Workplace violence prevention
A comprehensive guide for employers and employees

Introduction

1.1 The problem of workplace violence

There has been little research conducted and reported that investigates the causes of workplace violence. Further limiting our understanding of the phenomenon is that information from the perpetrator regarding motivation for the crime may not be available. According to a Ramsey County, Minnesota, report, *Ramsey County Initiative* (1994), some view violence as a misuse of power and authority. Additionally, social trends may account for some of the increases in workplace violence.

Our society has become increasingly technological and mobile. With the onset of computers, fax machines and email, face-to-face communication may be decreasing for many people. The potential to become more isolated at work and home is increasing. Fewer people know their neighbors and may interact with them less frequently. As individuals and families become more mobile, organizations such as churches and synagogues draw members who live throughout extensive metropolitan areas.

Workplace violence causes a significant number of fatalities throughout the United States. In 1996, the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) reported in its study, *Violence in the Workplace: Risk Factors and Prevention Strategies* that in any given week, about 20 workers are murdered in the United States. Statistics about workplace fatalities show that assaults and other violent acts are among the leading causes of work-related deaths in a number of states. For women, violence is the leading cause of workplace fatalities in the United States.

Nonfatal acts of violence in the workplace are numerous, but national data about the frequency of these injuries is limited. Using survey data collected during 1987 to 1992, the National Crime Victimization Survey estimates nearly one million workers are assaulted annually in U.S workplaces.

Violence in the workplace, home and community are strongly associated. For example, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that in 1992, approximately 20 percent of women killed in the workplace were murdered by a husband or male partner, former or current. In the short term, employees can take steps to make the workplace safer. In the long term, these steps will not be fully successful unless the underlying causes of violence in society are addressed. Therefore, it is critical that business, labor, social and health services, education, law enforcement and government undertake a collaborative approach to prevention.

1.2 Identifying the risk factors and symptoms of workplace violence

It is important to remember even the most respectful environment can experience incidents of workplace violence. The environment may not always be the stressor that leads to the occurrence of

an incident. An employee may be experiencing psychological problems, be under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or suffering from familial stress. He or she may have developed a "romantic" obsession for another employee, feeling abandoned and humiliated by his or her rejection; he or she may be feeling overlooked in not receiving a desired promotion; and he or she may be experiencing rage due to the knowledge of a potential layoff.

To intervene in a timely and appropriate manner before a violent episode occurs, it is important to be able to identify the stages of workplace violence. Employees should have knowledge of these stages so they can inform management of potential incidents. Management should have a plan in place for appropriate, early intervention.

The following are indicators that can signal the risk potential of violent episodes.

- Sudden and persistent complaining about being treated unfairly
- Blaming of others for personal problems
- Sudden change in behavior, deterioration in job performance
- Statement he or she would like something bad to happen to supervisor or another coworker
- Paranoid behavior
- Sudden increased absenteeism
- Sexually harassing or obsessing about a coworker: sending unwanted gifts, notes, unwanted calling, stalking
- Increased demand of supervisor's time
- Alcohol or drug abuse
- Talking to oneself
- Instability in family relationships
- Financial problems combined with not receiving a raise or promotion
- Poor relationships with coworkers or management
- History of violent behavior
- Previous threats, direct or indirect
- Presenting and talking about reading material that is violent in nature
- Carrying a concealed weapon or flashing one around
- Quiet seething, sullenness
- Refusal to accept criticism about job performance
- Sudden mood swings, depression
- Sudden refusal to comply with rules or refusal to perform duties
- Inability to control feelings, outbursts of rage, swearing, slamming doors, etc.

If an employee begins demonstrating any or a combination of the above indicators, it is important management refers him or her to the employee assistance program (EAP) or other counseling services as soon as possible. It is imperative to respond in an empathic, caring and nonshaming manner, remembering that time is of the essence.

Oftentimes, violence in the workplace is committed by someone from outside the agency or business. Therefore, when possible, it is important to have surveillance at the entrance of the school or business. The following situations indicate a potential threat.

- The spouse or partner of an employee who is in an abusive relationship
- Rejected suitors, partners involved in divorce or separation procedures

- Ex-employees who have been fired or laid off
- Disgruntled customers
- Person committing armed robbery
- People involved in gang activities
- In school settings, parents who feel their child has been treated unfairly or students who have been suspended

1.3 Types of workplace violence and their characteristics

Workplace violence occurs in a variety of forms. These "types" are violence by strangers, violence by customers or clients, violence by coworkers and violence by personal relationships. These types of workplace violence and their specific characteristics are described below.

