



## Workplace Violence

14<sup>th</sup> NASA International Health Educational  
Distance Learning Seminars  
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## USA TODAY Article 11-7-2004

**Stephanie Armour, USA TODAY, following an investigation of 224 fatal workplace incidents reported that:**

1. Manager are not well prepared to deal with violence in the workplace
2. One employee is killed and 25 seriously injured weakly in the workplace by co-workers or ex-coworkers
3. In 8 out of 10 instances could have been prevented if attention would have been paid to the warning signs



## Definition



***Verbal or Physical Threat or Assault perpetrated against co-workers, family members, companions or oneself***

\$36 Billions economic impact in USA alone

## Magnitude of the Problem



- **In the U.S.A.**
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> leading cause of fatal occupational injuries
  - In 2001, 639 fatal injuries out of 8,736 due to violence (Dept. of Labor)
  - About 20 workers are murdered weekly
  - 1 to 2 million assaults per year
  - Specific occupations: deliveries, handling money, dealing with the public etc.
  - Post 9/11 and anthrax letters: concern about high profile and densely populated vulnerable targets such as politicians and media offices, banks, mass transit, shopping centers, etc.

## International WHO Report



- Violence at work is becoming an alarming phenomenon worldwide. Affecting the dignity of millions of people, violence is a major source of inequality, discrimination, stigmatisation and conflict in the workplace. Increasingly, it is becoming a central human rights issue. The enormous cost of workplace violence for the individual, the workplace and the community at large is becoming more and more apparent. Recent information shows that the current knowledge is only the tip of the iceberg.
- While workplace violence affects practically all sectors and all categories of workers, the health sector is at major risk: more than half of all workers in this sector may have experienced violent incidents at some point. Ambulance and pre-hospital emergency staff are reported to be at greatest risk. Nurses are three times more likely than other occupational groups, on average, to experience violence in the workplace. Since the large majority of the health workforce is female, the gender dimension of the problem is very evident
- The International Labour Office (ILO), the International Council of Nurses (ICN), the World Health Organization (WHO) and Public Services International (PSI) launched in 2000 a Joint Program to develop sound policies and practical approaches for the prevention and elimination of violence in the health sector

## International



- ILO recommended a CODE to deal with violence in the workplace, 2003
- Canada is developing implementing Standards to handle violence in the workplace
- In addition to abuses against “Health and Relief Workers”, WHO estimates that about ½ of the workforce experiences abuses or violence at work
- Globally mostly children and women are at risk
- ILO estimates that the cost ranges from to 1-3.5% of the GDP , based on randomly collected/reported data by several countries



Occupation	Average Annual Rate per 1,000 Workers
Law enforcement officers	260.8
Corrections officers	155.7
Taxicab drivers	128.3
Bartenders	81.6
Mental health custodians	69.0
Special education teachers	68.4
Gas station attendants	68.3
Mental health professionals	68.2
Junior high school teachers	54.2
Convenience store workers	53.9
Bus drivers	38.2
High school teachers	38.1
Nurses	21.9
Physicians	16.2
All workers	12.6
College teachers	1.6

Of the occupations examined, police officers experienced such crimes at the highest rate (260.8 per 1,000), whereas college or university professors and teachers had the lowest rate (1.6 per 1,000). Government employees had violent victimization rates (28.6 per 1,000) that were higher than those people who work for private companies (9.9 per 1,000 workers) or self-employed people (7.4 per 1,000).

U.S. Bureau of Justice  
1993-1999

## Occupations at Higher Risk



- Health care employees
- Correctional and Law Enforcement officers
- Social services employees
- Teachers
- Municipal housing inspectors
- Public works employees
- Retail employees

## Demographics Categories at Higher Risk



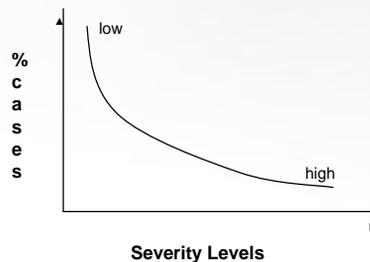
- Gender
- Race or Ethnic Background
- Age
- Self –employed



## Hostile Work Environment (Severity Level)



- **Less** (verbal)
  - Verbal harrassement
  - Sexual harassment
  - Intimidation
  - Shunning
  - Bullying
- **Moderate (non fatal)**
  - Physical harassment
  - Stalking
  - (Domestic violence)
  - Rape
- **High**
  - **Homicide**
  - **Terrorism**



If not remediated effectively hostile environment can become an established pattern at work

