

STOPPING WORKPLACE VIOLENCE BEFORE IT STARTS

Everyone knows that violence in the workplace is a serious safety and health issue. The most extreme manifestation of workplace violence — homicide — was the third-leading cause of fatal occupational injury in this country last year. Today we look at what OSHA and others say you should do to safeguard your workers.

There are no specific OSHA standards for workplace violence. However, the so-called “General Duty Clause” of the OSH Act requires employers to provide workers with a place of employment that is free from recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm.

If you think you can't be cited for an incident of workplace violence, think again. Back in 1992, OSHA announced a policy (via a standard interpretation) that said, In a workplace where the risk of violence and serious personal injury are significant enough to be 'recognized hazards,' the general duty clause would require the employer to take feasible steps to minimize those risks. Failure of an employer to implement feasible means of abatement of these hazards could result in the finding of an OSH Act violation.”

One of the most effective ways to minimize workplace violence is to try to head it off before it begins. Ideally, prevention should start during the hiring stage. A white paper on our sister website, Safety.BLR.com, provides advice from W. Barry Nixon, executive director of a consulting group known as the National Institute for Prevention of Workplace Violence, based in Orange County, California.

Too many employers get into a cycle of trouble by ignoring early warning signs, Nixon says. “The earlier you start, the more likely you are to prevent an escalation to violence.”