Type 1: Violence by strangers – involves verbal threats, threatening behavior or physical assaults by an assailant who has no legitimate business relationship to the workplace. The person enters the affected workplace to commit a robbery or criminal act. Violence by strangers is responsible for the majority of fatal injuries related to workplace violence nationally. Workplaces at risk of violence by strangers commonly include late-night retail establishments and taxi cabs.

Type 2: Violence by customers or clients – involves verbal threats, threatening behavior or physical assaults by an assailant who either receives services from or is under the custodial supervision of the affected workplace or the victim. Assailants can be current or former customers or clients, such as passengers, patients, students, inmates, criminal suspects or prisoners. The workers typically provide services to the public, such as municipal bus or railway drivers, health care and social service providers, teachers, sales personnel and other public or private sector service employees. Law enforcement personnel are also at risk of assault, for example, from individuals over whom they exert custodial supervision. Violence by customers or clients may occur on a daily basis in certain industries.

It is considered pertinent to further illustrate violence by customers or clients. The first involves individuals who may have a history of violent behavior, such as prison inmates and mental health service recipients. Situations where this may occur are usually well-recognized, and prevention focuses on appropriate staffing and specialized training, augmented with other control measures. The second arises when clients or customers may be "situationally" violent and are provoked when they become frustrated by delays or by the denial of benefits or social services. In these cases, problem anticipation, appropriate training and other control measures deemed effective are the focus of prevention.

Type 3: Violence by coworkers – involves verbal threats, threatening behavior or physical assaults by an assailant who has some employment-related involvement with the workplace, such as a current or former employee, supervisor or manager. Any workplace can be at risk of violence by a coworker. In committing a threat or assault, the individual may be seeking revenge for what is perceived as unfair treatment. This type of violence accounts for a much smaller proportion of the fatal workplace injuries than violence by strangers.

Type 4: Violence by personal relations – involves verbal threats, threatening behavior or physical assaults by an assailant who, in the workplace, confronts an individual with whom he or she has or

had a personal relationship outside of work. Personal relations include a current or former spouse, lover, relative, friend or acquaintance. The assailant's actions are motivated by perceived difficulties in the relationship or by psycho-social factors that are specific to the assailant.

Developing and implementing a workplace violence prevention program and policy

The first priority in developing a workplace violence prevention policy is to establish a system for documenting violent incidents in the workplace. Such statistics are essential for assessing the nature and magnitude of workplace violence in a given workplace and quantifying risk. These statistics can be used to assess the need for action to reduce or mitigate the risks for workplace violence and implement a reasonable intervention strategy. An existing intervention strategy may be identified within an industry or in similar industries, or new and unique strategies may be needed to address the risks in a given workplace or setting.
Implementation of the reporting system, a workplace violence prevention policy and specific prevention strategies should also be publicized companywide, and appropriate training sessions should be scheduled. The demonstrated commitment of management is crucial to the success of the program. The success and appropriateness of intervention strategies can be monitored and adjusted with continued data collection.

A written workplace violence prevention policy should clearly indicate a zero-tolerance of violence at work, whether the violence originates inside or outside the workplace. Just as workplaces have developed mechanisms for reporting and dealing with sexual harassment, they must also develop threat assessment teams to which threats and violent incidents can be reported. These teams should include representatives from human resources, security, employee assistance, unions, workers, management, and perhaps legal and public relations departments. The charge to this team is to assess the threats of violence (e.g., to determine how specific a threat is, whether the person threatening the worker has the means for carrying out the threat, etc.) and to determine what steps are necessary to prevent the threat from being carried out.

This team should also be charged with periodic reviews of violent incidents to identify ways in which similar incidents can be prevented in the future. Note that when violence or the threat of violence occurs among coworkers, firing the perpetrator may or may not be the most appropriate way to reduce the risk for additional or future violence. The employer may want to retain some control of the perpetrator and require or provide counseling or other care, if appropriate. The violence prevention policy should explicitly state the consequences of making threats or committing acts of violence in the workplace.

A comprehensive workplace violence prevention policy and program should include emergency procedures in the event of a violent incident in the workplace. This policy should explicitly state how the response team is to be assembled and who is responsible for immediate care of the victim(s), reestablishing work areas and processes, and organizing and carrying out stress-debriefing sessions with victims, their coworkers and perhaps the families of victims and coworkers. Employee assistance programs, human resource professionals, and local mental health and emergency service personnel can offer assistance in developing these strategies.

