



## **VIOLENCE COMES TO WORK**

Shootings, bombings, and other violent incidents seem to dominate the news. From the recent incident in Orlando where a former employee shot 5 of his co-workers shortly after his termination to a Congressman and his aides being shot while practicing for a baseball game, to a bombing at an Ariana Grande concert in England, the world and our workplaces seem to be morphing into unsafe places.

As employers, we have a legal and ethical duty to keep our employees safe. This includes taking the necessary precautions to prevent violent incidents in our workplaces.

When was the last time you evaluated your worksite to determine how your employees could find safety if a gunman came into your business? In the case of the former employee who shot his co-workers in Orlando, the situation may have been prevented if employees had been more diligent about keeping the side door to the facility locked. The main entrance to the facility required a key card to gain access; however, it was a habit for employees to keep the side door unlocked and accessible. Do you have a similar situation in your facility?

Violent threats don't just come from employees or former employees. They can also come from vendors, family members or "significant others" of our employees, or strangers. Now is the time for you to assess your businesses and come up with plans as to how you can deter and minimize the risk of someone coming into your facility and causing harm. Here are some suggestions for making your facility and employees secure:

- Establish physical barriers such as locked doors, glass partitions between the public and your receptionist (similar to what you see at a doctor's office), and deep, high counters at reception and retail areas.
- Provide adequate lighting in parking areas and entrances/exits to the facility.
- Use the buddy system to ensure no one is left at work alone. Encourage employees to walk to the parking lot together.
- Install cameras to monitor activity.
- Install a panic button if appropriate for employees to push if they feel physically threatened.
- Create at least two means of entrance/exit to a room if possible.
- Identify a "secure" room where employees can gather in the event of an emergency.

The Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) has devoted a section of their [website](#) to workplace violence and prevention. Additional resources include the [Department of Labor](#), the [Alliance Against Workplace Violence](#), and the [Federal Bureau of Investigation](#).

In addition to securing your workplace, employers need to be proactive to identify signs of workplace violence and to diffuse it as much as possible. This includes:

- Establish and enforce policies prohibiting bullying, harassment, and workplace violence.
- Conduct background checks before hiring someone who has a history of violence.
- Establish procedures for employees to report threats, violence and if there is imminent danger.
- Ensure keys, access codes, etc. returned from terminating or terminated employees.
- Evaluate how people are fired in your organization. Termination should never be a surprise and the company needs to treat the employee with as much dignity and respect as possible. This includes listening to their side of the situation even when you know it won't change your decision. Giving them an opportunity to vent can go a long way to diffuse the situation.
- Employees dealing with domestic violence and who have restraining orders should be encouraged to provide a picture of the person that is threatening them and given to whoever is responsible for security. Consider helping the employee by allowing them to change their schedule and/or take a leave of absence.

Training employees on the topic of workplace violence is also a key to preventing serious incidents from occurring at your facility. That training can include:

- What to do when there is an active shooter. The [Department of Homeland Security](#) and the [FBI](#) provide a wealth of materials that can be used. Additionally, videos from the [FBI](#), the [U.S. Marines](#), the [Los Angeles County Sheriff's Office](#), and the [City of Houston](#) can be incorporated into your training program.
- Regularly train employees and managers about your policies regarding workplace violence, bullying, and harassment.
- Teach managers how to recognize signs of potential violence how to diffuse it.
- Help employees and managers identify violent behaviors and give them a clear guide to reporting those suspicious behaviors.

Regardless of employer size or industry we're all vulnerable to workplace violence. Establishing security measures and protocols and providing training to employees and managers can go a long way to preventing disaster.

*Contributed by the Employers Association Forum, Inc. (EAF). EAF is a non-profit corporate membership-based association dedicated to serving the business and HR communities with world-class HR tools, hotlines & legal compliance, news & trends, surveys & economic data, benefits & insurance, risk management, training & consulting, and leadership & organizational development. Our members receive discounted rates on all [EAF classroom training](#) at EAF's training center in Longwood. [Click here](#) to learn more about EAF membership benefits.*