

Workplace Violence: Training Young Workers in Preventive Strategies

By Sheila Arbury

Small business should be alert to the risk of robbery coupled with criminal assaults on their employees. To address this danger, each business should have an established workplace violence prevention plan and train employees in measures to prevent these crimes and to protect their safety.

Young workers, who typically have less work experience than older employees, particularly need training on prevention of workplace violence. This article will offer suggestions on training these young workers, but employers can – and should - use this training for all employees.

In 2003, the Bureau of Labor Statistics announced that there were 631 workplace homicides, an increase from 609 in 2002. The leading cause of these deaths was violence associated with robbery. Of the 631 homicides, 73 were workers under 25 years of age. The numbers reveal the types of businesses where these young workers are killed: in 1998-2002 when there were 306 homicides of young workers, 165 occurred in retail trade. 132 of these deaths were workers in food stores, and eating and drinking places, two important types of small business.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has issued guidelines for preventing workplace violence in late-night retail establishments. These guidelines are useful not only for late-night retail, but also for other types of small business as well. The guidelines and the information provided here are advisory in nature, informational in content, and intended to help employers establish effective workplace violence prevention programs adapted to their specific workplaces.

As an employer, your first consideration is to apply preventive measures in your workplace. These preventive measures include engineering and administrative and work practice controls. Engineering controls decrease or remove the hazard from the workplace or create a barrier between the worker and the hazard. Examples are: alarm systems, metal detectors, closed-circuit video recording, limited access, bright lighting inside and out and windows that provide clear views of the business's interior.

Administrative and work practice controls describe procedures and practices that can help prevent violent incidents. Examples are: adequate staffing, training, security officers, hours of operation, and cash handling policies.

Your second consideration is to develop an emergency plan of action. Ensure that employees know emergency phone numbers and other necessary information. Discuss emergency procedures: Is there a panic button? Is there a height tape at the door to assist description of fleeing criminals? Do employees have distinct tasks during an emergency incident? Practice emergency response to several different events. Employees should

understand that thorough preparation can prevent violence or reduce its effect. Your emergency plan should be readily available to your employees.

Your third consideration is employee training about workplace violence. This training plan should contain at a minimum the following elements:

- Description and/or demonstration of engineering and administrative and work practice controls
- Discussion and practice of your emergency plan.
- Instruction in behavior that will increase an employee's chance of staying safe when facing a situation that could result in violence.

Young workers often work in service jobs that require contact with the public and exchange of money - both risk factors for workplace violence. Often they are new employees and uncertain how to behave at work. They may never consider that armed robbery could occur in their workplace. As their employer, you should help them think through how they would respond if this happened. Instruct them to protect themselves; tell them to:

- Stay calm
- Don't stare at the perpetrator: it makes him nervous
- Speak before moving - explain what you're doing, for example, "I am going to move to the counter now"
- Don't move suddenly
- Don't argue with the perpetrator
- Don't go with the perpetrator. Tell him "I'll give you the money, but I have to stay here."
- Follow emergency procedures as practiced

Protecting young workers and preventing workplace violence are outreach and training emphasis areas for OSHA and the agency has developed website resources for both topics. The *Teen Worker* webpage contains resources directed specifically at teens, parents, teachers, and employers. The *Workplace Violence* Safety and Health Topic Page presents information about workplace violence from OSHA and other agencies such as the U.S. Department of Justice and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) and from organizations such as the Universities of Iowa, Minnesota, and California. The document about late-night retail establishments mentioned in this article – *Recommendations for Workplace Violence Prevention Programs in Late-Night Retail Establishments* – is available on the Publications page of the OSHA website.

Act to prevent workplace violence in your business. Do your part as an employer to provide a safe environment for your employees.

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OSHA and NFIB have formed an Alliance to enhance safety and health throughout the nation's small and independent businesses. As part of this alliance, they will work together to develop and disseminate information through print and electronic media, including electronic assistance tools, publications, safety newsletters, and links from OSHA's and NFIB's Web sites.

▶ ***Teen Workers Web Site*** (<http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/teenworkers/index.html>)

▶ ***Workplace Violence Safety and Health Topic Page***
(<http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/workplaceviolence/index.html>)

▶ ***Recommendations for Workplace Violence Prevention Programs in Late-Night Retail Establishments*** (<http://www.osha.gov/Publications/osha3153.pdf>)