Prevention strategies

2.1 Environmental designs

Commonly implemented cash-handling policies in retail settings include procedures such as using locked drop safes, carrying small amounts of cash, and posting signs and printing notices that limited cash is available. It may also be useful to explore the feasibility of cashless transactions in taxicabs and retail settings through the use of machines that accommodate automatic teller account cards or debit cards. These approaches could be used in any setting where cash is currently exchanged between employees and customers.

Physical separation of employees from customers, clients and the general public through the use of bullet-resistant barriers or enclosures has been proposed for retail settings such as gas stations and convenience stores, hospital emergency departments and social service agency claims areas. The height and depth of counters (with or without bullet-resistant barriers) are also important considerations in protecting employees, since they introduce physical distance between employees and potential attackers. Nonetheless, consideration must be given to the continued ease of conducting business; a safety device that increases frustration for employees or for customers, clients or patients may be self-defeating.

Visibility and lighting are also important environmental-design considerations. Making high-risk areas visible to more people and installing good external lighting should decrease the risk of workplace assaults (NIOSH 1993).

Access to and exits from the workplace are also important areas to assess. The number of entrances and exits, the ease with which nonworkers can gain access to work areas because doors are unlocked and the number of areas where potential attackers can hide are issues that should be addressed. The issues have implications for the design of buildings and parking areas, landscaping and the placement of garbage areas, outdoor refrigeration areas and other storage facilities that workers must use during a work shift.

Numerous security devices may reduce the risk for assaults against employees and facilitate the identification and apprehension of perpetrators. These include closed-circuit cameras, alarms, two-way mirrors, electronic control access systems, panic-bar doors locked from the outside only and trouble lights or geographic locating devices in taxicabs and other mobile workplaces.

Personal protective equipment such as body armor has been used effectively by public safety personnel to mitigate the effects of workplace violence. For example, the lives of more than 1,800 police officers have been saved by *Kevlar* protective vests (Brierley 1996).

2.2 Administrative controls

Staffing plans and work practices (such as escorting patients and prohibiting unsupervised movement within and between clinic areas) are recommended. Increasing the number of staff on duty may also be appropriate in any number of service and retail settings. The use of security guards or receptionists to screen people entering the workplace and to control access to actual work areas has also been suggested by security experts.

Work practices and staffing patterns during the opening and closing of establishments and during money drops and pickups should be carefully reviewed for the increased risk of assault they pose to employees; these practices include having employees take out garbage, dispose of grease, store food or other items in external storage areas, and transport of store money.

Policies and procedures for accessing and reporting threats allow employers to track and assess threats and violent incidents in the workplace. Such policies clearly indicate a zero-tolerance of workplace violence and provide mechanisms by which incidents can be reported and handled. In addition, such information always allows employers to assess whether prevention strategies are appropriate and effective. These policies should also include guidance on recognizing the potential for violence, methods for defusing or de-escalating potentially violent situations, and instruction about the use of security devices and protective equipment. Procedures for obtaining medical care and psychological support following violent incidents should also be addressed. Training and education efforts are clearly needed to accompany such policies.

2.3 Behavioral strategies

Training employees in nonviolent response and conflict resolution has been suggested to reduce the risk that volatile situations will escalate to physical violence. Also critical is training that addresses hazards associated with specific tasks or worksites and relevant prevention strategies. Training should not be regarded as the sole prevention strategy but as a component in a comprehensive approach to reducing workplace violence. To increase vigilance and compliance with stated violence-prevention policies, training should emphasize the appropriate use and maintenance of protective equipment, adherence to administrative controls, and increased knowledge and awareness of the risk of workplace violence.

The role of Minnesota OSHA's "A workplace accident and injury reduction" (AWAIR) program

The state of Minnesota enacted Minnesota Statutes § 182.653, subd. 8, citing employers whose workplaces are at risk for violations of workplace safety conditions. The statute known as the "A workplace accident and injury reduction (AWAIR) Act," was enacted by the Minnesota Legislature in 1990. This statute requires employers to have and implement written safety programs.

The AWAIR Act statute provides the following.

Subd. 8. Workplace programs. An employer covered by this section must establish a written workplace accident and injury reduction program that promotes safe and healthful working conditions and is based on clearly stated goals and objectives for meeting those goals. The program must describe:

1   how managers, supervisors, and employees are responsible for implementing the program and how continued participation of management will be established, measured and maintained;
2   the methods used to identify, analyze and control new or existing hazards, conditions and operations;

3   how the plan will be communicated to all affected employees so that they are informed of work-related hazards and controls;
4   how accidents will be investigated and corrective action implemented; and
5   how safe work practices and rules will be enforced.

