

# PREVENTING WORKPLACE VIOLENCE: Security Awareness Considerations

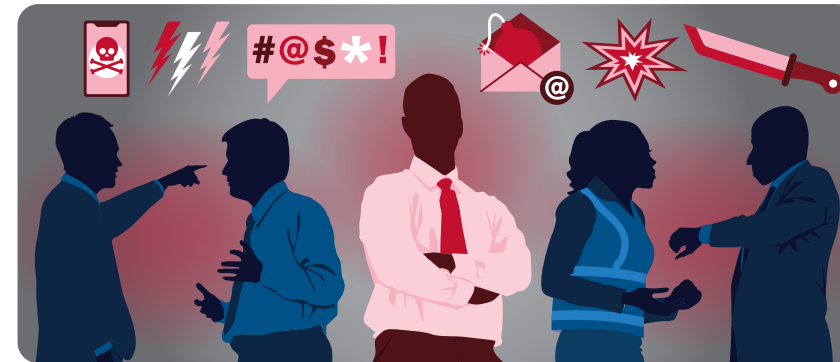


## CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE WORKERS ARE AN INDISPENSABLE PART OF THE UNITED STATES LABOR FORCE,

with each worker actively supporting the continued success of their respective sector, industry and community. A single workplace violence incident can have sweeping repercussions, including: immediate and profound loss of life; physical or psychological repercussions to the victim(s), their families or co-workers; the loss of productivity and morale following a violent incident; and the public relations impact on an employer when news of violence reaches the media.<sup>1</sup>

The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) assists critical infrastructure leaders, human resource personnel, managers and workers to prevent and mitigate workplace violence by cultivating a culture of awareness and support within their unique working environment.

## WORKPLACE VIOLENCE:



Any act or threat of physical violence, harassment, sexual harassment, intimidation, bullying, offensive jokes or other threatening disruptive behavior that occurs at the work or organizational site. It ranges from threats, verbal abuse, physical assault and even homicide.<sup>2</sup>

The Bureau of Labor Statistics found that violence in the workplace contributes to fatal occupational injuries, with approximately **450 workplace homicides** and **275 suicides** each year.<sup>3</sup>



Each year organizations across the country experience violent incidents that profoundly impact employee safety, morale and trust, sometimes resulting in **severe injury or even death**.

Approximately **2 million people report workplace violence every year** and authorities estimate an additional **25 percent of incidents go unreported**.<sup>4</sup>

Aside from the social and psychological effects of workplace violence, these incidents can also have an **extremely detrimental financial impact to organizations and individuals**. For instance, in 2019, workplace violence events resulted in **18,370 assaults—including 458 homicides** - which led to an **estimated financial impact of \$130 billion**.<sup>5</sup>



## CATEGORIES OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE RELATIONSHIPS:<sup>6</sup>



### Personal Relationships

In this type of violence, **the perpetrator does not have a relationship with the business but has a personal relationship with the intended victim**. It might be a family member, spouse or significant other, for example. Typically, the violence is intended for the employee with whom there is a relationship, but that doesn't mean it will be contained there. This can also include domestic violence cases that spill over into the workplace.

### Customer/Client

This type of workplace violence involves a **legitimate relationship between the perpetrator and the business or its employee(s)**. He or she might be a customer, a vendor or a student, for example. This category of workplace violence is the most common.

### Criminal Intent

This type of workplace violence involves **no relationship between the perpetrator, business or its employee(s)**. The incident is related to another crime such as robbery or trespassing.

### Worker-on-Worker

This type of workplace violence involves a **current or former employee of the business who attacks or threatens other employee(s) or former employee(s) in the workplace**.

1. U.S. Department of Labor. n.d. "DOL Workplace Violence Program." Office of the Assistant Secretary for Administration & Management. Accessed March 27, 2023. [dol.gov/agencies/oasam/centers-offices/human-resources-center/policies/workplace-violence-program](https://www.dol.gov/agencies/oasam/centers-offices/human-resources-center/policies/workplace-violence-program)  
2. U.S. Department of Labor. n.d. "Workplace Violence." Occupational Safety & Health Administration. Accessed May 2, 2023. [osha.gov/workplace-violence#:~:text=Workplace%20violence%20is%20any%20act,physical%20assaults%20and%20even%20homicide](https://www.osha.gov/workplace-violence#:~:text=Workplace%20violence%20is%20any%20act,physical%20assaults%20and%20even%20homicide)  
3. U.S. Department of Labor. 2022. Bureau of Labor Statistics. National Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries in 2021. Accessed May 16, 2023. [www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/cfoi.pdf](https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/cfoi.pdf)  
4. U.S. Department of Homeland Security. 2020. Insider Threat Mitigation Guide. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, 48. [cisa.gov/sites/default/files/2022-11/Insider%20Threat%20Mitigation%20Guide\\_Final\\_508.pdf](https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/2022-11/Insider%20Threat%20Mitigation%20Guide_Final_508.pdf)  
5. U.S. Department of Homeland Security. 2020. Insider Threat Mitigation Guide. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, 3. [cisa.gov/sites/default/files/2022-11/Insider%20Threat%20Mitigation%20Guide\\_Final\\_508.pdf](https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/2022-11/Insider%20Threat%20Mitigation%20Guide_Final_508.pdf)  
6. U.S. Department of Homeland Security. 2022. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency. Active Shooter Preparedness Webinar Training. Accessed May 2, 2023. [cisa.gov/resources-tools/training/active-shooter-preparedness-webinar](https://www.cisa.gov/resources-tools/training/active-shooter-preparedness-webinar)

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## **C** **A** **R** **E** **Cultivate Sense of Community, Advocate for Employees, Research and Plan Ahead, Enforce and Follow Through**

**CONSIDERATIONS:** To counteract worker-on-worker based violence in the workplace, CISA encourages all critical infrastructure leaders, human resource personnel, managers and workers to consider the following guidelines, known as **CARE**: Cultivate Sense of Community, Advocate for Employees, Research and Plan Ahead and Enforce and Follow Through. While there is no one-size-fits-all plan for preventing workplace violence, these guidelines can be tailored to fit any workplace structure or leadership style in the critical infrastructure community.

