

## Workplace Violence Training Program: General Prevention

### Start Session with Fatality Report

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

"That's what you get for firing me," said the man shooting rounds from a semi-automatic handgun at a group of managers. Three were killed and two were injured when the ex-employee found the group in a coffee shop near the workplace.

The gunman had been fired the day before after a troubled work history that included threats to other employees and carrying a handgun to work. Upon getting his pink slip, he said "You haven't seen the last of me."

When people think about workplace violence, stories like this come to mind. Lethal violence involving employees and ex-employees has affected large and small workplaces, including government bureaus, restaurants, schools, insurance offices, and many others.

Researchers say clear warning signs preceded 85% of workplace violence incidents. In many of the cases, supervisors and managers failed to check the worker's history before hiring. One worker who was fired for strange behaviour at one job repeated the same behaviour at his new workplace and took a fellow worker hostage. Large firms with personnel departments may routinely check work histories but smaller firms need to do so also, possibly with the help of an outside agency.

In many cases companies fail to recognize, ignore or don't take the warning signs seriously. Or if they do recognize the danger, they don't act quickly and decisively to deal with it. In one incident a company was attacked over the weekend by a violent worker it intended to notify the police about on Monday.

### Deliver This Safety Talk

Here's a Safety Talk script you can work from:

**What's At Stake:** Workplace violence can happen anywhere, any time. It can come from a co-worker or a stranger. And it isn't limited to physical assault. Workplace violence is any form of threatening or disruptive behaviour. It can be as simple as a gesture, such as a raised fist, or as complicated as sabotage.

**The Danger:** Every year about two million workers in the US experience workplace violence. The situation is similar in Canada, where 17% of all self-reported incidents of violence, including sexual assault, physical assault, and robbery, occur in the workplace.

**Look for Warning Signs:** Before people explode in violence at work, they often give signals that something is wrong. Common warning signs of workplace violence to look out for include:

- Social isolation
- Decrease in personal hygiene
- Constant and unwarranted complaints of unfair treatment
- Excessive lateness or absenteeism

- Faulty decision-making
- Blaming others for mistakes
- Inappropriate comments about revenge, violence or weapons
- Disrespect for authority
- Swearing
- Overreacting to criticism

**Precautions to Take:** Steps you can take to prevent or minimize or prevent the risks of being subjected to violence at work include:

- Don't get drawn into loud and aggressive arguments that can easily escalate into physical fights.
- Take verbal threats seriously, but don't confront or attack the person who threatens you.
- Report all threats to your supervisor or the company's security department.
- Report all incidents of bullying and sexual harassment.
- Watch for unauthorized visitors, even those who appear to have legitimate business at your plant.
- Report any suspicious person or vehicle to security personnel.
- Don't give out information about fellow employees.
- Keep doors locked before your business officially opens and after closing time.
- Always have access to communication devices so you can notify someone for help.
- Program emergency numbers into your phone's speed-dialing.
- Keep a list of emergency numbers in a nearby and accessible location that is readily visible.
- Use predetermined code words to signal that a visitor, customer, or other person may be violent in a way that won't tip that person off.
- Wear your identification badge as instructed.
- Never lend your key or entry card to anyone.
- Notify security if you have lost your keys or pass cards.
- Memorize your entry password instead of writing it down.
- Trust your instincts to act as your early warning system.

## Final Word

Knowing what workplace violence is, what you can do about it and what your company's policy is on the topic will go a long way to ensuring your safety and to curbing violence in your workplace.