

Feather River College



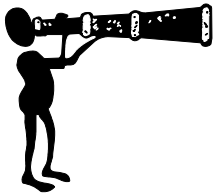
Introduction

Workplace safety and health hazards affecting California employees have traditionally been viewed as arising from unsafe work practices, hazardous industrial conditions, or exposures to harmful chemical, biologic or physical agents, not from violent acts committed by other human beings. Recently, employees, as well as supervisors and managers, have become victims of assaults or other violent acts in the workplace, which entail a substantial risk of physical or emotional harm. Many of these assaults result in fatal injury, but an even greater number result in nonfatal injury, or in the threat of injury, which can lead to medical treatment, missed work, lost wages and decreased productivity.

Workplace violence has become a serious occupational health problem requiring the combined efforts of employers, employees, labor unions, government, academics and security professionals.

At Feather River College strategies to prevent workplace violence are an addendum to the Injury and illness Prevention Program. This section is provided to give an understanding of the scope of the workplace violence problem, identification of risks, and ways to protect oneself.

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Scope Of The Workplace Violence Program

While the total number of fatal injuries in the workplace has declined over the past decade in California, the number of deaths resulting from assaults and other violent acts has significantly increased while other major categories of occupational fatalities have decreased.

In 1993, the category of assaults and violent acts became the leading cause of occupational fatalities in California. The demographic profiles of victims of fatal workplace assaults indicate that the majority are male. However, even though the overall fatal workplace injury rate for women is substantially lower than it is for men, homicides represent the leading cause of death for women in the workplace.

Fatal workplace assaults are only one part of the workplace violence problem—assaults which result in non-fatal injury, or the threat of harm, are much more common than those which result in fatal injury.

A survey of 480 members of the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM) found that a third of the respondents said their workplaces have experienced violent acts in the past five years, such as fist-fights (75%), shootings (17%), stabbings (7%) or sexual assaults (6%).

Other available survey data indicate the existence of a substantial and widespread problem. While there is no definite profile to determine if an individual will commit a violent act, experts say there are clear signs that should alert workplace managers that an employee is potentially violent. When a worker displays several of these the situation may need to be assessed for possible therapy or other action. Here are some signs mentioned by forensic psychiatrist Park Dietz:

- Threats, intimidating comments or allusions to violence against others in the workplace.
- Excessive or intimidating references to mass murder or workplace violence, real or fictional
- Frightening talk about weapons or displaying weapons on the job in an intimidating manner.
- Special interest in survivalism or military matters.
- Inappropriate communications to co-workers or superiors, such as responding to constructive criticism with several written pages of justification.
- Researching or stalking potential victims. This could include keeping notes about perceived enemies or looking up the supervisor's home address.
- Excessive displays of anger.
- Depression or suicidal thoughts.
- Paranoia, feelings of persecution.
- Repeatedly blaming others for one's problems.
- Filing unreasonable grievances or lawsuits.

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Types Of Workplace Violence Events

Workplace violence events can be divided into three major types:

In **Type I**, the assailant has no legitimate business relationship to the workplace and usually enters the affected workplace to commit a robbery or other criminal act.

In **Type II**, the assailant is either the recipient, or the object, of a service provided by the affected workplace or the victim, e.g., the assailant is a current or former client, student, or customer.

In **Type III**, the agent has some employment-related involvement with the affected workplace. Usually this involves an assault by a current or former employee, supervisor or manager; by a current/former spouse or lover; a relative or friend; or some other person who has a dispute with an employee of the affected workplace.

Employees or proprietors who have face-to-face contact and exchange money with the public, work late at night and into the early morning hours, and work alone or in very small numbers are at greatest risk of a Type I event.

Even though Type I events represent the most common type of fatal event, fatal Type II events involving victims who provide services to the public are increasing. In 1993, fatal Type II events accounted for 30% of workplace homicides. Of increasing concern, though, are Type II events involving assaults to teaching, administrative and support staff in schools.

Generally, a Type III event involves a threat of violence, or a physical act of violence resulting in a fatal or non-fatal injury, to an employee, supervisor or manager of the affected workplace by:

1. A current or former employee; or
2. Another person who has a dispute with an employee of the affected workplace.

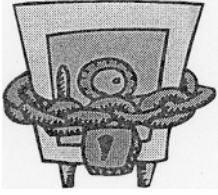
The following actions are considered violent acts:

- a. Striking, punching, slapping or assaulting another person.
- b. Fighting or challenging another person to a fight.
- c. Grabbing, pinching or touching another person in an unwanted way whether sexually or otherwise.
- d. Engaging in dangerous, threatening or unwanted horseplay.
- e. Possessing, using, or threatening use of a gun, knife or other weapon of any kind on the organization's property, including parking lots, interior or exterior premises, agency vehicles, or while engaged in activities on behalf of the organization in other locations, (unless such possession or use is a requirement of the job.)
- f. Threatening harm or harming another person, or any other action or conduct that implies the threat of bodily harm.

