

TOTAL SECURITY: LINES OF DEFENSE

7 Steps to Protect
Your Facility from
Workplace Violence



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**Total
Security**
Summit

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1. Panic buttons—Way to go?

Many organizations are considering the installation of panic buttons so that employees may covertly (or not so covertly) alert their security team and/or local law enforcement or their alarm service that something is happening that needs intervention.

There are a number of issues to consider before making an installation.

Make a threat analysis

First of all, make an analysis of likely threats. For example:

- Do you handle large amounts of cash or jewelry?
- Do you have employees who work in isolated areas?
- What sort of neighborhood are you in?
- How attractive is your industry to fanatics of one sort or another?
- Have you received threats against the organization or against individuals in the organization, or might you be subject to a copycat threat?

Current security analysis

Next, consider what security measures are in place.

- Do employees feel secure?
- Have they asked for additional security?
- Is access carefully restricted? An inspection might be in order. It's not that unusual for an organization to have strict security at the front door, but the custodial staff keeps the rear door open on hot days, or the smokers congregate outside a little-used exit.

Check state and local regulations

Next, check to see if there are statutes or regulations that might restrict your actions. There may be rules that apply to installing video surveillance, alarms, and panic buttons. For example, some police departments forbid recorded messages. Others require permits for certain types of installations.

Check with local police

Will your system notify police? If so, be sure to check with them to see what they suggest or require. If your facility is large, you probably already have arrangements concerning access, and you likely have some sort of emergency plan.

Use a service

General advice is to use a service company or some form of expert help. If you use a home-grown system, you may set yourself up for liability if something goes wrong.

Concerns and considerations

Here are some things to consider as you plan your panic button installation.

Notification

Who will be notified?

- Security team?
- Individual employees?
- Local authorities?
- Outside security service?

Where will buttons be located?

- Throughout facility?
- Security checkpoints?
- Mobile with individuals (worn around neck—works anywhere)?
- On the computer keyboard?

False alarms

Be aware that false alarms are common, what with people hitting buttons with a knee or whatever. This, of course, does not endear you to the local constabulary and may result in a fine. Some suggest requiring two buttons to be pushed to eliminate accidental triggering of alarms.

Locked doors

Some systems are able to lock doors, thus trapping the perpetrator inside. This may not be the best tactic unless the perpetrator can be isolated.

Proximity alarms

With this feature, a proximity alarm goes off when the wearer of the device leaves the building. This guards against someone being taken hostage or removed against his or her will. However, this is particularly susceptible to false alarms as wearers must disable the alarm whenever they leave the building.

Training

Any employees using panic buttons should receive training from a security company, local law enforcement, or other source.

Silent or not?

Some alarms are silent, but other alarms create loud noises that are intended to scare a perpetrator into leaving. Other systems activate strobe lights or other notification devices. For example, the system might suspend Internet access and put a warning notice on all screens. Consult with your expert to decide what is best for your situation.

Testing and review

Regular testing is suggested. For example, be sure that batteries have not run out of juice. Also, check to be sure that new people have been properly trained.

Are security cameras helpful?

Some think that security cameras are effective deterrents, while others contend that security cameras are only useful for finding the perpetrator after the fact. "After you get shot, the cameras will find the shooter." Employees may not find comfort in that.

Even some fake security cameras can be a deterrent in some cases.

Are panic buttons for you?

Employers are required to provide a safe working environment, and there are a lot of things that could threaten workers. Panic buttons may be one deterrent you should consider.

2. Special tips for protecting retail workers from violence

According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), robbery-related homicides and assaults are the leading cause of death in retail businesses. Workers in convenience stores have a seven times higher rate of work-related homicide than workers in other industries. Not every retailer can afford to hire security personnel for their store. Here are a few tips for retail operations to protect their workers from being injured or killed during an armed robbery.

According to NIOSH, stores that use Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) programs have experienced 30% to 84% decreases in robberies and a 61% decrease in nonfatal injuries. CPTED programs suggest that environments can be modified to reduce robberies by altering the physical design of a workplace.

Tip 1: Act before violence occurs.