### CULTIVATE SENSE OF COMMUNITY



**Encourage mindfulness by focusing on the workplace as a community environment.** Foster a professional, healthy and empathetic work environment that addresses workplace stressors such as isolation, resentment and hostility among employees before those stressors become larger issues.



**Encourage a diverse workplace culture that is acceptive and inclusive of all cultures, religions, sex, gender, race, etc.** This can be developed and maintained through regular awareness seminars, training and education.



**Establish a clear zero-tolerance policy toward workplace violence and create purposeful workplace safety standards of behavior based on input and collaboration between employees and leadership.** This policy should apply to all employees and non-employee vendors or contract staff.



**Encourage a culture of awareness, attentiveness and reporting that eliminates the fear of retaliation.** Employees can likely tell when a teammate is acting abnormal or showing worrying behavior; their insight is invaluable. Make it clear that the organization's end goals are to support employee needs and to foster employee belonging and safety, not to terminate individuals.

### ADVOCATE FOR EMPLOYEES



**Promote open, sincere and timely communication** among managers and employees.



**Strongly encourage employee feedback and develop a policy that includes procedures for employees to report incidents.** Maintain a non-judgmental forum for complaints and concerns that includes timely feedback to the initiator without repercussion.



**Develop a continuous peer review system for employees** as a method of gauging the social, ethical and communal environment for red flags or personnel stability concerns.



**Provide staff with various professional development opportunities and mental health assistance to encourage those experiencing difficulty to seek support without ramifications.** Ensure employees are aware and have a clear understanding of how to access the resources and employee assistance programs available to them through routine communication.

### RESEARCH AND PLAN AHEAD



**Develop standard operating procedures for the personnel responsible for intaking information, assessing and acting on reported incidents.**

Develop mandatory protocols to ensure the safest termination possible to lessen a potential future threat.



**Review and evaluate threat assessments and any previous workplace violence experiences** to identify vulnerabilities and develop prevention and mitigation measures and response plans.



**Provide regular training opportunities for employees.** This should include but is not limited to identifying worrying behavior, appropriate reporting measures, de-escalation and emergency response protocols.



**Form a designated internal community awareness group to regularly evaluate the organization's current ability to handle violent incidents** and recommend ways to strengthen response capabilities. Establish roles and responsibilities among group members and define a clear and routine schedule for group meetings.

### ENFORCE AND FOLLOW THROUGH



**Hold leadership accountable.** Preventing workplace violence greatly depends on awareness, accountability and program advocacy from senior leadership.



**Maintain impartial and consistent mediation for employees who exhibit improper conduct or poor performance.** Disciplinary actions should be fair and designed to help employees improve their performance while providing the necessary support to get them back on track. This support should include check-in measures following write-ups, etc., to address lingering concerns in an empathetic manner.



**Intervene early in a threatening or potentially violent situation** to prevent its escalation. Early intervention may defuse the initial situation and give the supervisor an opportunity to thoroughly review options for resolution.



**Develop an immediate "leave of absence" mechanism for employees related to safety issues.** Unlike termination or probation, this mechanism would place employees on sabbatical pending further investigation or action.



**If you have concerns about a potential immediate threat of violence in your workplace, contact your local law enforcement.**

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:



- **Bombing Prevention:** [cisa.gov/topics/physical-security/bombing-prevention](https://cisa.gov/topics/physical-security/bombing-prevention)
- **CISA De-escalation Series:** [cisa.gov/resources-tools/resources/de-escalation-series](https://cisa.gov/resources-tools/resources/de-escalation-series)
- **DHS "If You See Something, Say Something"™:** [dhs.gov/see-something-say-something](https://dhs.gov/see-something-say-something)
- **DHS Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships:** [dhs.gov/CP3](https://dhs.gov/CP3)
- **Insider Threat Mitigation:** [cisa.gov/topics/physical-security/insider-threat-mitigation](https://cisa.gov/topics/physical-security/insider-threat-mitigation)
- **National Safety Council:** [nsc.org/](https://nsc.org/)

- **Pathway to Violence:** [cisa.gov/resources-tools/resources/pathway-violence](https://cisa.gov/resources-tools/resources/pathway-violence)
- **Society of Human Resource Management:** [shrm.org/](https://shrm.org/)
- **The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health:** [cdc.gov/niosh/index.htm](https://cdc.gov/niosh/index.htm)
- **Active Shooter Preparedness:** [cisa.gov/topics/physical-security/active-shooter-preparedness](https://cisa.gov/topics/physical-security/active-shooter-preparedness)

- **Department of Labor Workplace Violence Program:** [dol.gov/agencies/oasam/centers-offices/human-resources-center/policies/workplace-violence-program](https://dol.gov/agencies/oasam/centers-offices/human-resources-center/policies/workplace-violence-program)
- **Federal Bureau of Investigation Resource Library:** [fbi.gov/how-we-can-help-you/more-fbi-services-and-information/library](https://fbi.gov/how-we-can-help-you/more-fbi-services-and-information/library)
- **Occupation Safety and Health Administration Workplace Violence:** [osha.gov/workplace-violence](https://osha.gov/workplace-violence)