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## **Stopping Workplace Violence Can Prevent Severe Workers Comp Claims**

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### **Keeping Employees Safe is Necessary Part of Risk Management**

Whether it is a former employee seeking revenge for being fired, an angry current employee, a lover's quarrel or an intentional criminal act like a robbery, protecting employees from injury or death in the workplace is essential. Keeping employees safe from violence is unfortunately a necessary part of any risk management program. Stopping workplace violence also results in the prevention of severe (and expensive) workers' compensation claims.

The first step in preventing workplace violence is the careful screening of all job applicants to eliminate new employees who might be prone to violence. The human resource personnel who have the responsibility of making employee hiring decisions should receive training in recognizing potentially dangerous employees. This is more than not hiring convicted felons. The human resource personnel should be trained to look for signs such as the job candidate being disgruntled in a former job, having mental health issues, being aggressive or angry toward anyone in their prior job(s).

### **Proper Hiring Procedures Can Stop Problems Before Start**

The new employee candidate should provide proof that they are they claim to be. A recent situation at a Savannah warehouse shows the importance of this. The new hire employee attempted to rape the warehouse office clerk. Another employee interrupted the attempted rape. Before fleeing the building, the newly hired employee shot and killed the second employee who had interrupted the attempted rape. The police quickly located and arrested the newly hired employee. It was discovered the new hire was not who he said he was. The newly hired employee was a convicted felon who had recently been released from prison. The newly hired employee had stolen the identification of his cousin, and had used his cousin's employment history to apply for the warehouse job. Proper hiring procedure including verification that the job applicant in front of the personnel recruiter matched the applicant's photo identification could have prevented this workplace tragedy.

In addition to careful hiring procedures, every employee (not just management) should know that any type of workplace behavior which threatens violence, implies violence or intimidates another employee is not acceptable. All employees should be taught to recognize anti-social behavior.

### **Red-flags For Potential Violence:**

- Any verbal threat
- Any physical threat like making a fist, intentionally invading a co-worker's personal space, or physical movement that implies violence
- Screaming or yelling
- Expressing homicidal or suicidal thoughts
- Being obsessed with weapons
- Having a history of domestic abuse
- Being a loner with no involvement with the rest of the work force
- Pursuing an unwanted romantic interest in a co-worker
- Having extreme family problems
- Having extreme financial problems
- Having a history of drug or alcohol abuse
- Having a grudge against a supervisor or co-worker

- Having a history of prior violent behavior
- Having extreme and unexplained mood swings
- Blaming co-workers, supervisor or management for all things that go wrong at work
- Having paranoid behavior or making statements that reflect paranoid thoughts

All employees should know they can confidentially report to management any concerns they have about a fellow employee without fear of reprisal from either the fellow employee causing their concern or from management. Management has the responsibility to investigate, assess and document both the objective and subjective behavior of the employee who is causing concern to their fellow employees.

Employees should understand that it is management's job to deal with the potential violent co-worker. The employees should never on their own attempt to address the potential violent co-worker's threatening behavior. Employees should expect their supervisor or management to immediately handle such situations, and if they don't, the employees should move to the next higher level within the chain of command.

### Safety Measures to Stop Workplace Violence:

- Restricting access to the workplace to employees only, with vendors and/or customers being restricted to designated areas
- Having established protocols on when and how to admit non-employees to the workplace
- Having an installed alarm system that can be triggered by the employees in the event of an emergency
- Using escorts for employees walking to their cars in uncontrolled parking areas
- Arranging furniture, cubicles or machinery to keep employees from being trapped in an area.
- Using cellphones to request immediate assistance when needed

All employees should know that any workplace violence or the threat of violence, no matter how trivial, is totally unacceptable. Employees must be encouraged to report any sign that a fellow employee may become violent. The prevention of violence should be a specific section within the workplace safety manual. While the total elimination of all workplace violence may not be attained, by having a comprehensive approach to recognizing and preventing the potential for workplace violence, the employer can make a major stride toward stopping workplace violence.

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