## Threats and violence clusters



- **Personal**
  - Tax return season
  - Financial or marital troubles
  - Holidays such as X-mas
  - Pay days
  - Family problems
- **Work Related**
  - Performance appraisals
  - Stress in the workplace (employees and environment related)
  - Management and employee communications (i.e. shelter in place, emergencies, access to restricted areas, change in workplace policies, etc.)
  - Dissatisfaction with and blame of management practices
  - Late hours of the night or early hours of the morning
  - Reorganizations and job elimination/transfers and other personnel actions

## What is Considered Violence?



- Verbal or Physical Expressions
- Intimidation
- Profiling
- Discrimination
- Improper Behavior affecting others
- Bullying
- Mobbing
- Assault
- Homicide

## Further Definitions



- **Threatening behavior** - such as shaking fists, destroying property or throwing objects.
- **Verbal or written threats** - any expression of an intent to inflict harm psychological or physical.
- **Harassment** - any behavior that demeans, embarrasses, humiliates, annoys, alarms or verbally abuses a person and that is known or would be expected to be unwelcome. This includes words, gestures, intimidation, bullying, or other inappropriate activities such as stalking.
- **Verbal abuse** - swearing, insults or condescending language.
- **Physical attacks** - hitting, shoving, pushing or kicking.

## Consequences



- Economic
- Emotional
- Psychological
- Physical
- Societal

## OSHA Ruling



- Currently there are no specific Federal/ OSHA standards to address these problems,
- The Federal Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSH Act), in Section 5(a)(1), provides that "each employer shall furnish to each of his employees employment and a place of employment which are free from recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm to his employees." In a workplace where the risk of violence and serious personal injury are significant enough to be "recognized hazards," the general duty clause would require the employer to take feasible steps to minimize those risks. Failure of an employer to implement feasible means of abatement of these hazards could result in the finding of an OSH Act violation.
- The occurrence of acts of violence which are not "recognized" as characteristic of employment and represent random antisocial acts which may occur anywhere would not subject the employer to a citation for a violation of the OSH Act
- Whether or not an employer can be cited for a violation of Section 5(a)(1) is entirely dependent upon the specific facts, which will be unique in each situation. The recognizability and foreseeability of the hazard, and the feasibility of the means of abatement are some of the critical factors to be considered.

Excerpts from Roger Clark, Director, Letter dated 12/10/92

## Union Views (excerpts)



- Violence in the workplace has become an epidemic. Not only is workplace violence increasing in those workplaces where violence is expected, such as corrections, enforcement, and mental health, but it has become a danger in almost every occupation that deals with the public. Many AFSCME members face the threat of violence every day.
- Workplace violence is a serious and deadly hazard; one that can cause not only physical injury, but **serious psychological** damage as well. Injuries and deaths related to workplace violence cannot be tolerated any more than any other workplace injury or death. Most violent incidents are predictable and preventable. And, as with other workplace hazards, such as asbestos or noise, it is the employer's responsibility to take reasonable measures to minimize the risks for workplace violence.
- Since workplace violence is a workplace issue, the union representative can play a role in urging employers to reduce the risks to violence in their workplaces. An effective employer workplace violence prevention program should include:
  - methods for identifying work practices and environmental factors that may lead to violence;
  - procedures for implementing controls that will reduce the risks for violence; and/or
  - procedures for responding to violence if it occurs.

## Recommended Steps to Reduce Violence in the Workplace



1. Risk identification, categorization and prioritization
2. Surveillance of the environment
3. Employee education (awareness, safety and crime prevention)
4. Prevention and control strategies
5. Continuous evaluation and communication with employees and interested groups

*Develop a plan and incorporate it into the organizational business strategies*

## Prevention and Control



- The Organizational Plan should address the following steps
  - **Primary:** pre-event actions
  - **Secondary:** early recognition and mitigation actions during the events
  - **Tertiary:** post event actions and minimizing the consequences

## Addressing the Violence



Phases	Employee &/or Victim	Perpetrator	Physical Environ.	Social Environ.
Primary	Training	Policy enforcement Reporting concerns and expressing issues	Control and safety measures	Good management and workforce relationship and care
Secondary	De-escalation techniques Practice on violent-event response plan	Weapon prohibition Use of restraint	Good security force Exit avenues Alarm systems	Response plan available and understood
Tertiary	Crisis intervention and EAP	Awareness for apprehension and prosecution	Surveillance systems (cameras, visits etc.)	Cohesive and mutually supportive workforce

