Workplace violence includes incidents that range from harassment to physical assault to active shooter situations. There are some jobs where you are more likely to run into workplace violence, such as drivers for hire, retail employees, healthcare and social workers, utility workers, and police officers.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) does not have a specific workplace violence standard, but under the General Duty Clause – Section 5(a)(1) of the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 – employers must provide a workplace free from recognized hazards that are likely to cause death or serious harm. A prevention program can help employers comply with the standard.

Prevention Strategies

Form a threat assessment team to evaluate your workplace’s weaknesses and agree on appropriate preventive actions. Team members may represent all areas and levels within your organization. In conducting its threat assessment, the team should consider the contents of:

- Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) Logs of Injury and Illness (Forms 300 and 300A);
- reports of all investigations of violent incidents, including verbal and physical abuse and aggressive behavior;
- insurance records;
- police records; and
- threat assessment team meeting minutes.

Have the threat assessment team review your employees’ high-risk tasks, including:

- exchanging money with the public;
- working alone or in small numbers;
- working late at night or in early morning;
- guarding valuable property or possessions; and
- working in community settings.

Using the threat assessment team’s directions, apply changes in work plans, procedures, and policies, and use administrative or engineering controls. Teach employees who perform at-risk tasks:

- not to enter a location where they feel unsafe;
- to use a buddy system or police escort when working overnight or in possibly dangerous situations;
- to use assigned staff cell phones and hand-held alarms; and
- to prepare daily work plans and to tell a contact person where they are.

Put administrative controls in place. These affect how employees do their jobs or tasks and include:

- a liaison with local law enforcement and state prosecutors; and
- trained teams to respond to emergencies.
Put engineering controls in place. These are considered the most effective because they make physical improvements on the job without relying on people’s behavior. These include:

- installing video surveillance, additional lighting, alarm systems, or metal detectors;
- restricting public access to your worksite;
- requiring employee identification badges and electronic keys; and
- hiring security guards.

Train managers and employees once a year or more on:

- your workplace’s violence prevention policy;
- types and examples of workplace violence;
- instructions for reporting threats or violent incidents;
- early warning signs of distress in a potentially violent person and appropriate responses;
- security hazards;
- location of security equipment and procedures for using it; and
- instructions for calming hostile situations, handling emergency responses, and following post-incident procedures, such as providing employees trauma counseling and referring victims to employee assistance programs.

Create an emergency action plan (EAP). An EAP is a written document required by certain OSHA standards (see 29 Code of Federal Regulations 1910.38(a)) that aims to organize employers’ and employees’ actions during workplace emergencies to avoid confusion, injuries, and property damage.

You must keep EAPs in writing and in the workplace for employees to review. Employers with 10 or fewer employees may share the plan verbally with employees. EAPs must include emergency evacuation procedures and identify when and how workers must respond to different types of emergencies.

Active Shooter Preparedness

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS; dhs.gov) recommends creating an EAP, along with leading training exercises, to best prepare staff to respond to an active shooter situation.

An active shooter – someone who is killing or trying to kill people in a confined and populated area – typically uses firearms and is unpredictable in his or her pattern of attack and method of selecting victims. Situations involving an active shooter often develop quickly and are over within 10 to 15 minutes. That is often less time than law enforcement can arrive on the scene to stop the shooting and help victims.

This means employees must be both physically and mentally prepared to deal with an event involving an active shooter or other dangerous intruder. Customers and clients who are onsite during such an event will likely follow the lead of managers and employees, but each person must quickly determine how to protect his or her own life.

DHS outlines a “Run, Hide, Fight” method for responding when an active shooter is nearby:

1. **Run.** If you have a clear escape path, try to evacuate whether or not others agree to follow.
   - Have a plan ahead of time, including an escape route. Follow your company’s emergency action plan.
   - Help others escape if possible.
   - Prevent others from entering an area where the shooter might be.
   - Do not try to move injured people.
   - Leave belongings behind.
   - Follow police officers’ instructions.
   - Call 9-1-1 when you are safely out.
2. **Hide.** If you cannot evacuate, hide where the shooter is less likely to find you.
   
   - The hiding place should be out of view, such as behind cabinets, desks, or other items. It should protect you from bullets (such as a closed and locked door) but should not trap you or keep you from moving.
   
   - Try to keep the shooter from entering your hiding place by locking doors and blockading them with heavy furniture.
   
   - If the shooter is nearby, remain quiet. Silence cell phones, radios, televisions, and other noise sources.
   
   - If you cannot **neither run nor hide**, remain calm. Call 9-1-1 if possible to tell police the shooter's location. If you cannot speak, leave the line open to allow the dispatcher to listen. Provide these details to the operator or law enforcement:
     - the shooter's location;
     - the number of shooters;
     - a physical description of the shooter;
     - the number and type of weapons the shooter is using; and
     - the number of potential victims at the location.

3. **Fight** as a last resort. When your life is in immediate danger, try to disrupt or disable the shooter.
   
