

MAJOR PROGRAM POINTS

"PREVENTING WORKPLACE VIOLENCE"

Part of the "GENERAL SAFETY SERIES"

Quality Safety and Health Products, for Today...and Tomorrow

Outline of Major Points Covered in the "Preventing Workplace Violence" Course

The following outline summarizes the major points of information presented in the Course on Preventing Workplace Violence. The outline can be used to survey the Course before taking it on a computer, as well as to review the Course when a computer is not available.

- **In the United States, a violent crime occurs every 17 seconds.**
 - One out of six violent crimes happens in the workplace.
 - One aggravated assault occurs every 28 seconds.
- **Assaults account for nearly three out of four reported incidents of workplace violence.**
 - Robbery occurs every 51 seconds.
 - Robberies cause 82% of workplace homicides.
 - Rape occurs every five minutes.
 - Studies suggest that 50% to 80% of rape victims knew their attacker.
- **A murder occurs every 23 minutes somewhere in the country. Homicide is the:**
 - Second leading cause of death on the job.
 - Number one killer of women in the workplace.
- **The media tends to focus on the things that generate big headlines, such as homicides.**
 - The real problems presented by workplace violence go much deeper.
 - No organization, regardless of its size or type of business, is immune to the effects of workplace violence.
- **Other incidents of aggressive behavior and physical conflict are less dramatic, but far more frequent.**
 - Their effects on morale are cumulative.
 - Stress builds and tempers flair until the situation becomes explosive.

- **OSHA's "General Duty Clause" requires employers to provide... "a place of employment free from recognized hazards that are likely to cause death or serious physical harm to employees."**
 - Aggressive and violent behavior in the workplace should be viewed as hazardous.
 - Like any hazard, steps must be taken to minimize and prevent incidents of workplace violence.

- **The most obvious definition of violence is "an act of physical aggression meant to do bodily harm."**
 - But a complete definition must include behavior meant to cause emotional harm.
 - Threats, intimidation and verbal abuse can cause psychological damage as serious as any physical injury.

- **Workplace violence takes many forms. The most obvious is "Commercial Crime." In these cases:**
 - A perpetrator enters an establishment with the intent of robbery.
 - If the situation gets out of control, people can get injured or killed.

- **According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), the people who are at the greatest risk from commercial crime:**
 - Exchange money with the public.
 - Work alone or in small numbers.
 - Work late at night or during the early morning.
 - Guard valuable property or possessions.
 - Work in public areas.

- **Even non-commercial businesses are susceptible to "Outside Threats" from people who are not employed by your company.**
 - These people can come into your facility and commit acts of violence.
 - They include customers or vendors seeking revenge.
 - Another group is terrorists trying to prove a point.
 - Emergency Room personnel and other healthcare workers can be at risk from hostile patients.

- **Incidents of "Domestic Violence" have been spilling over into the workplace in alarming numbers, as well.**
- **All organizations have to also be concerned about "Inside Threats" ... aggressive and violent behavior from people within the company.**
 - We've all heard about disgruntled employees who take out their frustrations on supervisors.
- **But most incidents of workplace violence are the result of disagreements or personality conflicts between coworkers.**
 - These are employees who know each other and work together every day.
- **What causes people to resort to violence?**
 - Some experts claim that lay-offs due to down-sizing and mergers are an important factor (because they increase stress).
 - Others warn about "toxic" work environments, where workers have experienced a lack of feedback and poor communication.
 - In these situations workers get frustrated, feeling that they have no control over their situation.
- **Overall, there are three basic motives for aggressive and violent behavior:**
 - "Acting out" to express feelings of fear or frustration.
 - Using threats or violence to intimidate or manipulate others.
 - People with mental illnesses, who are resorting to violence in a crisis situation.
- **Incidents of workplace violence are rarely spontaneous.**
 - People do not just "crack" and become violent.
 - There are usually "warning signs"... clear indications that something is wrong.

- **Some warning signs are emotional. They include:**
 - Mood swings.
 - Emotional outbursts.
 - Being irritable or defensive.
 - Overreacting to comments or criticism.
 - Withdrawing from social interaction with coworkers.

- **Other warning signs are verbal, such as:**
 - Complaining frequently.
 - Blaming others for problems.
 - Stating that "someone is out to get me".
 - Making comments about revenge.
 - Referring to other incidents of workplace violence.

- **Other changes in behavior can also be warning signs. These can include:**
 - Increases in tardiness.
 - More frequent absences.
 - Unexplained disappearances during the work day.

- **A dramatic change in someone's personal appearance or grooming habits may be another warning sign.**

- **There may be decreases in initiative, productivity or work quality as well. A person may become:**
 - Careless.
 - Reckless.
 - Have more accidents.

- **But don't jump to conclusions.**
 - Don't confuse someone "blowing off steam" with a real warning sign.
 - Take behavior in context.
 - Sometimes people have "bad days".
 - Look for multiple warning signs, repeated behavior or "escalation."

- **"Escalation" is an increase in the seriousness of a situation or behavior.**
 - Most violent incidents follow a pattern of escalation.
 - It usually begins with an argument between coworkers.
 - It then progresses to insults, threats, intimidation and verbal challenges.
 - Witnesses often dismiss these conflicts.

- **The arguments then develop into "pushing matches" and other physical contact.**
 - The victim often provokes an attack.
 - Incidents of physical assault can result in serious injury or even death.

- **If you see aggressive behavior that you believe could escalate into violence, you must report it, including:**
 - Incidents that you witness.
 - Personal experiences.

- **Some people are reluctant to report incidents, because they don't want to:**
 - Be labeled a "snitch".
 - Get anyone "in trouble".
 - "Get involved".

