

ELEANOR M. ROSS & ASSOCIATES, INC. *WORKPLACE VIOLENCE SPECIALISTS*

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE A GROWING CONCERN FOR EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES

Distraught employees are injuring and killing their coworkers, supervisors and managers at an alarming rate. Violence in the workplace is also attributed to a growing number of customers/clients. Domestic violence has moved to the workplace and is no longer a “domestic” issue. Measures must be taken to reduce the potential for workplace violence and to ensure our work environment is safe. Be prepared! When a crisis occurs, it is too late.

- I. Definition of Violence in the Workplace
- II. Overview of the Problem & Financial Implications
- III. Causes of Workplace Violence
 - A. Stress and Frustrations at Work and at Home
 - B. Performance Evaluations
 - C. Terminations
- IV. Hiring and Firing - Two Opportunities To Reduce Workplace Violence
- V. Most Effective Solution - Prevention
 - A. Written Workplace Violence Policy
 - 1. Zero Tolerance Policy
 - 2. Clearly Stated Policy Outlining Responsibilities of Supervisors, Managers and Employees To Be Followed With No Exceptions
 - 3. Commitment of Management
 - 4. Communicating Policy to All Managers and Employees

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B. Crisis Hot Line - Confidential

1. Require all Managers, Supervisors, and Employees to notify the hot line staff of potentially violent individuals or situations
2. Available to all Managers, Supervisors, and Employees as a resource for defusing a volatile situation

C. Training of Managers and Employees

1. Policy on Workplace Violence
2. Stress Management
3. Recognize Potentially Violent Personality
4. Conflict Resolution

D. Security and Safety Assessment

VI. Identifying Potentially Violent Behavior and Situations

- A. Perpetrator's Profile
- B. Signs of a Troubled Employee
- C. The Three Steps of Aggression
- D. Defusing Violence

VII. Crisis Management

- A. Crisis Team
- B. Crisis Plan
- C. Debriefings
- D. Follow-up after Crisis to Refine Crisis Plan

VIII. Legal Obligations

- A. Workers' Compensation
- B. Liability Issues

CRISES IN THE WORKPLACE

by

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CRIME IN THE UNITED STATES

In the United States, a burglary is committed every 11 seconds; a robbery every 47 seconds; a murder every 22 minutes. Crime costs \$1.3 million a minute in this country.

VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE

Robberies, threats, stalkings, beatings, fistfights, drive-by shootings, bomb threats, murders, natural disasters, foodborne illnesses, accidental deaths in the course of employment, intimidation, harassment workplace crises and acts of violence can strike any business at any time. The impact on the employees and customers is horrendous. The financial impact on the company may be so devastating that it takes years to recover. Sometimes, the company may never recover.

The perpetrators are employees, managers, customers, and the public. The victims of workplace violence are employees, managers, customers and the public. They are us.

Workplace violence has many negative consequences: decrease in or complete loss of productivity of the employee(s); increased rate of turn-over, absenteeism and accidents; increase in alcohol and drug use, family problems; closer scrutiny by the media and negative coverage; interference with normal business operations, possible threat to the operating license, and even temporary or permanent closure of the business. Therefore, the entire community may well be affected.

COSTS OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

On-the-job violence costs American businesses over \$36 billion a year in lost productivity, training, absenteeism, security, increase in worker's compensation insurance and medical claims, and attorney fees, among others. Each episode of violence resulting in death or severe injury of an employee has been estimated by business

consultants to cost an employer \$250,000.

WHEN WORK IS MURDER

Total Job-Related Homicides	1,063
Robberies & Miscellaneous Crimes	793
Work Associates	106
Co-workers or Former Co-workers	59
Customers or Clients	43
Police in the Line of Duty	52
Personal Acquaintances	45
Husbands, Ex-husbands	15
Boyfriends, Ex-boyfriends	11
Other Relatives	6
Other Acquaintances	11

Source: 1993 Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, US Dept of Labor BLS

EMPLOYERS MUST BE PREPARED

Employers should prepare for the inevitable crisis and know what to do when it strikes. Nearly 70% of the employers in the country have plans in place to handle various aspects of crisis situations; however, few companies have plans in place to deal with the human aspects of the situation. The victims of traumatic situations may experience symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress which are normal reactions of a normal person to an abnormal event. Post Traumatic Stress symptoms are extreme reactions to the traumatic situation.

