Victim Services of Waterloo Region

Workplace Violence Fact Sheet no.1

What is Workplace Violence?

Workplace violence is a specific category of violent crime that can include assault, domestic violence, stalking, threats harassment (including sexual harassment), physical and/or emotional abuse and, rarely, homicide of a singular or multiple nature.

Types of Workplace Violence

There are *four different types* of workplace violence:

1. Violent acts *by criminals who have no* other *connection with the workplace*, but to enter to commit robbery or another crime.
2. Violence directed at employees *by* customers, clients, patients, students, inmates or *any* other *for whom an organization provides services*.
3. Violence against coworkers, supervisors or managers *by a present or former employee*.
4. Violence committed in the workplace *by someone who doesn't work there, but has a personal relationship with an employee* – an abusive spouse or domestic relation.

Workplace violence is not only negative from the obvious safety, legal and ethical standpoints, but it also costs businesses – lost work time and wages, reduced productivity, medical costs, worker's compensation payments, legal and security expenses. Efforts to prevent workplace violence benefit everyone.

Workplace Violence Prevention

Everyone has a role to play in preventing workplace violence. It is important that everyone work together to promote safety.

What employers can do…

- Adopt a workplace violence policy and prevention program, and communicate it to employees.
- Provide regular training in preventative measures for all new/current employees, supervisors and managers.
- Support victims of workplace domestic violence instead of punishing them.
- Adopt and practice fair and consistent disciplinary procedures.
- Foster a climate of trust and respect among workers and between employees and management.
- When necessary, seek advice and assistance from outside resources, including threat-assessment psychologists, psychiatrists and other professionals, social service agencies and law enforcement.

What employees can do…

- Accept and adhere to an employer's preventative policies and practices.
- Become aware of and report violent or threatening behaviour by coworkers and other warning signs.
- Follow procedures established by the workplace violence prevention program, including those for reporting incidents.

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What unions can do…

- Support employer's violence prevention policies and procedures.
- Act as a partner in the design and implementation of the program.
- Defend worker rights to due process, but also support appropriate disciplinary actions that protect everyone's safety (e.g. sanctions for bringing a weapon into the workplace).
- Cooperate with and contribute to training efforts.

Workplace Violence Prevention Plan

Planning for violence, whether or not it has happened, is the best way of preventing it. By having steps in place to deal with the aftermath but also to recognize and diffuse potential violent incidents, a company can ensure that an incident will be better managed and less likely to escalate in threat level.

- There must be support from the top, otherwise it is unlikely to be implemented.
- Plans must be tailored to meet the needs of each individual agency.
- Plans should be proactive, not reactive.
- Plans should take into account the workplace culture: work atmosphere, management styles etc. If there are elements that appear to foster a toxic working environment they should be corrected.
- Use many perspectives when planning for and responding to workplace violence. A multidisciplinary team approach is best.
- Managers should take an active role in the plan: communicating it to employees, being alert for warning signs, and seeking advice and assistance when there is a potential problem.
- Plans must be practiced in order to ensure that they are carried out properly. Role plays should be evaluated to determine whether or not plans are effective and carried out properly.
- Policies should not be set in stone. Change them to reflect your current workforce and changes within it.

Components should include:

- A statement of the employer's no threats and violence policy and complementary policies such as those regulating harassment and drug and alcohol use.
- A physical security survey and assessment of premises.
- Procedures for addressing threats and threatening behaviour.
- Designation and training of an incident response team.
- Access to outside resources, such as threat assessment professionals.
- Training of different management and employee groups.
- Crisis response measures.
- Consistent enforcement of behavioural standards, including effective disciplinary procedures.

The next fact sheet in this series will address preemptive practices to help prevent workplace violence.

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