- **The truth is that a violent incident is a tragedy for everyone... victims, perpetrators and witnesses.**
 - Reporting minor incidents is the only way to prevent more serious trouble from occurring later.
 - It gives a troubled person a chance to get the help that they need.

- **You can report incidents to your:**
 - Supervisor.
 - Human Resources Department.
 - Company's security personnel.
 - Your company may also have an "Employee Assistance Program" or an independent hotline (these reports are confidential).

- **Incidents involving assaults or threats of violence should be reported to local law enforcement agencies. Before calling you should document:**
 - Who was involved.
 - What the circumstances were.
 - When the incident happened.
 - Where the incident occurred.
 - How things were said or done.

- **You also need to report any unfamiliar or unauthorized people you see in your facility.**
 - This is the single best thing you can do for workplace security.
 - There is no harm in having people "checked out", even if they turn out to be authorized.

- **It is extremely important to report any weapons you see in your workplace.**
 - Even a licensed, authorized weapon represents a serious hazard.
 - Management needs to know about them.
 - It is better to be safe than sorry.

- **If you come face-to-face with an aggressive or violent person, you need to know how to handle them.**
 - Aggressive behavior is any action meant to hurt or demean someone (it doesn't have to cause physical harm).
 - This can include threats, verbal abuse and sexual harassment.
 - Aggressive behavior is inappropriate and should not be tolerated.

- **There are three kinds of threats that people make... "Direct", "Conditional" and "Hidden".**
 - Direct threats communicate a clear intention to do harm, such as "I'll get you for this."
 - Conditional threats are used to control people through intimidation, as in "If you do that, you'll be sorry."
 - Hidden (or "veiled") threats imply an intention to do harm without actually saying it.

- **Offhand remarks and threats that are made "jokingly" are not funny.**
 - They could be warning signs of trouble ahead and should be taken seriously.
- **It is important to report all types of threats.**
 - They may begin by "testing boundaries" or "pushing buttons."
 - They can progress to bullying, mocking, intimidation and harassment.
- **If you get involved in an argument, try to resolve it peacefully.**
 - Stay calm and do not allow it to become a shouting match.
 - Offer a compromise, or suggest using an impartial person as a moderator.
 - If all else fails, just walk away.
- **If you are confronted by an agitated or irrational person:**
 - Stay at least five feet away (try to maintain this distance).
 - Avoid physical contact.
 - Keep your arms low, and in a non-threatening position.
- **Speak in a calm manner. Encourage the person to talk about the problem.**
 - Try to understand.
 - Don't argue, disagree or be judgmental.
 - If necessary, try to change the subject or distract them.
 - If they become violent, call for help or try to get away.
- **"Sexual Harassment" is a form of violence. It is repeated, unwanted behavior based on an individual's gender.**
 - It is not just a man "coming on" to a woman at work.
 - It is an attempt to inflict emotional, psychological or physical harm.
 - Women are not the only victims.

- **Sexual harassment includes:**
 - "Sexist" as well as sexual remarks.
 - Sexual advances.
 - Unwanted physical contact.
 - Assigning menial or demeaning tasks because of gender.
 - Hazing or practical jokes based on an individual's sex.

- **Everyone has the right to pursue their career without suffering indignity.**
 - Treat others as you want to be treated.
 - Report any incidents of harassment that you experience or witness.

- **Assault is defined as any attempt to cause bodily harm, or any physical threat to do bodily harm.**
 - It is important to understand that no amount of physical violence is acceptable in the workplace.

- **If someone tries to draw you into a fight, do not accept the challenge.**
 - Pushing and shoving is no way to resolve a conflict.
 - Do not sink to their level... refuse to fight.
 - Avoid any physical contact... just walk away.

- **There can be serious consequences to fighting, even if you did not start it. They can include:**
 - An injury.
 - Disciplinary action from your employer.
 - Suspension, or loss of your job.
 - Arrest.
 - Being sued by your assailant.

- **If you are attacked, do not fight back unless your life is in danger.**
 - Do not escalate the confrontation by pushing back, which could lead to blows.
 - Get away from the attacker or call out.
 - Help is usually nearby.

- **Assault is a crime and should be reported to local law enforcement agencies as well as to your employer.**
- **Situations that involve weapons require special consideration.**
 - Any incident involving a weapon is extremely dangerous.
 - One wrong move and you could be dead.
 - Remember, "the person with the gun is in charge."
- **When faced with an armed assailant:**
 - Make no sudden moves.
 - Keep your hands visible.
 - Follow instructions.
 - Repeat the assailant's orders as you slowly comply.
 - Do not go beyond their instructions (assailants don't like surprises).
- **Do not resist an armed assailant unless you truly believe that they are going to kill you.**
 - Only then is it worth risking your life to fight back.
 - Don't try to be a hero and confront an armed assailant.
 - Stay low and out of sight.
 - Get as far away as possible.
 - Evacuate as many people as you can.
- **Do not sound an alarm if it will jeopardize anyone's immediate safety.**
 - Contact security or law enforcement personnel only if you can do it safely.
 - Give them as much information about the situation as possible.
- **A review of the most important points of the Course:**
 - No organization is immune to workplace violence.
 - Workplace violence is unnecessary and unacceptable.
 - Minor incidents are bad for morale and hinder productivity.
 - Major incidents can lead to serious injuries, even death.

- **Additional points:**
 - Keep a eye out for the warning signs of violence.
 - Report threats, intimidation and verbal or sexual harassment, as well as aggressive and violent behavior.
 - Try to resolve conflicts peacefully.
 - Never attempt to reason with an unreasonable opponent... just walk away.
 - If you are confronted with violence, do not fight back unless your life is in danger. Get away and get help.
 - Remember that most incidents start as a disagreement between coworkers.

- **If we treat people with respect, and refuse to tolerate aggressive behavior, we can all help prevent workplace violence.**