POST TRAUMATIC STRESS REACTIONS

Out of 100 employees experiencing traumatic events, all of them will experience symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress. However, for approximately 20 - 30 of those employees, the symptoms will be so intense and devastating to them, that the employees will suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Responses to trauma may include physical, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral signs. For example, physical signs may include muscle tremors, fatigue, nausea, weakness, and other physical complaints. Cognitive signs may include confusion, poor concentration, hypervigilance, nightmares and intrusive images. Emotional symptoms of trauma include anxiety, guilt, grief, shock, fear and anger. Behavioral signs may include withdrawal,

emotional outbursts, inability to sleep or eat and increase in alcohol or drug consumption.

If the symptoms are not dealt with immediately, the condition may develop into Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and may persist for months or even years. PTSD can shatter the person's life and be extremely costly for the employer.

PSYCHOLOGICAL STRESS UNDER WORKERS' COMPENSATION

The sources of mental stress fall into three categories under state workers' compensation statutes.

Category A: Reactions to a sudden and unusual event in the employment environment

Examples: Traumatic accidents (without physical injury); witnessing death or severe injury of a co-worker; robbery

Category B: Reactions to a continuing unusual condition in the employment environment

Examples: Increase in job duties; conflict with a supervisor or co-worker; Harassment by supervisor or co-worker; circumstances surrounding a dismissal, transfer or demotion

Category C: Reactions to the usual condition of the employment environment

Examples: Inability to keep up with job duties; frustration or dissatisfaction with the job; stressful job duties

The courts have adopted guidelines which tend to draw dividing lines between the categories of mental stress as described above.

Many states have passed legislation regarding mental-mental cases wherein the work-related stress is a direct consequence of a lawful personnel decision. Examples of such decisions included the following: disciplinary actions, work evaluation, job transfer, demotion, or termination taken in good faith by the employer. These cases are not compensable.

The State of Georgia is among the 11 states that do not permit workers' compensation for mental-mental disorders (psychological injury due to trauma) resulting from on-the-job stress unless it is caused by and is sustained in connection with a physical injury. In other words, the law requires that an employee have a physical injury in addition to the

psychological injury in order for it to be compensable under the workers' compensation statute.

However, almost half of the states only require that the stress experienced by an employee be at a level beyond what the general population encounters or beyond what most people holding that job ordinarily experience for it to be compensable under their workers' compensation laws.

An additional 10 states require that some sudden or traumatic event at work cause the mental disorder in order for it to be compensable.

Thus, the trend has shifted under state workers' compensation laws from requiring a physical injury in addition to the psychological injury to simply requiring a sudden or traumatic event or a stressor beyond what the general population encounters.

CRISES AT WORK

A Crisis is any *unexpected event that involves risk and uncertainty*. Although we cannot eliminate every act of violence in the workplace, we can control the crisis through an effective crisis management plan. The plan takes the uncertainty out of an already stressful situation. It allows for rapid notification and decisive response. There is no time to develop a plan after the crisis has occurred.

The plan must be supported from the top down. Simplicity is key. Clear lines and areas of responsibility are defined so there is no doubt who will handle various aspects of the situation. Correct processing of information internally as well as effective media relations and channeling of information to the press and the public is essential. Immediate intervention by trained workplace violence specialists is crucial to the outcome. A written document stored on a shelf is not enough.

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE POLICY

Part of the crisis plan must include a workplace violence policy. The policy must be communicated to all employees. The policy must be clearly stated and the responsibilities of supervisors, managers and employees must be specifically outlined and are to be followed with no exceptions. It requires management's commitment.

Workplace violence and crises cannot always be prevented. they can be managed!

Eleanor M. Ross is the founder and owner of ELEANOR M. ROSS & ASSOCIATES, INC., a national company devoted to assisting employers and employees in preparing for and dealing with the human aspects of workplace violence. Her career in dealing with workplace trauma spans 29 years. Her knowledge and experience in the fields of psychological counseling, workers' compensation, medical aspects of impairments, and return-to-work programs make her uniquely qualified to assist employers in the area of workplace violence and other crisis situations. Her credentials include the following: Board Certified Expert in Traumatic Stress; Registered Traumatologist; Certified Disability Manager Specialist; Certified Case Manager; Member, International Society of Traumatic Stress Studies; Member, International Critical Incident Stress Foundation; Associate Member, American Psychological Association; Associate Member, Georgia Psychological Association; Member, International Association of Industrial Accident Boards and Commissions.