Type III events account for a much smaller proportion of fatal workplace injuries in California than do Types I and II. Most commonly, the target of a Type III event is a co-employee, a supervisor or manager of the assailant. In committing a Type III assault, an individual may be seeking revenge for what he or she perceives as unfair treatment. The most prevalent Type III event involves threats and other types of verbal harassment.

Some mental health professionals believe that belligerent, intimidating or threatening behavior by an employee or supervisor is an early warning sign of an individual's propensity to commit a physical assault in the future, and that monitoring and appropriately responding to such behavior is a necessary part of effective prevention.

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Preventative Measures

To establish preventative measures, each manager and supervisor should perform an initial assessment to identify workplace security factors that have been shown to contribute to the risk of violence in the workplace.

One or more of the following factors present in the workplace increases the potential risk of violence:

- Exchanging money;
- Working alone at night and during early morning hours;
- Availability of valued items, e.g., money and jewelry;
- Guarding money or valuable property or possessions;
- Performing public safety functions in the community;
- Working with patients, clients, passengers, customers or students known or suspected to have a history of violence;
- Employees with a history of assaults or who have exhibited belligerent, intimidating or threatening behavior to others.

Recommended Prevention strategies to reduce the risk of assault include:

1. Training in how to effectively defuse hostile situations involving students, clients, customers, and members of the general public to whom they provide services.
2. Training to identify the warning signs of potentially violent behavior.
3. Identifying procedures for reporting suspicious persons or activities.
4. Maintaining presence of security personnel where appropriate.

5. Training and instruction in recognizing workplace security hazards and measures to prevent workplace assaults, including emergency action and post-emergency procedures.
6. Posting emergency telephone numbers for security and fire protection services.
7. Controlling physical access such as placing barriers between clients and service providers; installing electric doors.
8. Creating escape routes, installing alarm systems or "panic buttons" or establishing a "buddy" system.
9. Requiring employees to wear identification badges.
10. Installing security cameras and safety glass at counters serving the public.

In addition Feather River College efforts to prevent workplace violence include, but are not limited to the following:

1. Ensuring that employees comply with safe and healthy work practices and do not engage in threats or physical actions, which create a security hazard to other employees, supervisors or managers in the workplace.
2. Providing employees with a reporting mechanism to inform the employer of security hazards at the worksite without fear of reprisal.
3. Establishing security procedures for investigating occupational injury or illness arising from a workplace assault or threat of assault.
4. Adhering to appropriate screening and reference checking procedures in hiring employees.
5. Creating an atmosphere of respect and consideration for employees and students.
6. Providing effective security management to prevent workplace violence events, which includes post-event measures such as emergency medical care and debriefing employees when an incident occurs.
7. Offering post-event trauma counseling to those who desire such intervention to reduce the short and long-term physical and emotional effects of the incident.
8. Taking appropriate disciplinary action against any employee who threatens another including requiring the employee to undergo a fitness-for-duty psychological exam.

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Responding To Workplace Violence

As part of the college's workplace security plan, it is essential that procedures for responding to violence in the workplace be established.

Immediate Response Procedures

Immediate response procedures should address, at a minimum, the "who, where and what" of:

- Obtaining control over the situation;
- Providing first aid and medical care;
- Securing the affected area;
- Contacting local law enforcement and other emergency response agencies;
- Providing psychological assistance to victims and witnesses;
- Notifying appropriate college management;
- Addressing the media.

Follow-Up Response Procedures

- Follow-up response procedures should address, at a minimum, the following:
- Repair and clean-up of workplace to remove any and all reminders of violent occurrences, if necessary (i.e., replace shattered glass, repair bullet holes and markings);
- Investigation of the incident;
- Discipline and/or discharge of employee(s) involved;

- Provision of post-event trauma counseling and emotional assistance to employees and staff affected to reduce the short- and long-term emotional effects of the incident;
- Debrief employees about incident; and
- Allow extended leaves for employees affected.

Investigation

An investigation of violent incidents, including threats of violence, shall be prompt, fair and thorough. The investigation of such incidents shall take place immediately after they occur so that the employer can take appropriate corrective and disciplinary action, when warranted. The investigative procedure utilized may be similar to the procedures for investigating allegations or occurrences of other workplace misconduct. The following are guidelines used for developing an investigation plan:

1. Investigate in a prompt and timely manner so that the incident will be fresh in the minds of persons involved.
2. Obtain written and signed statements from all victims and witnesses. It is essential that these statements are in writing and signed since people sometimes have a tendency to recant their stories, especially when the threat of retaliation may exist.
3. Obtain detailed and concrete facts of what happened, not opinions.
4. Ensure confidentiality of witness statements. This is especially important if people are afraid to come forward and provide information out of fear of retaliation.

While decisions must be made on a case-by-case basis, an agency should consider the following factors when considering discipline for fighting among employees:

- Extent and seriousness of damage to property or injury to persons;
- Presence or absence of provocation;
- Use of a weapon;
- Whether the assault was a momentary flare-up or a premeditated attack;
- Disciplinary record of the employee;
- Right of self-defense;

- Work relationship between employees and the extent of malice or animosity;
- Potential for repeat occurrences; and
- Mental condition of employees involved.