WORKPLACE VIOLENCE: IT'S MORE COMMON THAN YOU THINK

By DeAnn Wandler

Workplace violence incidents have tripled in the last decade, and it's now the fastest-growing category of murder in the United States. Not only are active shootings on the rise in the United States, the country is also at the greatest risk for experiencing a mass shooting. According to an analysis by CNN, between 1966 and 2012, despite the U.S. only having 5 percent of the world's population, the country accounted for 31 percent of all public mass shootings in the world.

In this paper, DeAnn Wandler discusses the escalating numbers associated to violence in the workplace as well as which occupations are at greater risk and the staggering costs to organizations. And, perhaps most importantly, Ms. Wandler addresses the steps employers can adopt to lessen the risk of violence in their work environment and safeguard the lives of their staff.

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ADDRESSING THE GROWING THREAT OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

According to OSHA's definition, workplace violence is violence or the threat of violence against workers. It can occur either on-site or outside the workplace, and it ranges anywhere from harassment and intimidation, to threats, physical assaults, and homicide.

Workplace violence incidents have tripled in the last decade, and it's now the fastest-growing category of murder in the U.S. It's also the second leading cause of death for women in the workplace (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016).

In fact, the rates of murder and other violent incidents have intensified to the point that the U.S. Department of Justice declared the workplace as one of the most dangerous places to be. It's an escalating concern for employees and employers nationwide, with many cases going unreported. According to OSHA, 2 million workers in America are victims of workplace violence each year.

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ACTIVE SHOOTER INCIDENTS RISING

In a business context, an active shooter represents one of the worst examples of workplace violence. The years 2013 to 2015 saw the worst rate of deaths due to active shooters in a two-year span. From 2000 to 2015, over 1,000 active shooter casualties occurred in the workplace. Not only are active shooter incidents on the rise in the U.S., this type of workplace violence poses the greatest risk to the entire country.

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What's even more disturbing is the fact that active shooters are a growing problem. Active shooter incidents tripled in the last eight years, with an event occurring in the U.S. once every three weeks. Alarmingly, you are 18 times more likely to encounter workplace violence and an active shooter situation than a fire.

IS WORKPLACE VIOLENCE MORE PREVALENT IN CERTAIN JOBS?

There are certain professions which have a higher percentage of workplace deaths due to homicide, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics:

- 45% for "sales and related occupations" with an even higher figure of 48% for their supervisors
- 57% for "retail sales workers"
- 28% of "food preparation and serving-related occupations" with an almost equal figure for their supervisors at 22%
- 21% of "office and administrative support occupations"
- 21% of "personal care and service occupations"
- 17% of "health technologists and technicians"
- 14% of "operations specialties managers"

PROFILE OF WORKPLACE HOMICIDES, 2014

Characteristics	Sub-Characteristics	Deaths
TOTAL HOMICIDES		**409**
Gender	Women	68
	Men	341
Employee Status	Wage and salary workers	293
	Self-employed	116
Race	White	200
	Black	88
	Latino	71
Leading Primary Source	Assailant, suspect	216
	Co-workers or work associate	61
	Other client or customer	46
	Relative or domestic partner	30
Leading Secondary Source	Firearm	308
	Knives	33
Leading Worker Activity	Tending a retail establishment	129
	Protective services activities	89
	Vehicular and transportation operations	46
Leading Location	Public building	182
	Street or highway	66
	Private residence	54
Leading Occupations	Supervisors or sales workers	58
	Motor vehicle operators	50
	Law enforcement workers	46
Leading Industries	Retail trade	106
	Local government	53
	Accommodations and food services	47
	Transportation and warehousing[1]	47

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, 2014.

[1]Taxi service accounted for 27 of these deaths.

WHAT ARE THE FINANCIAL AND INSURANCE RAMIFICATIONS OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE?

Unfortunately, no amount of training, security guards and warnings can totally eliminate the chance of an active shooter launching an attack. No employer is 100% immune from this phenomenon, nor can they totally prevent it — and the costs to organizations are staggering.

There can be the abrupt and profound loss of life or physical or psychological consequences felt by the victim as well as the victim's family and co-workers; the loss of productivity and morale that sweeps through an organization after a violent event; and the public relations impact on an employer when news of violence reaches the media. Workplace violence researchers assess that the cost to American business ranges from $6 billion to $36 billion each year (FBI, 2011).

According to the Workplace Violence Research Institute, neglectful hiring and negligent employee retention out-of-court disbursements due to workplace violence lawsuits averaged more than $500,000. Jury rulings in these cases averaged $3 million (2012).

Workers compensation policies cover on-the-job injuries, but usually omit coverage for acts of lethal force or the threat of lethal force. You need separate coverage to shelter you against the aftermath of workplace violence.

Thankfully, when one of these violent incidents occurs, another smart option is for these organizations to have active shooter insurance. This new form of coverage is specifically designed to provide additional financial security for businesses. By having a sound Active Shooter Insurance policy or Workplace Violence Expense coverage in place, businesses, groups, and other organizations can mitigate the fallout from these terrifying and chaotic events.

While each policy is different, they may reimburse business income expenses, security consultants, medical services, rehabilitation costs, independent security guards, employee counseling, public image management, and wages for victim employees and for replacement employees. They may also impart death benefits to families or other beneficiaries of employees.