   - Act as aggressively as possible toward the shooter by throwing items, using materials around you as weapons, and/or yelling. Commit to your actions.
   
   - When law enforcement arrives:
     - raise your hands right away, with fingers spread, and keep hands visible;
     - avoid making quick movements toward officers, such as holding onto them for safety;
     - do not point, yell, or scream; and
     - remain calm and follow officers' instructions.

**Convenience Retail Establishments**

Employees of convenience stores, gas stations, liquor stores, and other stores that stay open late at night and have large amounts of cash on hand are especially vulnerable to homicides and assaults that are often linked to robberies. Employees often work alone or in small numbers, and the establishments are often in isolated or poorly lit areas. Stores in these locations are also at risk of being robbed repeatedly.

While no single strategy is appropriate for all convenience businesses, employers can help protect their workers by knowing the special hazards involved and using the right prevention and control measures.

**Worksite Analysis**

A worksite analysis – an assessment of a site's environmental and operational risks for violence – will help convenience retail employers create a good violence prevention program. OSHA recommends analyzing and tracking records, doing screening surveys, and analyzing a site's security.

**Records Analysis and Tracking.** To track the history of armed robberies and other violent incidents at their stores, employers should examine the past several years of medical, safety, workers' compensation, and insurance records, along with the OSHA Log of Work-Related Injuries and Illnesses (Form 300) if the employer must maintain it.

Looking for patterns in job titles, workstations, dates, and times of day among worker and police reports of assaults or aggressive behavior can also help employers address dangers at a particular location. Employers can also work with local law enforcement to analyze historical crime data for areas near the worksite. Using several years of data helps give a clearer understanding of neighborhood trends.

Employees can help by reporting incidents promptly and accurately. Involving cashiers and other front-line workers in violence prevention is crucial. Especially in late-night settings, retail workers have first-hand experience that can help identify practical safety solutions to help prevent incidents.
**Screening Surveys.** While many incidents go unreported or undocumented, employers can still identify violent incidents at convenience retail locations by asking workers to complete a screening survey once a year or when work conditions change.

The survey might question employees about: whether they have been assaulted, threatened, or harassed by customers; whether customers have used or carried firearms into the store; what employees were doing right before and during an incident; whether preventive measures were in place or were used at the time of an incident; and whether employees called police. Employers may give these questionnaires themselves or use independent reviewers who will conduct the survey, analyze the results, and offer advice to strengthen the company’s violence prevention program.

**Worksite Security.** Convenience retail employers should routinely inspect their site(s) and evaluate job tasks to identify potential hazards. Analyze the building’s layout, inside and outside lighting, and locations and effectiveness of existing security and communications systems. Identify locations, jobs, processes, and procedures that put workers at greatest risk. Look at details of violent incidents that have happened at the site, including characteristics of the assailants and victims.

**Using Hazard Controls to Prevent Robberies**

After analyzing a worksite’s hazards, convenience retail employers should put in place the combination of engineering and administrative controls that will best help prevent armed robberies and other violent incidents at that site.

**Engineering controls** that convenience retail employers should consider using include:

- limiting the amount of cash on site by using drop safes;
- posting signs saying cashiers have limited access to cash;
- using security cameras;
- mounting curved mirrors to keep an eye on hard-to-see areas of the store;
- keeping windows clear of obstructions, including signs and shelves;
- lighting the inside and outside of the store as brightly as local law will allow;
- having the cash register and customer service areas visible from outside the store;
- using door detectors so workers know when someone enters the store;
- installing and maintaining alarm systems, panic buttons, and other devices; and
- putting up bullet-proof barriers with pass-through windows between workers and customers.

**Administrative and work practice controls** that convenience retail employers should consider using include:

- not allowing transactions with large bills;
- increasing the number of staff at stores where robberies or assaults have happened and at stores in high-crime areas;
- making rules so employees walk to garbage and storage areas safely;
- providing security escorts to staff members walking to parking areas at night; and
- telling workers how to request help from police and file charges if assaulted.

**Responding During Robberies**

Retail robberies and assaults usually happen at night and are most often armed (gun or knife) robberies. The offender might injure the victim in an unprovoked, surprise attack, or the assailant might attack in response to a perceived threat, like when a cashier fights back. Convenience retail employers should train employees how to behave toward robbers or other intruders to lower the risk of injury or death. Give these instructions:

- Hand over the money – do not argue or resist. Most robbers are looking for quick cash.
- Unless there is an immediate threat to your life, do not pull a weapon, which can make getting hurt or killed more likely.
- Stay calm and quiet, and speak in a cooperative tone.
• Avoid eye contact, but try to make mental notes of how the offender looks to help police identify the person.

• Make no sudden movements. Move slowly and explain your movements to the robber before you make them.

• Stay where you are until the offender has left the immediate area. Then lock the door, call police, and don’t open the door until they arrive. Don’t touch anything the offender has touched. Write down all the details you can remember about the offender and robbery while you wait for police to arrive.

This document was produced by the Division of Workers’ Compensation (DWC) and is considered accurate at the time of publication.

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