

Prevention Update



Protecting Workers from Workplace Violence

What is workplace violence?

Workplace violence can take many forms, including threatening behaviour and physical attacks which may result in worker injury. Part 52 of the OHS Act General Regulations addresses violence in the workplace and defines it as the threatened, attempted or actual exercise of any physical force by a person other than a worker that can cause, or that causes, injury to a worker, and includes any threatening statement or behaviour that gives a worker reasonable cause to believe that he or she is at risk of injury.

Worker-on-worker violence

Under the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHS Act), worker-on-worker violence is considered workplace harassment. For employer and worker obligations and guidance on this topic, please refer to the OHS Act Workplace Harassment Regulations and the WCB's Guide to Workplace Harassment Regulations.

Domestic violence in the workplace

Sometimes, personal relationships outside of work can lead to violence that enters the workplace. This includes instances where a spouse or former spouse, current or former intimate partner or a family member – may physically harm, or attempt or threaten to physically harm that worker at work. In these situations, domestic violence is considered workplace violence.

Workplace violence may include, but is not limited to:

- Verbally threatening to attack a worker.
- Leaving threatening notes or sending threatening emails.
- Shaking a fist in a worker's face.
- Hitting or trying to hit a worker.
- Throwing an object at a worker.
- Using a weapon.
- Sexual violence against a worker
- Trying to run down a worker using a vehicle or equipment.



What types of workers are at risk?

There are several factors that may increase a worker's risk of exposure to workplace violence. Research on workplace violence shows work activities that are most at risk are:

- Working with the public
- Handling cash
- Selling or dispensing of alcohol or prescription drugs
- Delivering health care or social services
- Providing security or regulatory enforcement services
- Protecting or securing valuables
- Transporting people and goods
- Working from a mobile workplace, such as a vehicle
- Providing services to the public or community
- Working in areas of high crime
- Working with unstable or volatile people
- Working alone in isolation
- Working late nights or very early mornings

PREVENTING WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

The OHS Act sets out the general duties of the employer in identifying workplace hazards. When the risk of workplace violence exists, an employer must:

Perform a workplace violence risk assessment- The assessment must consider the nature and circumstances of the workplace as well as the conditions and type of work. The assessment should be specific to the work location and be reviewed at least annually.

Establish a Workplace Violence Prevention Program (WVPP) that includes a workplace violence policy- A WVPP outlines policies, risk assessments, training, safe work procedures, reporting and investigation processes, as well as follow-up support.

Inform workers who may be exposed to the risk of violence in the workplace- Employers must provide job-specific training on workplace violence for both new and transitioning workers, updating it as needed based on risk changes or policy updates.

Report and document violent incidents- Workers must be trained to report incidents, including what documentation to fill out and to whom it must be submitted. If an incident occurs, an investigation must take place as soon as possible. The workplace is responsible for performing the investigation.

Follow-up and debrief after an incident- A post-incident review assesses whether the response was effective and helps determine what corrective action may be required.