Environment, health, and safety (EHS) managers are key players in ensuring that their companies have taken steps to reduce the probability of violence in the workplace. The optimal time to address workplace violence is before any incidents have occurred.

Tip 2: Install panic buttons.

These will alert local authorities to ensure a rapid, reliable response when the alarm is triggered. Some cities are taking steps to protect retail workers. For instance, Houston, Texas, has enacted an ordinance that requires that all convenience stores located in the city must register online with the Houston Police Department.

Tip 3: Install physical barriers.

Barriers such as bullet-resistant enclosures can serve to separate customers from employees at cash registers.

Tip 4: Redesign the store.

Redesigning the store could be a low-cost option for allowing better visibility so that customers and the cash register can be seen from the street and/or parking lot.

Tip 5: Hang warning signs.

Warning or advisory signs on the premises can identify deterrent measures in effect at your store. These measures can include:

- A time-lock safe that cannot be opened past certain hours;
- Keeping a limited amount of accessible cash and lottery tickets; *and*
- Monitoring the premises by video surveillance.

Tip 6: Conduct training.

All employees should be trained so that they are aware of the potential security hazards at your store and the means to protect themselves and coworkers. The training should include your workplace violence and prevention program and the procedures and practices to follow in the event of a violent incident.

Note: See the case study at the end of this article for an example of a willful General Duty Clause violation based in part on failure to install panic buttons.

3. Survival tips for active shooter situations

Do your workers know what to do if an “active shooter” situation goes down in the workplace? The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) defines these unpredictable, terrifying situations as “an individual actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a confined and populated area.” They can devastate your workplace—but you can help prepare workers to react properly.

Reacting to an active shooter situation

Employers should share the following DHS-recommended strategies for coping with an active shooter situation:

- Be aware of your environment and any possible dangers.
- Take note of the two nearest exits in any facility you work in or visit.
- If you have an accessible escape path, evacuate quickly, leaving belongings behind and helping others to escape if you can.

- If you can't evacuate, find a place to hide where the shooter is less likely to find you. If you're in an office, stay where you are, and secure the door. If you're in a hallway, get into a room and secure the door.
- As a last resort, and only if you are in imminent danger, attempt to take the active shooter down. When the shooter is at close range and you cannot flee, your chance of survival is much greater if you incapacitate the shooter. Try to disrupt or incapacitate the shooter by:
 - Acting as aggressively as possible against the shooter;
 - Throwing items and improvising weapons; *and/or*
 - Yelling.
- Call 911 when it is safe to do so.

Developing an emergency action plan

To best prepare your staff, develop an emergency action plan, and conduct training exercises. The plan should include:

- A method for reporting emergencies;
- Evacuation policy and procedure;
- Emergency escape procedures and route assignments;
- Contact information and responsibilities for key individuals;
- Contact information for local area hospitals; *and*
- An emergency notification system to alert people at remote locations on the premises, local law enforcement, and hospitals.

4. Are your workers in danger of violence? Nine factors for assessing risk

Organizations want to protect their employees from workplace violence. Here are some tips for assessing risk from what is going to be required of healthcare facilities under California's new Violence Prevention in Healthcare Standard. The principles can guide any organization that wants to initiate violence prevention.

Under the new standard, healthcare facilities must develop a workplace violence prevention plan (Plan). The Plan must include procedures to identify and evaluate environmental risk factors for workplace violence in each area of the establishment, including areas surrounding the facility, such as employee parking areas and other outdoor areas. The environmental risk factors that are required to be addressed by fixed healthcare workplaces in California can be applicable to any building or facility where workers are present. **Note:** Some states have state plan standards that address workplace violence. If you operate a facility in any state plan states, be sure you are aware of the most current standards.

