

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

HOW TO HANDLE THREATS, SET POLICIES,

AND SAFEGUARD EMPLOYEES



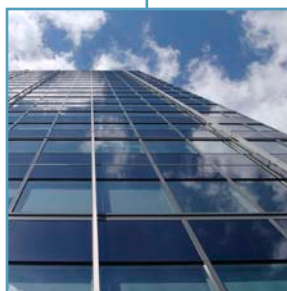
Workplace threats are very real. Whether a passing comment about “going postal,” or a definitive warning to take up arms and “start dropping people one by one,” menacing language and behavior by employees should never be taken lightly.

Most employers and HR professionals understand that even the mere threat of violence or physical harm by employees against coworkers must be met with immediate discipline—possibly termination. Having policies in place can ease the challenge of responding to such intimidation. Here are some tips.

LOOK TO NATIONAL STANDARDS

Although slow to develop, there are some federal guidelines that provide direction in handling workplace threats. The Occupational Health and Safety Act (OSHA) contains a broad “general duty clause,” which requires employers to furnish employees a place of work that is free from recognized hazards that could cause death or serious harm.

The Labor Department also periodically issues industry-specific recommendations for preventing and responding to workplace violence—most notably directed to late-night retail businesses, and healthcare or social service workers who may be particularly vulnerable.



In the private sector, ASIS International, a 55-year old standard-setting organization for security professionals around the world, released violence prevention and response guidelines in 2005. More recently, ASIS teamed up with the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM) to develop national standards based on those earlier guidelines. Once completed, the standards will offer practical definitions of workplace violence (including a continuum of problem behavior) and classify incidents based on the relationship between the perpetrator and victim. Standards will also outline prevention and

intervention strategies, as well as procedures for detecting, investigating, and addressing threatening behavior or violent episodes.

WHAT A WORKPLACE POLICY SHOULD INCLUDE

ASIS guidelines state that workplace violence should be defined broadly enough to capture the entire range of behaviors that could cause injury, impede the normal course of work, or make coworkers or customers fear for their safety. Policies should also...

- Include a clear statement of the consequences for violation of the policy
- Encourage or require employees to report suspected violations of the policy, and establish multiple channels for reporting
- State a commitment of non-retaliation for employees who make reports
- Determine who or what department has responsibility for taking actions under the policy, and specify how they will be trained to do so
- Coordinate with other workplace policies, while taking priority over them (for example, those policies addressing drug and alcohol use at work, harassment, or carrying weapons)

In this post-Columbine, post-September 11 era, when economic stress places even greater pressure on employees, it may be impossible to eliminate every threat of workplace violence. But a carefully thought-out policy, and a strong commitment to its enforcement, can go a long way toward providing a working environment that promotes employee safety and good morale. Call us if you would like some help.

ASIS
GUIDELINES

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