Workplace Violence – It CAN Happen to You!

The Bureau of Justice Statistics’ National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) estimated the number of nonfatal violent crimes occurring against persons 16 or older while they were at work in 2009 at 572,000. The Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries reported 13,827 workplace homicides between 1992 and 2010 with an average of over 700 homicides per year.

Although we may all gasp when we hear horrific stories of violence on the news, we often separate ourselves from the possibility of such a tragedy and believe that it couldn’t possibly happen to us. The statistics show otherwise. The information below is designed to help you better recognize potential signs of violence so that you can take action.

What is Workplace Violence?
Workplace violence is any act or threat of physical violence, harassment, intimidation, or other threatening disruptive behavior that occurs at the work site. It ranges from threats and verbal abuse to physical assaults and even homicide. It can affect and involve employees, clients, customers and visitors.

Am I Really In Danger?
Nearly 2 million American workers report having been victims of workplace violence each year. Unfortunately, many more cases go unreported. The truth is, workplace violence can strike anywhere, anytime, and no one is immune. Research has identified factors that may increase the risk of violence for some workers at certain worksites. Providing services and care, and working where alcohol is served may also impact the likelihood of violence. Additionally, time of day and location of work, such as working late at night or in areas with high crime rates, are also risk factors that should be considered when addressing issues of workplace violence. Among those with higher risk are workers who exchange money with the public, delivery drivers, healthcare professionals, public service workers, customer service agents, law enforcement personnel, and those who work alone or in small groups.

Warning Signs – What to Look For...

- History of violence
  - Fascination with weapons, acts of violence
  - Demonstrated violence toward objects
- Threatening behavior
  - States intention to hurt someone
  - Holds grudges
  - Excessive behavior (calls, gifts)
  - Escalating threats
- Intimidating behavior
  - Arguementative /shows unwarranted anger
  - Uncooperative, impulsive, easily frustrated
  - Challenges peers and authority figures
- Increase in personal stress
  - An unreciprocated romantic obsession
  - Serious family or financial problems
  - Recent job loss
- Negative personality characteristics
  - Suspicious of others
  - Believes he/she is entitled to something
  - Cannot take criticism/Feels victimized
  - Shows a lack of concern for others
- Marked changes in mood or behavior
  - Irrational beliefs and ideas
  - Appears depressed, hopeless or anxious
  - Marked decline in work performance
- Socially isolated
  - Few family or friends
  - Sees the company as a “family”
  - Obessive with work
- Abuses drugs or alcohol
QUESTIONS DESIGNED TO IDENTIFY RISK FACTORS THAT COULD LEAD TO WORKPLACE VIOLENCE:

What is motivating the individual to make the statements or take the actions that led to concerns about the safety of the workplace and its employees?

What has the individual communicated to anyone concerning their intent, by threats or other disclosures or actions?

What interest has the individual shown in violence or its justification, violent persons, guns, or extremist groups?

Has the individual engaged in planning and preparation for violence, such as approaching a target or site, breaching security, conducting surveillance, harassing, or stalking a target?

Does the individual have a current or past history of a mental disorder or substance abuse? Has the individual exhibited symptoms of paranoia, delusional ideas, hallucinations, extreme agitation, despondency, or suicidal tendencies, especially with any violent content? Has he or she ever acted on such beliefs?

How does the individual manifest any anger problems, and how focused is this anger on other individuals in the workplace?

What kinds of serious oppositional or counter-productive attitudes or behavior does the individual present in the workplace? For example, does the individual blame others or exhibit a strong sense of entitlement, defensiveness, self-centeredness, or intolerance of others’ rights?

How does the individual manifest any anger problems, and how focused is this anger on other individuals in the workplace?

Has the individual experienced (or is he or she likely to in the near future) any serious personal or financial stressors, such as divorce, custody disputes, job or status losses, or deaths in the family? Does he or she show poor coping skills in reaction to such events?

What is the individual’s known history of serious interpersonal conflict, violence, or other criminal conduct, in domestic or other settings?

What is the nature of any organizational, supervisor, or work group problems that have contributed to, provoked, or exacerbated the situation, and how do those problems influence the individual’s perception of his or her circumstances?

THESE QUESTIONS ARE AIMED AT DISCLOSING FACTORS THAT MAY LOWER THE RISK OF VIOLENCE:

Does the individual have positive, valued, family, or other personal attachments?

Has the individual expressed genuine remorse for making threats or engaging in the behavior that has generated a concern for safety?

Upon the completion of the initial risk assessment, situations that are evaluated as presenting no or low risk of violence should be followed-up and resolved outside the crisis management process, for example through relevant human resources channels.

Has the individual responded positively to defusing or limit-setting efforts by others?

All other situations should be forwarded to the Crisis Management Team for further review.

Has the individual engaged in appropriate problem solving or sought professional treatment or legal recourse as a way to manage the situation or problems at issue?