An employer must conduct and document a review of the workplace accident and injury reduction program at least annually and document how procedures set forth in the program are met. Employers with workplaces included in the scope of the AWAIR Act must have a written safety program adequately addressing and implementing each of the requirements listed in the statute. The primary or secondary standard industrial classification (SIC) for a workplace is listed in Minnesota Rules Part 5205.1500, and that workplace or portion of a workplace, must have a current written safety program. Citations may be issued for lack of a complete AWAIR program, for failure to have the specified documentation and for failure to actually implement the written program.

A workplace violence situation could result in an AWAIR citation, due to the fact that violence is a hazard and should, thereby, be included in a company's written safety program. Just as for any workplace hazard, the written program should cover participation of management, communication, investigation, correction and enforcement as necessary for hazards resulting from threats of violence or violent actions.

General duty clause – There is no OSHA standard that specifically addresses an employer's duty to prevent incidents of violence in the workplace. In situations where there is no specific standard to address a particular hazard, the only tool available to OSHA is the general duty clause. The general duty clause requires employers to furnish a workplace "free from recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm" (Section 5(a)(1) of the Occupational Safety and Health Act, 29 U.S.C. 654(A)(1)). Minnesota's general duty clause is codified at M.S. § 182.652, subd. 2 (1992).

To prove a violation of the general duty clause, federal OSHA (or in Minnesota, the state program) must establish:
1   the employer failed to render the workplace free of hazards to employees;
2   the cited employer or the employer's industry recognized the hazard;
3   the hazard caused or was likely to cause death or serious physical harm;
4   feasible means existed to eliminate or materially reduce the hazard; and
5   the employer knew, or with reasonable diligence could have known, of the recognized hazard.

In the context of workplace violence, proving these elements can be difficult. For example, one of the common challenges to a general duty clause citation is that the cited condition was not **recognized as a hazard by the employer or others in the employer's industry**. Although awareness of workplace violence is growing, employers in some industries may not realize their workplaces are at high risk for violent incidents. But even in cases where the cited employer does not recognize a condition or activity as a hazard, the courts and the OSHA Review Commission look to what is reasonable and customary in a particular industry to determine whether a hazard is recognized.

For employers, this means that if others in their industry are taking precautions aimed at reducing violence, they must consider taking the same measures or assessing their particular workplace to determine the exact nature of the threat of violence. In addition, if management has actual knowledge that the threat of violence exists in the workplace, violence is a recognized hazard to **that employer** and steps must be taken to eliminate (abate) the hazard. Employers should also keep in mind they may be held to a higher standard if the industry in which they are engaged has been negligent in recognizing and preventing workplace hazards.

3.1 Workplace violence in Minnesota

The problem of violence in the workplace has continued to be a serious public health issue. However, to date, little has been documented relevant to nonfatal events associated with these incidents. The likelihood of encountering an incident of workplace violence will vary greatly depending on where one works. At the present time, *NIOSH, 1996* has estimated there are between 700 and 1,000 workplace homicides each year in the entire country. The highest-risk industries for workplace homicide are taxicab services, liquor stores, gas stations and law enforcement. More than half of all workplace homicides occur in retail trades and service industries. Of all workplace homicides, 75 percent are robbery related. Although 80 percent happen to men, homicides are the leading cause of workplace death for women. Between 4 and 6 percent are attributed to coworkers or former employees, and 4 percent stem from personal disputes or acquaintances. Of all nonfatal assaults in the workplace, 85 percent occur in the service and retail industries. Also according to *NIOSH, 1996,* the most frequent workplace assault that leads to days away from work comes from health care patients (45 percent), followed by "other persons," with coworkers and former coworkers at 6 percent. Some 30 to 35percent of victims of workplace assaults knew their assailant either as a customer, coworker or business associate. This means a majority of assaults come from strangers.

In some work settings, the most likely source of workplace violence will be coworkers/supervisors or family/former family. In other work settings, the most likely source will be external – customers, clients, patients, criminals. It is crucial each worksite does a thorough inventory of the threats of violence that have and will impact it.

In Minnesota, assaulted women are most likely to be in service, managerial/professional, administrative/clerical or technical occupations. Assaulted men are most likely to be in service, transportation and material moving, or managerial/professional occupations. *(Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry, Research Statistics. Based on 1993 through 1996 data.)*

3.2 Domestic violence in Minnesota as a workplace issue

Domestic violence has been acknowledged as abusive behavior that is physical, sexual and/or psychological, intended to establish and maintain control of a partner. Domestic violence is a serious problem that affects people from all walks of life. It can adversely affect the well-being and productivity of employees who are victims, as well as their coworkers. Other effects of domestic violence in the workplace include increased absenteeism, turnover, health care costs and reduced productivity.