Nine tips for assessing risk from violence

When assessing risk from violence at your facility, be sure to consider at least these nine factors:

1. Do any of your employees work in isolated locations, isolated from other employees because of being assigned to work alone or in remote locations, during night or early morning hours, or where an assailant could prevent entry into the work area by responders or other employees?
2. Are any areas where possible assailants could be present poorly illuminated or visibly blocked?
3. Is there a lack of physical barriers between employees and persons at risk of committing workplace violence?
4. Does your facility lack effective escape routes?
5. Are there obstacles and impediments to accessing alarm systems?
6. Are there any locations within the facility where alarm systems are not working?
7. Are there any entryways in your facility where unauthorized entrance can occur, such as doors designated for staff entrance or emergency exits?
8. Are there furnishings or any objects in any area in your facility that can be used as weapons?
9. Is there inadequate storage of high-value items or money?

5. Train your workers to prevent workplace violence

All your employees should be trained so that they are aware of the potential security hazards at your facility and the means to protect themselves and coworkers. The training should include your workplace violence and prevention program and the procedures and practices to follow in the event of a violent incident.

Here we will take a look at the training California is requiring to prevent workplace violence in healthcare facilities. We are sure that any EHS manager can develop similar procedures to round out safety training programs.

What's the 'Type'?

California has identified four types of workplace violence. Your workplace violence training program should address each type:

- Type 1 violence refers to violence committed by someone who has no legitimate business at the worksite.
- Type 2 violence refers to violence toward employees by someone such as a customer, client, patient, or visitor who is legitimately at the worksite.
- Type 3 violence refers to violence against an employee by a present or former employee.
- Type 4 violence refers to violence by someone who does not work at the worksite but has or had a personal relationship with an employee.

Eight components for initial training: Your workplace violence training program should include initial training, annual refresher training, and training for specific reasons. The training should be composed of at least these 8 components:

1. An explanation of your workplace violence prevention plan, including hazard identification and evaluation procedures, general and personal safety measures you have already implemented, how the employee may communicate concerns about workplace violence without fear of reprisal, how you will address workplace violence incidents, and how the employee can participate in reviewing and revising the Plan.
2. How to recognize the potential for violence, including factors that contribute to the escalation of violence and how to counteract them, and when and how to seek assistance to prevent or respond to violence.

3. Strategies to avoid physical harm.
4. How to recognize alerts, alarms, or other warnings about emergency conditions, such as mass casualty threats and how to use identified escape routes or locations for sheltering, as applicable.
5. The role of private security personnel you may employ.
6. How to report violent incidents to law enforcement.
7. Any resources available to employees for coping with incidents of violence, including, but not limited to, critical incident stress debriefing or employee assistance programs.
8. An opportunity for interactive questions and answers about your workplace violence prevention plan.

Additional training

Your workplace violence training program should include additional training when new equipment or work practices are introduced at your facility or when a new or previously unrecognized workplace violence hazard has been identified. Annual refresher training should be provided for employees whose job responsibilities, such as responding to alarms, may put them in the position of being confronted by violence.

6. Four key tips for workers when confronted by workplace violence

Let's say you have your workplace violence prevention plan in place, and you are conducting the training outlined in your plan. Part of the plan should include strategies for your workers to avoid harm. Here are four key tips to offer your workers should they be confronted with violence at your facility.

Tip 1. Recognize potential workplace violence incidents. All your workers should be trained to recognize signs and behaviors of violence in others, such as:

- Angry outbursts;
- Intimidating behavior toward one or more people;
- Talk about weapons, especially if it seems obsessive;
- Blaming others for their own problems; *and*
- Holding grudges.

Your workers should also be aware of common employee issues that could trigger workplace violence, including:

- Negative performance review;
- Unwelcome change in role due to performance or reorganization issue;
- Criticism of performance;
- Conflict with a coworker or supervisor;
- Personal stress outside the workplace; *and*
- Increased workload or pressure, such as deadlines or specific projects.

Tip 2. Take it seriously. All your workers should be trained to take potential workplace violence threats seriously and take precautions. Key precautions your workers should be trained to take are:

- Don't let any unauthorized people into the facility.
- Alert security about strangers or anyone else, such as a former employee, who should not be in the workplace. Do not confront these people yourself!
- Tell your supervisor about any people you do not want to see at work.
- Tell your supervisor if you are dealing with domestic violence.
- Be familiar with all facility exits, and note the one you would use if need be when you move around the facility.
- Know your security guards and how to contact them if the need arises.
- Let someone know if you are working overtime.
- Try not to work alone.
- Don't leave your workplace alone, if at all possible.

