

Workplace security assessment helps prevent workplace violence

By Molly Byrne and Johanna Foucher

Before you begin

Violence in the workplace is any unwelcome harassment, threats or attacks that cause fear, mental or physical harm or unreasonable workplace stress. Along with increased awareness and written policies and training, a physical workplace security assessment is an important step for developing a successful violence in the workplace prevention program.



Introduction

To identify potential violence in the workplace risk factors, conduct a security assessment that analyzes conditions and processes inside and outside your establishment. It is beneficial to include employees in the design and completion of a security assessment because they can provide insight and suggestions that managers and outside resources may not consider.

In addition, this offers employees a chance to communicate any difficulties they or their co-workers may have in understanding the employer's policies and procedures for violence in the workplace and security issues.

Basic assessment tips and questions

A basic assessment should include the items listed below.

- o Note your hours of operation. Include the times of year that it is dark outside when employees enter or leave the building. Check for ample lighting in the outside parking lots and building entrances. In addition, see if there are any remote areas inside the building where lighting needs improvement such as access hallways, stairwells, etc. Make sure you maintain lighting and service it regularly in those areas.
- o Evaluate landscaping to ensure it cannot provide a hiding place for a potential attacker. Make sure entrances are not visibly blocked from view by overgrown landscaping, signage or any other obstructions.
- o Ensure you secure multiple entrances to the building so you can monitor and control visitor, contractor and vendor access. Do you have an accountability system such as a sign-in/sign out log for visitors and vendors to your building?
- o Determine if alarmed doors are regularly disarmed or propped open during the day. If so, find out the cause for this security breach (i.e., smokers, poor ventilation, visibility, etc.) and develop remedies to address them.
- o If you have operations that involve cash or money transactions, verify they are secure. Are there procedures in place to protect employees while dealing with the public and handling money? Consider limiting the amount of cash you have on the premises at all times using locked safes and regular cash pickups via secure armored transportation.
- o Make sure you train employees in customer service skills, including conflict resolution. There are many programs available to provide specific training in conflict resolution, de-escalation techniques, self defense, etc. BWC's Ohio Center for

Occupational Safety and Health (OCOSH) in Pickerington offers one course named Non-violent Strategies for Caregivers and Other Staff Working Directly with the Public.

- o If your company has a security alert system in place, have you trained employees on the reasons for and the importance of the system? Do you have procedures for conducting employee interviews as well as discipline or terminations? Check the room layout so the interviewer is closest to the door and there are no potential weapons on the desk such as staplers, paperweights, etc. In termination and discipline hearings, establish procedures that include notification and presence of security personnel.
- o Is there a hiring process that thoroughly checks any potential employee's background and criminal history? Many Ohio employers, both public and private, must perform background checks on new hires and persons obtaining professional licenses. Along with many private companies, the Ohio Attorney General's Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigations Unit (BCI) completes background checks by comparing fingerprints against a database of criminal fingerprints.
- o Is there a reporting mechanism for employees who feel they are victims of workplace violence? This includes threats, harassment and bullying. In the case of direct supervisor conflicts, make sure there are multiple levels of private, secure reporting so employees are not discouraged from filing complaints.
- o Is there an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) or other stress-management counseling services available for employees? Offering these types of programs or providing information on how to access community-based programs can help provide employees with skills for coping with various types of personal problems that often lead to workplace violence.

In addition, your local police department may be a valuable resource to help conduct your security assessment and to provide information on issues of concern regarding local events and crime trends. To observe areas of concern and gain information about the general security within your neighborhood, police officers may allow local residents and business owners to ride in their cruisers.

Furthermore, many police departments partner with local businesses to provide self-defense courses and other personal-safety training as well as informational bulletins and tips on crime prevention.

Conclusion

Once there is a security assessment for your facility, the weak points in your employer's violence in the workplace program will be evident. To brainstorm solutions for identified problems, form a team that includes employees and management.

A security assessment is only one component of a workplace-violence prevention program. However, it is a valuable step in addressing a workplace problem an employer should not ignore.

Group actions

Survey employees to find out if they have any concerns or suggestions related to workplace security. Form an employee/management team to conduct a workplace-security assessment at your facility and to develop solutions for any workplace security risk factors you discover.

Contact the local police department and ask if their officers can assist in conducting a workplace security assessment.

References

Rollin A. Kiser, chief of police, city of Grandview Heights, Ohio

Websites

OSHA Guidelines on Workplace Violence: <http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/workplaceviolence/index.html>

NIOSH Occupational Violence: <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/violence/>

Ohio Attorney General's Office Background check: <http://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/Services/Business/WebCheck>

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