



Workplace Violence Fact Sheet

What is workplace violence?

Workplace violence is violence or the threat of violence against workers. It can occur at or outside the workplace and can range from threats and verbal abuse to physical assaults and homicide, one of the leading causes of job-related deaths. However it manifests itself, workplace violence is a growing concern for employers and employees nationwide.

Who is vulnerable?

Some 2 million American workers are victims of workplace violence each year. Workplace violence can strike anywhere, and no one is immune. Some workers, however, are at increased risk. Among them are workers who exchange money with the public; deliver passengers, goods or services; or work alone or in small groups, during late night or early morning hours, in high-crime areas, in isolated locations, or in community settings and homes where they have extensive contact with the public. This group includes healthcare and social services workers such as visiting nurses, psychiatric evaluators and probation officers; community workers such as gas and water utility employees, phone and cable TV installers, and letter carriers; retail workers; taxi drivers; and real estate agents.

What can these employers do to help protect their employees?

The best protection employers can offer is to establish a zero-tolerance policy toward workplace violence against or by their employees. The employer should establish a workplace violence prevention program or incorporate the information into an existing accident prevention program, employee handbook or manual of standard operating procedures. It is critical to ensure that all employees know the policy and understand that all claims of workplace violence will be investigated and remedied promptly. In addition, employers can offer additional protections such as the following:

- Provide safety education for employees so they know what conduct is not acceptable, what to do

if they witness or are subjected to workplace violence, and how to protect them.

- Consult with a security expert or your local police for suggestions to secure your workplace.
- Where appropriate to the business, install video surveillance, extra lighting and alarm systems, and minimize access by outsiders through identification badges, electronic keys, guards or protective barriers.
- Provide drop safes to limit the amount of cash on hand. Keep a minimal amount of cash in registers during evenings and late night hours and post signs stating cash on hand is limited.
- Equip field staff with cellular phones and hand-held alarms or noise devices, and require them to prepare a daily work plan and keep a contact person informed of their location throughout the day. Keep employer provided vehicles properly maintained.
- Instruct employees not to enter any location where they feel unsafe. Introduce a “buddy system” or provide an escort service or police assistance in potentially dangerous situations or at night.
- Develop policies and procedures covering visits by home healthcare providers. Address the conduct of home visits, the presence of others in the home during visits, and the worker’s right to refuse to provide services in a clearly hazardous situation.

How can employees protect themselves?

Nothing can guarantee that an employee will not become a victim of workplace violence. These steps, however, can help reduce the odds:



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- Learn how to recognize, avoid or diffuse potentially violent situations by attending personal safety training programs.
- Alert supervisors to any concerns about safety or security and report all incidents immediately in writing.
- Avoid traveling alone into unfamiliar locations or situations whenever possible.
- Carry only minimal money and required identification into community settings.

What should employers do following an incident of workplace violence?

- Encourage employees to report and log all incidents and threats of workplace violence.
- Provide prompt medical evaluation and treatment after the incident.
- Report violent incidents to the local police promptly.
- Inform victims of their legal right to prosecute perpetrators.
- Discuss the circumstances of the incident with staff members.
- Encourage employees to share information about ways to avoid similar situations in the future.
- Offer stress debriefing sessions and post-traumatic counseling services to help workers recover from a violent incident.
- Investigate all violent incidents and threats, monitor trends in violent incidents by type or circumstance, and institute corrective actions.

- Discuss changes in the program during regular employee meetings.

What protections does OSH offer?

While OSH does not have a specific standard for workplace violence, the General Duty Clause requires employers to provide a safe and healthful workplace for all workers covered by the Occupational Safety and Health Act of North Carolina. Employers who do not take reasonable steps to prevent or abate a recognized violence hazard in the workplace can be cited. Failure to implement suggestions in this fact sheet, however, is not in itself a violation.

How can I get more information about workplace violence?

OSH offers assistance through its many safety and health programs: workplace consultation, strategic partnerships, and training and education. This information is available on the NCDOL Web site at www.nclabor.com.

- Visit our [Workplace Violence Subject Index](#) page.
- To review our workplace violence video list, please visit the [NCDOL Library](#) on www.nclabor.com.
- To ask a question, call us toll-free at 1-800-625-2267 or e-mail ask.osh@nclabor.com.
- To file a complaint, please click on [Safety and Health Complaints](#) under “Quick Clicks” on www.nclabor.com or call 1-800-625-2267.
- Employers may also review the [Workplace Violence Prevention Act](#) under Legal Affairs/Labor Laws on www.nclabor.com.