



# WORKPLACE VIOLENCE AWARENESS GUIDELINES

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Workplace safety and health hazards affecting employees have been viewed as occurring from unsafe work practices, hazardous working conditions, or exposures to harmful chemical, biological or physical agents; not from violent acts committed by other persons. Recently, employees, as well as supervisors and managers, have become all too frequent victims of assault or other violent acts in the workplace which entail a substantial risk of physical or emotional harm.

## Defining Workplace Violence

The workplace is any location, permanent or temporary, where an employee performs work or work-related activities. Workplace facilities include lunchrooms, restrooms, break rooms, vehicles used for work, and parking facilities.

Workplace violence is any physical assault including unwanted touching or any other offensive physical contact, threatening behavior, or verbal abuse. Examples of workplace violence may include:

- Harassment of any nature such as being followed, sworn at, or shouted at;
- Psychological traumas such as threats, obscene phone calls, bomb threats, or an intimidating presence;
- Physical violence such as hitting, grabbing, beating, stabbing, attempted suicide, suicide, rape or shooting.

## Categories of Workplace Violence

- Stranger on Employee – stranger enters the workplace to commit a robbery or engage in another violent act.
- Customer on Employee – customer may engage in varying levels of violence.
- Partner on Employee – someone else's partner may cause harm to employee or co-workers.
- Employee on Employee – employee may have displayed behavioral changes over a period of months or years that are evident of potential workplace violence.

## Recognizing Warning Signs

- Potential warning signals may alert you to any employee or person in the workplace who could become violent. No single warning signal is a reliable predictor of violence;
- Keep in mind that what is considered acceptable or inappropriate behavior depends on the person;

- Changes in behavior are important to note in most cases. Look for patterns of changing behavior;
- Know your department's procedures for reporting potential or actual workplace violence. Note: Refer to County of Los Angeles, Department of Human Resources Policy No. 620, Threat Management Policy, Guidelines, and Resources dated February 24, 2006.

#### Potential Warning Signs May Include:

- Increased absenteeism;
- Major changes in personal appearance, attitude, or behavior;
- Change in personal relationships;
- Reduction in work productivity;
- History of violent behavior;
- Unusual interest in or preoccupation with weapons;
- Exhibits serious stress;
- Observation of substance abuse;
- Unexplained signal of physical injury;
- Loitering around the workplace;
- Exhibits agitation. Inability to make eye contact;
- Unexplained interest in other's work activity.

#### What to Do

- Stay calm, listen attentively, and ask the person to sit down;
- Ask the person questions relevant to the complaint, such as, "What can I do to help you?"
- Acknowledge the person's concerns and try to find solutions;
- Maintain eye contact;
- Speak slowly, softly, and clearly. Avoid being defensive;
- Identify violent behaviors, especially before they escalate;
- Set ground rules, such as, "When you shout at me, I can't understand what you're saying."
- Signal a co-worker or supervisor that you need help by using a panic button or pre-determined code word or signal. Keep the situation under control;
- Speak with your supervisor.

#### If the Behavior Escalates,

- Get yourself and others away from the potentially violent person;
- Know and follow your department's workplace emergency action plan;
- Call 9-1-1 or your workplace emergency number;
- Get out, hide and/or evacuate the area.

If you need further information, refer to the Cal/OSHA Guidelines for Workplace Security at [http://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/dosh\\_publications/worksecurity.html](http://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/dosh_publications/worksecurity.html).