Each year, about one million women become victims of violence at the hands of an intimate – a husband, boyfriend or ex-boyfriend. Some estimates are even higher. According to the U.S Bureau of Justice, women are about six times more likely than men to experience violence committed by an intimate. In addition, it has also been reported that at work, women are more likely than men to be attacked by an intimate, whereas men are more likely to be attacked by a stranger. Each year, nearly one million individuals become victims of violent crime while working or on duty. During the period 1987 to 1992, the U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics reported 5 percent of the women victimized at work were attacked by a husband, ex-husband, boyfriend or ex-boyfriend compared to 1 percent of men who were victimized by an intimate. When an employee is the target of an attack in the workplace by an intimate, other employees may also be placed at risk.

Homicide is by far the most frequent manner in which women workers are fatally injured at work. Although more women at work are killed in the course of a robbery or other crime, or by a work associate, from 1992 to 1994, 17 percent of their alleged attackers were current or former husbands or boyfriends. For black women, the figure was 28 percent and for Hispanic women, 20 percent.

Employers should always be committed to working with employees who are victims of domestic violence to prevent abuse and harassment from occurring in the workplace. No employee should be penalized or disciplined solely for being a victim of harassment in the workplace. Establishments should provide appropriate support and assistance to employees who are victims of domestic violence. This includes: confidential means for coming forward for help, resource and referral information, work schedule adjustments or leave as needed to obtain assistance and workplace relocation as feasible.

Domestic violence

Employees who are perpetrators of domestic violence should also be encouraged to seek assistance. Establishments should provide information regarding counseling and certified treatment resources, and make work-schedule arrangements to receive such assistance.

It is important employers and employees know how best to respond to the effects of domestic violence in the workplace. In addition, they also should be aware of physical or behavioral changes in other employees and know who – personnel officer, manager and/or employee advisory service/resource – they can contact for advice. They should not attempt to diagnose the employee.

The following are options for employees who are **victims** of domestic violence.

• Tell a trusted coworker, supervisor or manager, and ask for help.
• Contact your personnel officer for assistance.
• Contact the employee advisory service/assistance resource.
• Call the local police.
• Notify your supervisor of a possible need to be absent. Find out what work schedule or leave options are available to you. Be clear about your plans to return to work and maintain communications with your supervisor during your absence.
• If appropriate and if safety is a concern, submit a recent photograph of the abuser and a copy of your protection order to your supervisor. This assists your employer in identifying the abuser should he/she appear in the workplace.

The following are options for employees who are **perpetrators** of domestic violence.

- Tell a trusted coworker, supervisor or manager, and ask for help.
- Contact your personnel officer and ask for help.
- Contact the employee advisory service/resource.
- Obtain a referral to a certified domestic violence perpetrators' treatment program.

4.1 Issues to consider when designing violence prevention programs

In designing violence prevention programs, the following issues must be seriously taken into consideration.

1   The economic situation within a community is absolutely critical. Poverty, unemployment and underemployment are associated with significantly increased levels of violence.
2   Government's responsibility is not always to set up new, stand-alone programs; rather, government's position should be to facilitate the involvement of others and to encourage partnerships.
3   Sexual assaults, rape and date rape are very much a part of the violence problem. When health officials study violence, they generally review death and hospitalization statistics. Although sexual-assault injuries may not show up in their specific data sets as often as other types of violence, they are widespread, devastating and traumatic.
4   Violence must be understood as a reaction to economic, racial, sexual, cultural and age-based oppression. Therefore, options to violence must come from an understanding of the context of oppression rather than from a "blaming the victim" point of view.
5   The issues of guns cannot be ignored because guns are the instruments most often used in homicides, assaults and suicides.
6   Adults, particularly parents and other caregivers, need to be part of the solution. For example, one of the achievements of the Contra Costa County violence prevention effort was the development of the Workplace Program, funded by United Way. This project trains parents at their worksites about violence prevention, substance-abuse prevention and conflict-resolution skills.
7   In efforts to reduce violence, it is essential that youth be part of the solution.
8   The lessons about preventing post-traumatic stress that have been learned from wars need to be applied to inner cities. That is, we need to identify people who have witnessed or experienced violence and immediately talk with them.
9   Understanding the complex relationship between alcohol, other drugs and violence is critical and cannot be ignored in violence-prevention efforts.
10 Another key factor in violence prevention is the presence and impact of the media. Regular television programming, for example, includes a large amount of violence.
11 Evaluation of violence prevention programs and strategies is critical.

