

Are You Prepared For A Possible Workplace Violence Incident?

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Although employers are not currently receiving much guidance from the Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) relating to its enforcement priorities, recent headlines suggest that employers should consider steps to reduce the chance of workplace violence.

In past years, many employers have avoided these questions out of a concern that they could be held responsible if they took ineffective measures to prevent an incident. However, it may only be a matter of time until OSHA begins to find more frequently that a workplace violence incident is a “recognized hazard” for purposes of issuing a citation under its General Duty Clause authority. Dealing with the risk of workplace violence does not lend itself to a “cookie cutter” policy approach. Human Resource staff should receive training on how to assess common employee issues with an eye towards diffusing potential problems.

These steps should involve: reviewing and enforcing workplace “bullying” and professional standards policies; assisting employees who have raised concerns about needing protective orders against someone who may or may not be the company’s employee; assessing exit interviews with terminated employees or other disciplinary scenarios for threats of retaliation; and proactively working with law enforcement when employees show signs of aggression. Based on the number of reported incidents, employers should not look at the news and assume that “this sort of thing could never happen here.”

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