Tip 3: Avoid confrontation. It is a good idea to have a warning signal that all your workers know in the event of a violent situation. Employees who are not specifically trained to deal with workplace violence should be told and trained to avoid and/or de-escalate a violent situation by:

- Remaining calm;
- Not arguing;
- Not responding to threats;

- Avoiding anything that would increase the person's anger;
- Screaming to alert other people, if need be; *and*
- Doing anything to avoid going somewhere with the violent person.

Tip 4. Report it. It is critical that all your workers take any work-related violence or threatening behavior seriously. They must report these incidents immediately before situations can get out of hand. In order for them to feel comfortable reporting a violent or potentially violent incident, you must have a policy and procedures in place that are convenient for your workers and that protect them from any possible retaliation.

Your policy should include that retaliation against a worker who makes a good-faith report of violence or other disruptive behavior is strictly prohibited and subject to appropriate corrective or disciplinary measures. In addition, workers should feel comfortable reporting violence or intimidating behavior to managers or supervisors other than his or her own in cases where the behavior is by his or her own supervisor.

7. General Duty Clause—Case study

The General Duty Clause can sometimes be invoked in cases related to workplace violence. For one New Jersey employer, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) determined that its failure to address its violence issue amounted to willful neglect of worker safety.

OSHA cited Jay Management Inc., (Jay) for a General Duty Clause violation after a worker at a convenience store in Irvington, New Jersey, was fatally shot during a robbery.

A history of violence

At the Getty gas station and convenience store on Stuyvesant Avenue in Irvington, security was less than optimal. Between 2010 and 2015, more than 20 incidents of theft, armed robbery, and fights occurred at the store, culminating in the October 26, 2015, shooting death of 57-year-old Ashiwin Patel, a clerk at the store. Following the incident, the local prosecutor's office offered a \$10,000 reward for information leading to an arrest (none had been made as of the time this article was written).

OSHA also conducted an investigation, determining not only that Jay had committed a serious violation of the General Duty Clause in failing to protect workers from exposure to violence but also that it had willfully done so.

General Duty Clause citations are rare, in part because a serious hazard must exist in order for a General Duty Clause citation to be issued; OSHA will not issue a General Duty Clause citation for any hazard that is classified as less than serious. In order to be classified as serious, the hazard must be capable of causing an accident or illness that would most likely result in death or serious physical harm—and the employer must know, or be capable of knowing, about the hazard. For example, if the employer had no way to know of the hazard because it was caused by unpreventable employee misconduct, the employer cannot be said to have exposed the worker to the hazard.

But was it willful?

Willful General Duty Clause citations are even more rare because they must meet a higher standard of proof. In order to be classified as willful, OSHA must feel that it can make the case that the employer either knowingly failed to comply with a legal requirement or acted with plain indifference to employee safety. But, given that low-level violence is endemic in so many workplaces, what was it about Jay's case that put it over OSHA's threshold for "willful"?

The key seems to have been what Jay did—or, rather, didn't do—in the wake of Patel's death. According to OSHA, even though Jay was "well aware" of the location's violent history, the employer did nothing to implement safety measures—even *after Patel's death*.

To fail to protect workers before an incident is foolish; to fail to correct hazards after a worker has died is a clear—willful—demonstration of unconcern.

Commonsense measures

When it comes to preventing violence, Jay is not the only retail/convenience store employer to fail to take even the simplest commonsense precautions. In a 2015 study, researchers at NIOSH found that convenience store owners in Texas did not put in place some basic workplace violence prevention measures. The most commonly neglected measures, according to the study, were the posting of warning signs about the presence of security cameras and the placement of product displays and signage that obstructed visibility at the front of the store.

According to OSHA, Jay failed to do both, as well as failing to:

- Develop a written workplace violence prevention program;
- Install panic buttons to ensure rapid law enforcement response;
- Install physical barriers to separate customers from store associates at the cash register;
- Train workers in workplace violence prevention and response procedures; *and*
- Prohibit working alone.