The coverage traditionally doesn't protect businesses against lawsuits by employees or other businesses due to workplace violence, because these legal actions would be covered under the business's general liability policy. Recovering from an incident of workplace violence is arduous, and the quicker employees travel the road back to normalcy, the better. Well-run companies can do a number of things to reduce their exposure, and obtaining insurance is one of them.

WHAT SHOULD COMPANIES DO TO BE BETTER PREPARED FOR WORKPLACE VIOLENCE?

Most companies go to great lengths to protect employees from danger, such as fire drills, safety equipment and extensive courses of safety instruction that encompass standard corporate procedures. With respect to workplace violence, however, most companies are unprepared and vulnerable.

Despite the escalating numbers associated to violence in the workplace (according to a report issued by the National Institute for the Prevention of Workplace Violence), the average spend on workplace violence prevention by organizations is $4.50 per employee annually. There is opportunity for improvement with regard to workplace violence training, preparation, and prevention.

Employers can adopt effective steps to lessen the risk of violence in their work environment and safeguard

the lives of their staff. First, companies should:

1. **Identify workplace risk and vulnerability factors.** Organizations should perform a realistic and comprehensive risk assessment to identify the security vulnerabilities of the business and facilities to an active shooter event. Aspects to take into account include: Does the business require early morning or late night shifts? Can the company control who enters the building or job site? Do employees work with money or prescription medications? Are their areas of poor lighting on the premises? Do employees deal with volatile customers regularly?

2. **Use Security Controls.** Providing a secure and physically safe workplace is part of any sound approach for preventing workplace violence. Companies can use a variety of security measures to help ensure safety. While the measures used depend on the resources available in the area, these safeguards may include coded card keys and employee photo ID badges for access to secure areas; camera surveillance systems, on-site guard services; and other appropriate security measures such as metal detectors.

3. **Foster a culture of respect and trust amongst workers and between employees and management, companies must eradicate a bad culture of bullying or harassment by creating a zero-tolerance workplace violence policy.** The policy should be plainly worded and specify how the employer classifies workplace violence, the conduct the policy prohibits, methods for reporting violations, and how these reports will be investigated. It's also important that employees understand the consequences of such behavior, which should include disciplinary or other undesirable actions up to and including termination and/or criminal charges.

4. **Develop a workplace violence prevention program.** This program can stand alone or it can be integrated into your injury and illness prevention program. Regardless, it's essential that all employees (to include managers and supervisors) be familiar with the company policy and program. Employees should also hold discussions so that they know how to manage bullying, frightening, or violent incidents. Employers should schedule periodic training sessions with employees to make sure they recognize the responsibilities they have in preventing workplace violence. Those responsibilities include accurate reporting, keeping a record of all occurrences or suspected occurrences, and avoiding potentially dangerous situations whenever possible.

5. **Provide regular workplace violence prevention training.** Simply put, it's every employer's duty to strive toward protecting and safeguarding their employees by training them to respond appropriately to active shooters. 70% of active shooter incidents occur in businesses versus campuses. If your workforce is not trained on how to respond responsibly in this type of situation, they might not know how to escape alive. It's not enough to have a strategy. You must communicate that strategy and each of these methods to your employees. Training them before such an incident actually occurs will help to bolster prevention protocols at your workplace. Moreover, it's important to distinguish the different types of training needed for employees versus management, as both will have a unique role in a crisis situation. Lastly, it's important to remember that training does not necessarily equal learning. Training should be developed and delivered based on sound adult learning principles.

6. **Regular performance of active shooter drills.** Surprisingly, most companies still do not perform active shooter drills, even though nearly 50% of corporations with an excess of 1,000 employees experience workplace violence annually (Hart, 2016). Drills should be established and conducted in such a way so as not to frighten or alarm employees. They should have an education focus and be designed to aid employees in retaining information that may save lives. The emphasis should be on safety and offering employees choices for critical incident decision making.

Every workplace should offer a safe and productive setting for employees. By incorporating these proactive measures, employers help to avert dangerous incidents from happening at work. They protect their employees

by ensuring that employees have the knowledge of how to respond if they are confronted with an active shooter or a multi-hazard workplace crisis.

PREPAREDNESS RESOURCES

- Department of Homeland Security Pocket Card: Active Shooter Response Pocket Card
- Department of Homeland Security Booklet: Active Shooter Response Booklet
- Department of Homeland Security Poster: Active Shooter Response Poster
- Department of Homeland Security Website: Active Shooter Preparedness Website
- American Public University System Active Shooter ACTION™ Online Training Course in Multi-Hazard Crisis Safety, developed in exclusive cooperation with the FBINAA

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Prior to joining APUS, DeAnn served as Vice President of Admissions Operations, overseeing the strategic direction and management of 24 career-college campuses throughout the United States. She has more than 15 years of increasingly responsible and successful experience in all areas of higher education, including Vice President of Education Outreach, Vice President of Enrollment Management and Director of Admissions. Her background includes positions at University of Phoenix, Grantham University and Vatterott Educational Centers.

DeAnn currently serves on the National Contract Management Association (NCMA) Board of Advisors. She has served as Vice President of Educational Standards on the Greater Kansas City Association of the United States Army (AUSA) and sat on the Board of Directors for the Kansas City Executive Women International (EWI). For more information, please email cal@apus.edu.

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