4.2 School safety plan
(For a more incisive discussion, see Edward J. Swenson, *1996, Developing a School Safety Plan.)*

There are three major components to a comprehensive school safety plan. This is a fundamental understanding; failure to attend to one of these components will jeopardize the effectiveness of the others.

The school safety plan is built around the three components of an anti-violence effort: **interdiction, intervention** and **prevention**. Each activity, which a school engages to alleviate violence, is part of one or more of these components. Each component contains a constellation of programs and processes. Below is a brief explanation of these components.

Interdiction: This component addresses the procedures and processes necessary to prohibit and discourage acts of violence. It includes programs and practices that ensure the school is and will remain safe. Board policy, supervision techniques, security and a variety of management techniques are included in this component.

Intervention: The intervention effort recognizes there will be pupils who are unable or unwilling to modify their behavior to conform with the school's discipline and conduct policies and regulations. Intervention efforts are remedial. These programs include counseling, peer mediation, conflict resolution and alternative school placement among others.

Prevention: This component includes the development of programs that address the causes of violent and disruptive behavior. This component encompasses curriculum and programs that include mentoring programs; anger-management-and-reduction programs; career-path education; and value, virtue and justice units that are spliced into the standard curriculum.

Establishing or restoring an interdiction capability will be the initial focus for many school districts. Without a safe and orderly environment, the effectiveness of intervention and prevention strategies is compromised. If students are unable to function effectively in the school setting, intervention programs are initiated. Intervention does not make sense unless the district has met its interdiction requirement. The application of intervention programs without interdiction generates an "enabling climate" wherein the pupil is enabled to continue to be disruptive while participating in some form of intervention program. Prevention programs are the long-term-solution element in the model. Prevention programs build long-term solutions and permit the pupil to make positive life choices. These programs address the **cause** of violence and thereby mitigate the **effects**.

Building the school plan

The goal of a comprehensive plan is to provide a school with a continuing capability to prevent disruptive and violent acts and cope with them if they should occur. The building of the plan is bolstered by an appreciation and use of planning theory and system analysis. The plan will result in developing specific objectives and activities strengthening the capabilities of the school to prevent violence and remedy situations if necessary.

1. A school safety committee – This is a recommended vehicle for developing the school safety plan. This committee is charged with the responsibility of developing the plan and monitoring its implementation. As with any other institutional endeavor, if everyone is responsible, no one is found wanting. This committee should report on a regular basis to the board of education, administration and school community.

2. The principal players – The framers of the plan will, in many cases, be the participants in plan development. The following are suggested team members.

- **The board of education:** This is the policymaking and responsible group for the conduct of the school district. The board is accountable for the quality of education and for the establishment of a safe school environment. In establishing policy and regulation, it sets the "tone" for the school district. The board of education has a critical leadership role in the development of a proactive school safety plan.
- **The superintendent of schools:** The superintendent is the chief executive officer of the board of education. As such, he or she plays a most critical role in establishing the plan and providing the organizational support, resources, moral commitment and supervision necessary for its success.
- **Building principals:** The building principal is the individual administrator closest to the setting. The principal is aware of resources and the student population. The capabilities of personnel and resources are best assessed by this individual.
- **Teachers:** The teacher is closest to the youngsters and encounters and transacts with pupils daily. The teacher delivers instruction and evaluates pupils affectively and cognitively. The teacher's quality of life and ability to perform service is determined in large measure by the security and safety of the environment.
- **Parents:** The parent is a partner in the issue of school safety and anti-violence education. A holistic approach to pupil behavior must naturally consider the parent. Parents are also rightfully concerned about issues relating to their child's safety and are among the most interested stakeholders in the school community.
- **Police and law enforcement personnel:** These individuals can play a most critical role in the implementation of a school's anti-violence program. Their participation in the planning process can be invaluable. Ideally, they are involved early in the plan development. The early inclusion of the police agency in the planning process provides an opportunity to share ideas as well as a knowledge of roles, capabilities and limitations.
- **Security personnel:** In the event that a school uses security personnel, it is very important to have the leadership of this group involved in the development of the plan.
- **The school board attorney:** Much of the ground that is covered in an anti-violence plan represents new territory. In the plan development, the attorney plays a critical role. The attorney can advise about the legality of the initiatives, propose alternatives, interpret law and brief participants on case law and its implications to portions of the plan. The attorney can draft needed policies and regulations requisite to putting the plan into action.
- **Pupil representation:** Statistics indicate the pupil is the most likely target of a violent or a personally disruptive act. The planners should seriously consider including representation from the student body in the school safety planning group. Students provide insights and perceptions into the problems other members will not have. Due to the sensitive and secure nature of some components of the plan (critical incident planning, tactics, etc.) their participation should be limited from time to time.
- **Additional personnel and resources:** Each school district is in the best position to determine what other stakeholder groups should be involved in the process of developing the plan. In addition, there are other resources that can be enlisted to assist in the plan's development. The New York State School Board's Association is an excellent resource for counsel about matters related to policy and law. Its consultants can provide assistance and direction based on experience. Other professional organizations and governmental agencies are beginning to develop capabilities to assist schools in their anti-violence efforts.

