

## Reducing Violence in the Workplace

Much has been written about violence in the workplace, and for good reason. It is an area where there has been a dramatic increase. Indeed, one study suggests that monthly one employer-directed homicide occurs. Since violent behavior has been found to be linked to employee feelings of powerlessness, stress and burnout, negligent hiring, and domestic problems that show up at the worksite, this checklist is designed to help you:

- Avoid violence in your own workplace by addressing these casual factors;
- Recognize the warning signs before the worst happens;
- Develop action plans to cope with threats to your safety and your employees'.

### Incidents in the workplace

- Physical violence against managers or employees
- Destruction of corporate property
- Theft of money or property that also involves violence

### Work situations that can lead to such incidents

- Personality conflicts between employees or employees and a manager
- Layoffs
- Firings
- Mergers and acquisitions
- Other reorganizations
- Passover for promotion

### Profile of the Violent Employee

S. Anthony Baron, in his book *Violence in the Workplace: A Prevention and Management Guide for Business* (Pathfinder Publishing, Ventura, CA 1993), has developed a profile of a perpetrator of violent acts in the workplace that includes these characteristics:

- Has lost his or her job or thinks such an event is imminent.
- Is focused on the workplace – is a loner with no outside interests or contacts, whose sense of well being is consequently tied to the job.
- Has a history of conflicts with colleagues and/or management.
- Tends to blame others for his or her problems.
- Doesn't accept authority well.

- Has a history of depression, paranoia, and violence or encounters with violence.
- Works in a company with a rigid, authoritarian work culture.
- Exhibits increasingly aggressive behavior, from lack of cooperation and belligerence with customers to constant arguments with everyone and refusal to obey company policies and procedures, to verbalization of wishes to hurt co-workers and/or management, to recurrent physical fights. "Frequent displays of intense anger result in the final, violent act," writes Baron.

### Casual Factors

- Burnout or stress. Given time pressures and ever-increasing job demands, feeling stressed or burned out is not unusual. But feelings of powerlessness, role ambiguity stemming from continuous organizational changes (who's in charge of what?), unclear expectations, diminished influence, bureaucratic decision making, fear of failure, extreme work overload and anxiety about the job can exacerbate the situation.
- Organizational climate. Management is seen as insensitive and uncaring, there is little opportunity for communication between management and staff, the organization is considered rigid and unreceptive to employee ideas, with no system exists to handle grievances.

**Contact Your  
Employee Assistance Program  
Outcomes, Inc. (505)243-7145  
1-800-677-2947**