

Workplace Violence Training Program: The Right Way of Calling 911

Tips to Prepare for Training Session

While preparing to deliver this Safety Talk:

- Carefully review your company's workplace violence policy focusing on the procedures and protocols for reporting incidents and threats of violence.
- Come up with one or two scenarios that your trainees can act out as part of a simulation exercise illustrating how to call for help in violent situation.
- Identify the equipment your company provides for workers to summon help in the event of an emergency, such as special phones, silent alarms, etc.
- Verify that your company has conspicuously posted emergency contact numbers and information throughout the workplace.

Start Session with Fatality Report

A horrifying example of what can go wrong after an emotionally unstable employee is fired resulted in a young man being jailed for life.

Jackie Marshall, a 57-year-old grandmother who worked at a McDonald's restaurant in Chichester, England, was beaten and stabbed to death in front of horrified customers, including children attending a birthday party.

Her killer was 21-year-old Shane Freer, a former employee who had been fired following an earlier incident at the restaurant. Freer had struck a young girl who had lobbed pieces of carrot and wet napkin at him.

Freer was suspended with pay and soon fired for gross misconduct. Although Marshall did not fire Freer, he believed his termination was her doing. Upon hearing his job was gone, he broke into tears and then said of Marshall, "I'll kill her."

True to his word, he purchased an eight-inch hunting knife, returned to the restaurant, and stabbed Marshall multiple times. She died two hours later in hospital.

The tragedy might have been prevented had somebody at the restaurant immediately sounded the alarm or called for help.

Deliver This Safety Talk

Workplace violence and active shooter events don't strike without warning. In most cases, there's a short window of between five and 15 minutes in which it becomes clear that violence is a real danger. Calling for help during that crucial window can prevent the violence and save lives. Even after the attack begins, summoning immediate assistance may be critical to controlling the situation and minimizing the damage.

Your company likely has a zero-tolerance policy on violence. This means no verbal or non-verbal threats or any other form of intimidation or assault.

Regrettably, people sometimes hesitate before calling for help. Potential reasons:

- They don't want to get another person in trouble.
- They second guess their own judgment and fear they may be overreacting.
- They're afraid of being blamed for the incident.
- They think it's too late to call for help.
- They don't think they'll be taken seriously.
- They fear they'll suffer retaliation.

None of these are good reasons not to call for help!

Bottom Line: Call for immediate help any time you face what you believe to be a potentially violent situation. Better to err on the side of raising a false alarm than failing to raise any alarm to a true threat.

Recognize that you will suffer no punishment of any kind for acting in good faith to report a violent situation. Calling for help isn't just your right but your obligation. And so is making proper use of security equipment is also part of your job. Don't attempt to bypass safeguards such as guard stations, identification badges, surveillance cameras, metal detectors, and turnstiles. Make use of the security tools provided, such as curved mirrors to monitor hallways and concealed areas. If you are issued a two-way radio, keep it with you and make sure it works.

Know what to do in an emergency. Learn about the silent alarms and other security devices in the workplace and how to activate them in an emergency. It's also very important to know what to do when calling 911, including what to tell the 911 operator:

- Let the operator control the conversation.
- Provide your name.
- Give the complete address where you need help.
- Know in advance where the facility is located, for example, local landmarks or intersections, in case the address is unknown, obscure, or the site is otherwise in a difficult to identify location.
- Explain the problem and why you need help.
- Listen to and accurately answer the operator's questions which will help the police or fire units responding to your emergency.
- Remain calm.
- Speak clearly and loudly but don't scream.

Final Word

Do NOT call 911 and hang up before speaking to the 911 operator. If you do, the operator will have to call you back, which will waste time. If you determine that the situation isn't an emergency after placing the call, stay on the line until the operator picks up and say, "This is not an emergency," and briefly describe why you called.