4.3 Occupation and industry plan
(For a detailed discussion, see Carol Keyes, M.A., Complete Health, Environmental and Safety Services, and Jeanmarie Keim, Ph.D., Counseling Psychology, *Workplace Violence: What Is It and How Do We Prevent It? (1996).*)

While OSHA does not currently have a published standard or policy specifically addressing workplace violence, the federal OSHA General Duty Clause (Section 5(a)(1)(Occupational Safety and Health Act, 1970) states that an employer is obligated to provide a place of employment "free from recognized hazards." Some states and associations have gone beyond federal OSHA guidelines. The Kenwood Group (1994), in discussing California legislation, reported that health care facilities need to have security plans, conduct safety/security assessments and train employees. The state of Minnesota created a task force to develop guidelines for a workplace safety standard. Regardless of legislative mandate, employers can work to prevent workplace violence.

Theoretically, workplace violence issues can be circumvented or dealt with in three areas: pre-employment hiring practices (before the person is an employee), disciplinary actions with zero-tolerance policies (after the person is an employee but before a major violent act occurs) or post-incident policies (after the violence has occurred). The most expensive and costly way for a business is to deal with a problem after it has occurred, thus emphasizing the importance of prevention of violence as a management priority. As a starting point, employers should have a definition of what is considered workplace violence and a policy outlining procedures for these situations that is distributed to all employees (Anfosu, 1994).

To prevent workplace violence, employers should look at their atmosphere. According to Thomas Harpley, the clinical director of National Trauma Services in San Diego, Calif., management intimidation is consistently found in companies with workplace violence problems (McGarvey, 1994). Increased uncertainty about job security, not being able to pace your work, conflicting expectations, layoffs, job stress and a general feeling of disrespect for employees foster an environment where workplace violence is more likely to occur. It is important that managers be receptive to employee concerns and respond seriously to complaints or concerns so employees feel they have a voice (Bensimon, 1994; and McGarvey, 1994).

The federal OSHA General Duty Clause (1970) makes employers accountable for recognizing and preventing known hazards. Moreover, independent of an employer's responsibility under OSHA laws, employers can be liable for negligent hiring practices, negligent training, negligent retention and negligent supervision (Kenwood Group,1994; and OSHA, 1970). Employers should review their hiring practices, check references, and consider both background checks and personality testing when appropriate (Anfosu, 1994). Attention to these areas is one way to reduce the impact of negligent hiring. Background checks should include a check for criminal records and prior history of violence or abuse. Employment testing must be job-related with a connection between the test administered and successful job performance for the applicant who has applied.

Clear job descriptions are important because they not only define the essential functions of a job, but include information about contact with the public and with other employees. Potential employees should read the job description and agree to it prior to employment (Kenwood Group, 1994). Background checks and testing, when used, should be applied uniformly to all applicants for a specific job for which the check/test is being used. There is an obvious concern about an applicants rights under data privacy, EEOC and the American with Disabilities Act (ADA). Implications of

these laws must be taken into consideration when instituting any employment screening and hiring practices.

Employers may want to use threat-assessment teams designed to identify and address hazards in the workplace, in this case specifically related to workplace violence hazards. Similar to safety and human resource personnel performing job analyses to determine physical demand and hazards of a job, threat-assessment teams conduct workplace analyses examining the risks and dangers present. Workplace analysis should take into consideration what is happening in the industry as a whole rather than focusing only on a specific worksite. MNOSHA may hold an employer responsible for the industry standard.

If an incident occurs, having emergency plans and an emergency response team in place to respond to violent acts resulting in injury or death are helpful. Emergency responders (i.e. fire, police units) should be contacted when appropriate. One employee should be assigned to meet emergency teams and direct them within the facility. A company officer or another employee can be assigned to deal with the media, if necessary. If the company has an employee assistance plan, it should be contacted to help provide debriefing following the incident. If an incident occurs resulting in death or hospitalization of more than three people, federal OSHA requires OSHA offices be notified within eight hours. In Minnesota, MNOSHA offices must be notified within eight hours and the Department of Labor and Industry's Workers' Compensation Division and the employer's workers' compensation carrier must be notified within 48 hours. Arrangements should be made for transporting people home if they are unable to drive and for contacting relatives when necessary (Benison,1994).

