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What is workplace violence?

Workplace violence is any act or threat of physical violence, harassment, intimidation, or other threatening disruptive behavior that occurs at the work site. It ranges from threats and verbal abuse to physical assaults and even homicide. It can affect and involve employees, clients, customers and visitors. Homicide is currently the fourth-leading cause of fatal occupational injuries in the United States. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries (CFOI), of the 4,547 fatal workplace injuries that occurred in the United States in 2010, 506 were workplace homicides. Homicide is the leading cause of death for women in the workplace. [\[More...\]](#) However it manifests itself, workplace violence is a major concern for employers and employees nationwide.

Who is at risk of workplace violence?

Nearly 2 million American workers report having been victims of workplace violence each year. Unfortunately, many more cases go unreported. The truth is, workplace violence can strike anywhere, anytime, and no one is immune. Research has identified factors that may increase the risk of violence for some workers at certain worksites. Such factors include exchanging money with the public and working with volatile, unstable people. Working alone or in isolated areas may also contribute to the potential for violence. Providing services and care, and working where alcohol is served may also impact the likelihood of violence. Additionally, time of day and location of work, such as working late at night or in areas with high crime rates, are also risk factors that should be considered when addressing issues of workplace violence. Among those with higher risk are workers who exchange money with the public, delivery drivers, healthcare professionals, public service workers, customer service agents, law enforcement personnel, and those who work alone or in small groups.

Highlights

- [Enforcement Procedures for Investigating or Inspecting Workplace Violence Incidents](#). OSHA Directive CPL 02-01-052, (2011, September 8).
- [Preventing Violence Against Taxi and For-Hire Drivers](#) (PDF*). OSHA Fact Sheet, (2010, April).
- [Recommendations for Workplace Violence Prevention Programs in Late-Night Retail Establishments](#) (PDF*). OSHA Publication 3153-12R, (2009).
- [Guidelines for Preventing Workplace Violence for Health Care & Social Service Workers](#) (PDF). OSHA Publication 3148-01R, (2004).

How can workplace violence hazards be reduced?

In most workplaces where risk factors can be identified, the risk of assault can be prevented or minimized if employers take appropriate precautions. One of the best protections employers can offer their workers is to establish a zero-tolerance policy toward workplace violence. This policy should cover all workers, patients, clients, visitors, contractors, and anyone else who may come in contact with company personnel.

By assessing their worksites, employers can identify methods for reducing the likelihood of incidents occurring. OSHA believes that a well written and implemented Workplace Violence Prevention Program, combined with engineering controls, administrative controls and training can reduce the incidence of workplace violence in both the private sector and Federal workplaces.

This can be a separate workplace violence prevention program or can be incorporated into an injury and illness prevention program, employee handbook, or manual of standard operating procedures. It is critical to ensure that all workers know the policy and understand that all claims of workplace violence will be investigated and remedied promptly. In addition, OSHA encourages employers to develop additional methods as necessary to protect employees in high risk industries.

How do I find out about employer responsibilities and worker rights?

Workers have a right to a safe workplace. The law requires employers to provide their employees with working conditions that are free of known dangers. The OSHA law also prohibits employers from retaliating against employees for exercising their rights under the law (including the right to raise a health and safety concern or report an injury). For more information see www.whistleblowers.gov or [worker rights](#).

OSHA has a great deal of information to assist employers in complying with their responsibilities under the OSHA law.

OSHA can help answer questions or concerns from employers and workers. To reach your regional or area OSHA office, go to OSHA's [Regional & Area Offices](#) webpage or call 1-800-321-OSHA (6742).

Small business employers may contact OSHA's free and confidential [on-site consultation service](#) to help determine whether there are hazards at their worksites and work with OSHA on correcting any identified hazards. On-site consultation services are separate from enforcement activities and do not result in penalties or citations. To contact OSHA's free consultation service, go to OSHA's [On-site Consultation](#) webpage or call 1-800-321-OSHA (6742) and press number 4.

Workers may file a complaint to have OSHA inspect their workplace if they believe that their employer is not following OSHA standards or that there are serious hazards. Employees can [file a complaint](#) with OSHA by calling 1-800-321-OSHA (6742), online via [eCompliant Form](#), or by printing the complaint form and mailing or faxing it to your local OSHA area office. Complaints that are signed by an employee are more likely to result in an inspection.

If you think your job is unsafe or you have questions, contact OSHA at 1-800-321-OSHA (6742). It's confidential. We can help. For other valuable worker protection information, such as Workers' Rights, Employer Responsibilities, and other services OSHA offers, visit [OSHA's Workers'](#) page.