

Workplace Violence Training Program: Dealing with Robberies & Violent Customers

Tips to Prepare for Training Session

Before delivering your training:

- Determine and be prepared to focus on the particular robbery-related hazards to which your workers and trainees are exposed, whether they involve shiftwork, handling cash and valuables, remote parking areas, or other concerns.
- Find out if any defensive training is available to help workers identify and deal with risks to personal security—some companies and community programs offer instruction in self-defence strategies.
- Be ready to lead a discussion about possible improvements to workplace security.
- Ask your company's security or safety personnel if there are any issues they want you to emphasize at your safety meeting.

Start Session with Fatality Report

First, ask your trainees to talk about their safety and security concerns. Then relay this true story.

Sixteen-year-old Shona (not her real name) didn't even have time to react to the robber's demand for money before the bullet from his gun shattered her skull. Her mother was right beside her when Shona's world stopped forever.

Shona was a part-time cashier at her parents' restaurant in Wisconsin. She also prepared food and took customers' orders. The rest of her time was spent studying 10th grade subjects in high school.

Shona was standing behind the front counter of the restaurant watching television when a man wearing a bandana over his face entered and stood in front of the cash register. He pointed a handgun at Shona's face and demanded money from the cash drawer. Before she or her mother could respond, the gun fired, striking Shona in the face. She fell to the floor, and the suspect ran from the building.

Shona's father was working in the back kitchen when he heard the gunshot. He immediately pushed a silent alarm button to notify the security company, and Shona's mother phoned for emergency services. Paramedics and police responded within four minutes, but couldn't do much for Shona, who died of brain injuries. In their grief, Shona's parents subsequently closed their business.

About a month before the incident, two men tried to steal the television set from the customer service counter. But Shona's father stopped the robbery in progress. Three years before that, an armed robbery occurred at the restaurant.

Although the family had a silent alarm security system, a camera that was directed at the counter wasn't working. After police received information from an informant, three men were arrested, but only two were later convicted of murder.

Deliver This Safety Talk

Don't let what happened to Shona happen to you!

If your work involves direct interaction with the public, follow these precautions to protect against armed robberies and other acts of workplace violence:

- Be sure you understand and diligently follow company safety procedures for handling cash, dealing with the public, and defusing potentially violent persons and situations.
- Be aware of the company's security protocols and arrangements.
- Have a personal alarm or cell phone so you can easily notify security or authorities in an emergency.
- Ask your boss about reducing the amount of cash on the premises and hanging a sign clearly indicating that you don't keep cash at the site.
- Avoid working alone, if possible.
- Report any suspicious persons and vehicles you see at or around your jobsite.
- If you're the first to enter the facility at the start of the day or shift, follow company safety procedures for entering and de-activating the alarm.
- Before entering the premises, check for signs of forced or illegal entry.
- If you think someone may be inside, remain outside, re-lock the door, and call security or the police.
- If you're robbed, stay calm.
- Don't argue with robbers because they may be armed and very nervous.
- When confronted by an angry customer, remain calm, polite, and non-argumentative.
- In responding to the angry customer, suggest a solution to the problem rather than express disagreement or fight back.
- If your attempt at resolution fails, politely take the customer to your supervisor.

Final Word

Take responsibility for your personal safety. Stay alert, avoid dangerous situations, and stay out of conflicts at work. Prevention is your best protection.