



How Can I Prevent Workplace Violence?

A few years ago, I would have laughed if someone had suggested writing this. But all the reports about nutcases killing each other at work makes me really think I need to do something to make sure this doesn't happen at our company. But what should we do? Can you suggest some things?

Unfortunately, violence in the workplace has become a serious problem all over the country. The federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) reports that almost 1,000 workers are murdered, and a whopping 1.5 million are assaulted each year at work. And violence is the leading cause of death for women in the workplace. So you're definitely not crazy to want to take precautions against this problem. It's also in your self-interest to take action now.

You have a duty as an employer to take reasonable measures, given the known or foreseeable risks your employees face. This is especially true if there are prior threats of violence or if your company is located in a high-crime area. Before you panic, however, you should know that an employer's duty and potential liability is governed by the specific circumstances of each situation. Experts agree that the best approach consists of a dual strategy of protection and prevention.

The specific measures you take will depend on your industry, workforce, and the location of your business. There are consultants who can help advise you and set up a violence prevention and security program. Here are some recommended measures you can take:

- Have a clear, written policy that communicates zero tolerance toward workplace violence in any form.
- Determine in advance what discipline will be taken against employees who threaten or take violent action in the workplace, and follow through if such threats arise.
- Create a management team trained to recognize the warning signs of potential violence.
- Alert your employees about what constitutes workplace violence, including destruction of property and implied threats of violence, and encourage them to report these incidents immediately.
- Have a reporting system (e.g., an anonymous hotline) to let management know about suspicious or threatening behaviors.
- Learn to recognize employee behaviors that contribute to workplace violence, such as emotional disturbance and substance abuse.

For more information and resources, see the [OSHA Web site](#).