Adapted from Ref. 5: Halden Matrix

## Pitfalls to be Avoided in the Planning & Implementation Process (Ref.5)



- Missing key core planning elements due to organizational barriers
- Profiling
- Psychological Tests leading to legal problems due to violations of
  - Confidentiality
  - Civil Liberties
  - Americans with Disabilities Act
- Poorly trained threat assessment /crisis intervention teams
- Policies excluding Union and employee participation
- Selective and/ or piecemeal application of policies
- Poor record keeping

## Canadian Initiative (excerpts)



- “Prevention is the cornerstone of any workplace initiative aimed at curbing violence and aggression on the job. Simply responding to violent events after-the-fact, although necessary, is just not enough”
- Recommendations
  - Listen to employees
  - Review sources of information
  - Examine existing controls
  - Policies and procedures
  - Training and awareness
  - Conflict resolution
  - Response planning

## Post 9/11

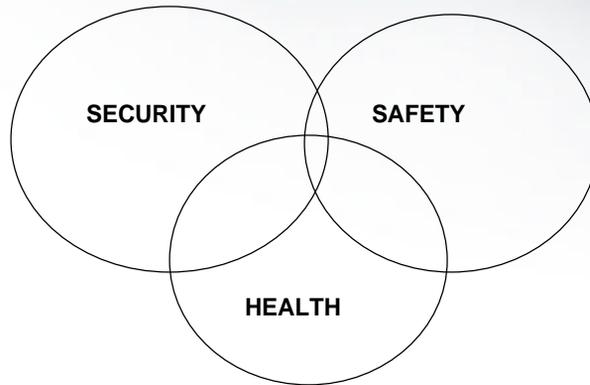


- Emphasis on Workplace Security
- Balancing the needs for antiterrorism programs and prevention of violence (need not to be conflicted)
- Expanding the definition and concepts of workplace violence to include terrorism
- Urgent need to review occupational health and safety programs and policies
- Integration among multiple security and health programs and initiatives
- More intensive communications with and training of employees
- Employees involvement and feedback
- Protecting the customer in addition to the employees and their families

# Whose Business is it?



Occupational Health and Management Leadership play a critical role to ensure success

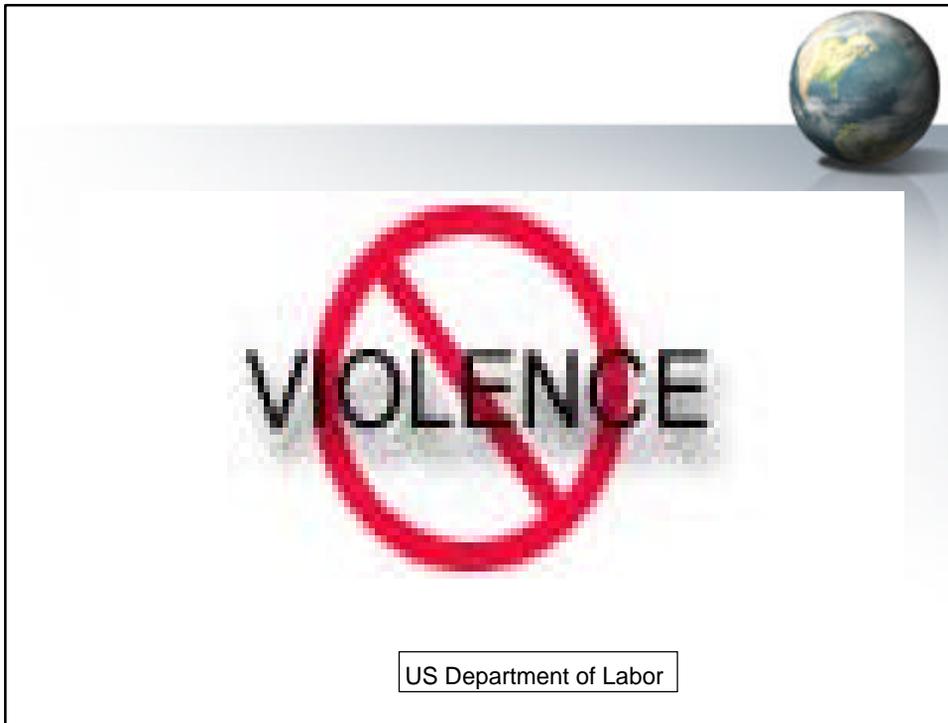


*All three disciplines working together to create a healthy, secure and safe environment*

# Policy Issues



- Unfair employment practices in US or internationally
  - Illegal immigrants
  - Migrant workers
  - Off-shore Sweat Shops
- Media reporting practices
- Post 9/11 situation
- Provisions for workplace/home stress reduction and psychological help



## **Additional References**

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