Debriefing is used to minimize the psychological impact of a traumatic incident on victims, survivors and relatives, and generally is provided by trained mental health professionals. Employee assistance programs usually have counselors who specialize in this area. Local police departments and professional psychologists may also be available to assist. Debriefing entails individual or group sessions to discuss the incident and the impact it has had on people. Encouraging people to talk about the event as soon as they are comfortable doing so helps to lessen the psychological trauma resulting from the event. Some employees may never resume work at a site that has had a death or violent incident. These individuals may need counseling, outplacement services or reassignment to another facility.

Top 10 ways to prevent violence in the workplace

There is no single prescription for reducing violence in the workplace. Each organization is unique and operates in a different social and economic environment. When planning workplace safety issues, employers may want to consider the organization's culture, history, size, industry and workforce.

These 10 prescriptions are based on responses from survey participants and recommendations from experts who guided the research. The suggestions should be modified to best accommodate the unique needs of any organization.

1. Foster a supportive, harmonious work environment – Creating a culture of mutual respect can help reduce harassment and hostility in the workplace. In such a culture, employers strive to communicate openly, give employees adequate control in their work and provide them with support

and recognition. Conflict and stress are lower when employees feel empowered to work independently and are motivated to work cooperatively.

2. Train supervisors and employees how to resolve conflicts – Conflict on the job can be reduced by developing employees' skills in negotiating, communicating effectively, team building and resolving disputes. Furthermore, programs that encourage respect for diversity can help to lessen interpersonal conflicts.

3. Develop effective policies to protect employees from harassment – While all companies strive to build a culture devoid of harassment and discrimination, they can advance this goal by having systems in place to address infractions. The key is a company harassment policy that clearly denounces harassment and states unequivocally it will not be tolerated. A thorough policy defines harassment, specifies how to report it, explains how complaints will be investigated and presents the consequences.

4. Establish procedures for handling grievances – Employees need to: understand grievance procedures for reporting complaints of unfair treatment, discrimination or harassment; believe those procedures will be followed; and feel confident concerns will be addressed promptly and confidently.

5. Provide personal counseling through an employee assistance program – Family, marital, financial and personal issues can have a profound impact on employees' work performance, as well as their social interaction at work. An employee assistance program provides employees with a free, easily accessible and confidential resource for addressing personal concerns. In addition, supervisors can be trained about how to document and address work-performance and attitude problems and refer employees for help. If a violent or threatening incident occurs at work, support services can be made available to help employees cope with their fears and concerns.

6. Implement security programs that protect employees – Employers have a variety of methods for ensuring workers' safety, such as full-time or after-hours security guards, high-tech monitoring systems, emergency warning systems, limited access key cards, strict visitor sign-in policies, new employee background screening, and safety awareness and training. Companies that regularly evaluate their security programs can best determine if they are meeting company and employee needs. Also, employers need to make sure employees are aware of and understand existing security policies and procedures.

7. Provide employee safety education programs – In addition to making workers aware of company safety policies and employee support services, employers can provide educational materials and seminars about ways to maximize safety at work.

8. Provide job counseling for employees who have been laid off or fired – Because a job is often closely tied to one's identity, being laid off can be traumatic. Employee counseling and support services can help workers develop job-seeking skills, learn how to cope with life changes, and personally and financially prepare for the future. These services also help existing employees feel the company cares about them. It is helpful to train supervisors to sensitively communicate layoffs and firings.

9. Train supervisors how to recognize signs of a troubled employee – One way to reduce the potential for workplace violence is to intervene before an incident reaches a flash point. Supervisors

can be given training about how to recognize signs and symptoms of a potentially violent employee, such as threatening behavior or preoccupation with violence. Also, supervisors can be instructed about how to be sensitive to signs of possible abuse among employees, such as frequent absences or depression.

10. Set up a crisis plan – Employers may consider developing a crisis plan for dealing with violent incidents. The plan can include details about how to report the incident, which key internal managers and external authorities should be alerted, how to maintain the safety of unaffected workers and security precautions to prevent further trouble. Companies can also arrange to provide individual crisis counseling and support groups for affected employees soon after the incident occurs.

Fear and Violence in the Workplace: A Survey Documenting the Experience of American Workers. October 1993. Northwestern National Life Insurance.