

Risk and Vulnerability – Can It Happen Here?

May 20, 2024

Employment Law Monthly

Author: [Kevin M. Craig, MAS, CPP, CPM](#) | Vice President, Safety, Security and Investigations, [Porzio Compliance Services](#)

Every organization, large or small, private, or public, has an obligation to provide a safe and secure working environment for employees. While it is common to view our organizations as inherently safe, no organization is immune from the potential for workplace violence in some form. Organizational leaders must be cautious not to fall into the “It can't happen here” mindset.

Workplace violence comes in many forms and varying degrees of severity. Whether the organization experiences employee aggression or intimidation, threats towards others, or acts of physical violence, no amount of violent behavior is acceptable.

For this reason, employers must take a proactive approach to assess risk and vulnerability as part of a comprehensive workplace violence prevention strategy.

Effective workplace violence prevention strategies require multidisciplinary involvement. Top management and human resources personnel cannot accomplish this alone. Workplace violence prevention also must include employees, security personnel, and legal counsel.

Legal counsel plays a significant role in workplace violence prevention and must work closely with human resources and organizational leadership to ensure compliance with established policies and procedures, privacy rights of employees, legal obligations related to standards of care for workplace safety, due process, and disciplinary action when necessary.

Organizational Assessments

The first step in planning a workplace violence prevention program is assessing organizational needs, risk, and vulnerability. This exercise will help the organization understand safety and security needs to drive security strategies and prevention and mitigation measures.

Organizations should start by evaluating factors such as the potential for violent events, and the impact on both employees and the organization as a whole. The goal of the initial assessment is to identify, evaluate, and prioritize the risk of violence that may impact the workplace.

The risk assessment should include the potential for violence from internal and external sources. Understanding the ways they are targeted is an important factor in creating strategies to protect them. Violence in the workplace generally falls into four categories each with varying or overlapping mitigation strategies.

Type 1: Violence by strangers

Many acts of violence that impact organizations are perpetrated by individuals with no connection to the organization. These acts from outside sources are difficult to identify.

Type 2: Violence by customers or clients

In some cases, unsatisfied or aggrieved customers or clients perpetrate violence.

Type 3: Violence by co-workers

Employee conflict, disciplinary actions, or terminations also may be a catalyst for violence. Many incidents involve recently disciplined or terminated employees.

Type 4: Violence by personal relations

Other cases involve indirect connections to the targeted location. Perpetrators may have no direct connection to the organization themselves but target an employee who is a family member, spouse, former partner, or someone who they wish to seek revenge against. These cases often involve domestic violence.

Once the risk of violence and potential sources of violent behavior are identified, organizations should assess vulnerabilities. Vulnerabilities should be considered in relation to the types of threats identified in the risk assessment including the nature of the organization and industry and whether the threats are from internal or external sources.

Additional considerations related to organizational vulnerability include:

- Hours of operation- Do employees work beyond daylight hours?
- Location of assignments- Do employees work remotely, off-site, or alone?
- Location of the facility- Is the facility in an area prone to crime or violence?
- Public Access- Is the facility open to the public?
- Behavioral Threat Assessment- Does the organization have a mechanism to report and investigate concerning behavior?
- Other considerations: employee discipline, geopolitical or ideological target, high-risk industry, etc.

Evaluating Preparedness and Planning for Prevention

After risks and vulnerabilities have been identified evaluate existing practices and mitigation measures and establish a comprehensive plan. Actions include:

- Establishing comprehensive workplace violence prevention policies.
- Train employees on threat reporting and situational awareness.
- Address physical security vulnerabilities: office floorplan, clear exits, lighting, access control, visitor management, emergency response procedures, and safe spaces for employees.
- Consider security technology: emergency buttons or alarms, emergency notification for employees, cameras, electronic access control.
- Threat Assessment and Management: establish clear protocols for addressing concerning behavior.
- Employee Assistance Programs: provide resources to assist and support employees.

Every organization has a unique environment and culture and there is no one-size-fits-all approach to securing the workplace. Assessing and evaluating risk and vulnerabilities is the best way to identify the needs of any organization to

effectively plan a comprehensive strategy to prevent and respond to potential incidents of violence. In doing so, organizations can implement policies and measures to provide a safe environment and establish a culture that prioritizes safety and security in the workplace.

Interested in learning more about workplace safety and security? Join us at PorzioCS's Safety, Security & Investigations Symposium! Gain insights into essential topics like workplace wellness, prevention strategies, and cutting-edge security technology. [Register today](#) to discover practical solutions for improving your safety protocols.