

Workplace Violence Training Program: Bullying

Start Session with Fatality Report

Pierre Lebrun was considered a “nice guy” by most of his coworkers at OC Transpo, the mass transportation authority of Ottawa. But Pierre’s work environment was far from healthy. Two of his colleagues were giving Pierre a hard time about his speech impediment. What started as teasing had turned to bullying. And Pierre didn’t like it. One day a fight ensued. Pierre was fired. The union contested the termination and won reinstatement. Pierre agreed to take anger management counselling.

Sadly, the situation got worse. Pierre left OC Transpo. And then he snapped. At 2:30 PM, on April 6, 1999, Pierre, an avid hunting enthusiast, showed up at OC Transpo headquarters armed with a Remington 760 .30-06 rifle and his pockets stuffed with ammunition. “It’s judgment day!,” he shouted as he entered the building.

Before the rampage had ended, Pierre had fatally shot four employees and seriously wounded another. He then turned the gun on himself.

Deliver This Safety Talk

Workplace bullying takes a toll on workplace morale and safety. Left unchallenged, bullying creates a dog pack mentality where others will add to the problem by ignoring a victim or joining in on mean behaviour.

Bullying can lead to incidents of physical violence as victims retaliate against their tormentors or bullies escalate their actions. Everyone is entitled to a safe workplace. A workplace that tolerates bullying cannot be considered safe.

How to Protect Yourself: It would be nice if ignoring a bully would make the problem go away. But it probably won’t. So, you may need to confront the bully.

It's best to take action right when bullying occurs. Hold up your hand, say "stop!", and tell the person that their behaviour is not acceptable and you will not tolerate it. If the person keeps harassing you, calmly repeat the same message, adding that if the person doesn't back off you'll be forced to report him/her to management. Then, turn to other co-workers in the area and tell them you may need their support as witnesses if the bullying continues.

Carefully detail all incidents in writing. You may need to produce that information later.

If the bullying doesn't stop and you must report it to a manager, try to take someone with you as a supportive witness. Some workplaces have a culture of harassment that goes right to the top. If your complaint gets you nowhere, the best solution may be to find another job and leave with dignity. You may also be entitled to file a discrimination complaint if the bullying is based on race, religion, age, sex, or other grounds protected by human rights and anti-discrimination laws.

Final Word

Getting along with everyone may not be possible. But there's a big difference between personal differences and professional conflict and unfair treatment that leaves you depressed, shaken, and physically ill. You have a legal right to work without physical, sexual or emotional abuse. And if this safety meeting causes you to wonder if **you** are a bully, you should talk to a professional counselor and also to yourself.