



## **Recognizing & Preventing Workplace Violence**

The unfortunate 2013 events in Colorado and Wisconsin put violent acts in the forefront of our minds, and workplace violence is a real concern of employers and employees. According to the Arizona Department of Occupational Safety and Health (ADOSH), there were 24 assaults or violent acts reported in Arizona in 2010; 22 of those acts resulted in death, representing an overwhelming 31.2 percent of all workplace fatalities in Arizona for that year.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) defines workplace violence as “any physical assault, threatening behavior, or verbal abuse occurring in the workplace”. Below are some helpful tips on how to recognize a potentially dangerous situation, how to diffuse a potential attack, and what to do in the event of an emergency.

### **Am I really at risk?**

Workplace violence can happen at any time, often without provocation or apparent warning; however, certain factors hold higher statistical likelihood for workplace violence. The most potentially dangerous jobs include tasks that require:

- Contact with members of the public
- Exchange of money
- Deliveries of people, goods, or services
- Operating during very early or very late hours
- Working under high-stress conditions
- Working alone, or in small groups

It is important to note that even employees who do not regularly perform any of the above tasks are still susceptible to workplace violence; no one is immune, and recognizing the signs of potential violence is the first step to avoid becoming a victim.

### **What are the “warning signs”?**

Many people think that “workplace violence” means being assaulted by a co-worker; in reality, workplace violence can occur at the hand of a colleague; member of the public; consumer; or more closely related individual, such as a spouse or family member. Often, potential attackers exhibit behaviors that should be perceived as a warning to others:

- Disorderly conduct
- Harassment; obscene phone calls, text messages, or emails; intimidation
- Weapons- possession; violation of laws and/or policies; discussion/bragging about weapons
- Threats of violence- vague or overt
- Discussion of violence, death, or homicide

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### **ARIZONA MUNICIPAL RISK RETENTION POOL**

14902 NORTH 73<sup>RD</sup> STREET ♦ SCOTTSDALE, ARIZONA 85260  
MAIN: 602.996.8810 ♦ TF: 888.309.4339 ♦ FAX: 602.996.9045  
WWW.AMRRP.ORG



If ignored, these warnings may escalate to a possible attack. Evasive measures should be taken immediately if any of the following are observed in a confrontational setting:

- Stance- Standing uncomfortably close to others; trying to stand behind or to the side of others (flanking); pugilist (fighter's) stance
- Voice- Speaking too loudly, or with a nervous or monotonous tone
- Eyes- Darting or scanning around room; blinking faster or slower than normal; glassy, bloodshot, or dilated appearance; lack of eye contact
- Other Physical Cues- Shaking; sweating; clenching of hands or teeth
- Verbal Cues- Hesitation in response; answering questions with question; defensiveness

Should these behaviors be presented, seek help *immediately*. Discreetly ask another person to call for assistance, scan the room for the closest exit, and attempt to increase the distance between yourself and the attacker. Speak calmly, clearly, and compassionately to the attacker; resist the urge to “clam up”. If the attacker persists and escape is unavoidable, as a last resort, defend yourself until help arrives.

#### **What can I do to protect my employees?**

The best protection employers can offer their employees is to establish and enforce a zero-tolerance policy toward workplace violence against or by their employees. Establish a prevention policy and incorporate the information into an existing accident prevention program, employee handbook, or standard operating procedures (SOP) manual.

It is critical to ensure that all employees understand and follow your workplace violence policy. Training sessions are imperative, and employees should be encouraged to ask questions and provide suggestions to make the workplace safer for everyone. When preparing your workplace violence prevention policy, consider the following:

- Establish clear goals
- Deliver to all employees; every employee must take part in training
- Encourage immediate reporting of potential or real acts of violence; ensure there will be no negative effect on any reporting employee
- Management involvement is key, but all employees should be empowered to prevent workplace violence

For more information on employer responsibility or tips to prevent workplace violence, visit OSHA's website at [www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov).

For questions regarding policy implementation or employee training, contact an AMRRP Loss Control Manager Eric Duthie at (602) 368-6503 or [eduthie@berkleyrisk.com](mailto:eduthie@berkleyrisk.com).

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