

Planning and Preparing for Workplace Violence: It Starts with a Cultural Shift



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The society we live in today is vastly different from the society we lived in one decade ago. Going to work each day completely tuned out to our surroundings, failing to be diligent, and ignoring the red flags of workplace violence are no longer acceptable. Since 2019, the influx of workplace violence incidents has continued to rise to new levels as each year passes. Recent data shows that more than two million workers in the U.S. will face some form of workplace violence each year – and those are just the reported cases. Current estimates show that workplace violence costs U.S. companies around \$56 billion annually. Despite the risk-heightened environment, only about 30% of businesses have established safety and health programs according to the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

We are seeing now that U.S. courts are deeming businesses with no established emergency response protocol, workplace violence training/education program, and ineffective employment screening practices (a lack of due diligence) as being negligent when an incident happens within their organization. These negligent businesses are being ordered to pay huge sums of money, in the tens of millions of dollars, in the aftermath of workplace violence incidents for lawsuits, employee counseling/healthcare, increased insurance premiums, and governmental fines. This is not inclusive of the potential loss of business and partnerships from media coverage, the inability to hire and retain good people, and the reputational harm these incidents cause. According to The Washington Post, the average workplace violence incident where serious injury and/or death occurs will cost a business around \$38.5 million in total loss. The importance of this data is to understand that the majority of businesses in this country cannot withstand a loss of that magnitude. Your insurance policy will provide you with little help.

It is also **important to realize that in our industry we are being blunted by local, state, and federal laws/regulations that are making effective pre-employment screening practices more and more a thing of the distant past. As states continue to legalize drug use and prohibit pre-employment drug screening, compounded by the "ban the box" campaign to suppress background checks, we must seek other ways to ensure our diligence as we owe our employees a safe and secure workplace. The 2023 Verkada Workplace Survey showed that only 37% of workers feel safe in their workplace.** So, think about that... only one in three of your employees who walk through your doors every day feels safe being there. I realize that this is a national survey and not conducive to every business, but the point is well taken. How can we change that view for our workers? What can we do to make them feel safer? As data shows, a workplace that feels safe is more productive, more engaged, and less likely to leave to seek alternative employment.



Finally, I have some good news. There are ways that we can make our organizations safer and more prepared. First and foremost, a safety culture must be established. This will start at the top and employee buy-in is a must. As with any change initiative, organizational leaders are the key components, or champions, in establishing and grounding change. As stated earlier, we owe it to our employees to provide them with a safe working environment, and OSHA mandates it with its General Duty Clause. Below is a list of components that should be implemented to build a workplace safety culture:

- 1. Construct a Workplace Violence Prevention Plan (WVPP). It is better to have a plan and not need it, than not have one and need it. Every organization should have a WVPP in place. WVPPs have been mandated for employers in California by law as of July 1, 2024, and there are many other states currently drafting legislature to enact laws requiring annual WVPP review and a minimum of one hour of active assailant response training for employees.**
- 2. Control Measures aka "Target Hardening." Address hazards and risks using access control, proper lighting, security cameras, placement of workstations, etc. Teach employees to challenge/question outsiders, who are not part of the organization, before allowing them to walk in the door.**
- 3. Build an Emergency Response Plan (ERP) and make sure all employees know where to find it and/or how to access it.**
- 4. Train and educate employees on topics such as active assailant response, critical incident management, situational awareness, continued behavioral observation, de-escalation/non-escalation techniques, and threat assessment.**
- 5. Create forms, protocols, and proper channels for incident reporting and recordkeeping. Ensure employees know how to report and when to report "red flags."**
- 6. Evaluate your entire safety program and practices annually. This is not a document or something that can be created one time and hidden away in a cabinet forever. It must constantly be reviewed and updated with current best practices.**
- 7. Drill, drill, and drill some more! Schools do this all the time. Proper response in the event of a workplace violence incident requires continual functional conditioning drills to build muscle memory, making action second nature. Failure to drill will lead to complacency and unpreparedness should an incident occur.**
- 8. Have a vulnerability study conducted to assess current security risks and potential insider/outsider threats.**
- 9. Conduct regular testing of interoffice communication devices and conduct regular safety meetings.**



Keep in mind that the list above is not exhaustive. It is a starting point. Building and maintaining a workplace safety culture takes time and effort. However, the reward for the effort you put in will be safer, happier, more engaged, and more enthusiastic employees. It is also worth noting that your efforts toward mitigating foreseeable risks will greatly help you in the event that an incident should occur in your organization. Insurance companies and the courts are drawing a line in the sand. At this point, you are either diligent or negligent. There is no in-between anymore. Remember, it is better to have a plan and not need it, than not have one and need it. Workplace violence is not going away. We owe it to ourselves to refuse victimization. The time is now to begin building workplace safety cultures through planning and preparation.

If you find yourself asking where to turn to for help, The Noble Group welcomes the opportunity to assist. We have built and recently launched our Safer with SCOUT program, an online Learning Management System (LMS), encompassing many training and education courses that discuss in-depth the components of a workplace safety culture mentioned above. Beyond that, we can conduct site security surveys/vulnerability studies, create emergency action plans, draft WVPPs, provide in-person functional conditioning drills, and general security/risk consulting. Please visit us at www.noblesix.us or www.saferwithscout.com for more information.

