weapons at work?

Domestic conflicts can sometimes occur in the workplace. This usually involves the spouse (sometimes ex-spouse) or domestic partner of an employee. Again, access to the employee is an important factor in domestic violence at the victim's workplace. An organization's workplace violence plan should include strategies to help protect not only the victims, but victim's supervisors and coworkers as well.

### **Categories of Workplace Violence**

There are generally 4 types of workplace violence to consider.

A type 1 event is a violent act committed by a criminal with no connection to the workplace.

A type 2 event is when violence is directed at an employee by customers, patients, inmates or others who receive services from an organization.

A type 3 event is when violence is directed against a coworker, supervisor, or manager by a present or former employee.

A type 4 event is violence committed in the workplace by someone who does not work there, but has a personal relationship with an employee. This may be an abusive spouse or domestic partner.

Keep in mind that the workplace may include any location, permanent or temporary, where an employee performs their work. This includes surrounding areas like parking lots, field locations, and travel to or from work assignments.

### **Engineering Controls**

Engineering controls help create a barrier between the victim and potential offender. Control access to the facility or workplace when possible. Maintain sufficient lighting, natural surveillance, and paths of escape. Have sufficient locks and designate a "safe area" where someone might find temporary protection until help arrives. Consider identification means for employees, visitors, or sub contractors who may be on site. Video monitoring may help identify a problem early enough to allow precautionary strategies to be implemented, and a panic alarm can help alert others to a potential problem.

### **Warning Signs**

Although this list is not all inclusive, consider the following possible warning signs.

- Does someone have an obsessive involvement with the job?
- Is there an unwanted romantic interest in a coworker?
- Does an employee refuse to accept criticism or a poor evaluation of job performance?
- Are there family, or personal issues that someone cannot deal with?

- Does the person talk about past violence or threaten potential violence?
- Is an employee testing the limits of unacceptable behavior?
- Do you see vast differences in someone's behavior, beliefs, or attitude?

If these or any other behaviors provide concern, do not ignore them. Report them to the proper authorities and take action.

### **Management Tools**

Leadership does matter when it comes to workplace violence. Besides having a plan to deal with workplace violence issues, leaders and managers have a role. First, be consistent and do things correctly the first time. Second, be flexible in ones management style. An Authoritarian style of leadership may not be as effective if an employee believes they are being challenged. Use a leadership style that fits the circumstances. Keep matters confidential except when behaviors need addressed and policies followed. Constantly look for clues indicating a potential problem, and identify procedures at work to ensure a safe environment for employees and customers alike.

Conduct employee training to address workplace violence concerns. Have a written policy prohibiting harassment, and weapon possession. Train employees to recognize warning signs or areas for improvement within the workplace, and discuss reporting mechanisms. Evaluate employee procedures regularly and make employees aware of Counseling Services when available. Establish a team at work to help deal with these issues and to make future recommendations. Together, strive to provide a healthy work environment.

### **Conclusion**

Employees have a right to expect a workplace that is safe, and one that promotes a zero tolerance policy for violence, threats, and harassment. A successful program will have support from the top of the organization, and each company's policies must be tailored to their specific circumstances and work environment. Plans and actions should be proactive and not reactive, and a culture of safety must be instilled. Lastly, practice workplace plans and safety procedures, and reevaluated plans on an annual basis.

*The Lafayette Police Department's Crime Prevention efforts are meant to strengthen the partnership between our members, and the community that we serve. We hope that together, we can make our community safer.*