



AMHERST POLICE DEPARTMENT

21 ACADIA STREET • AMHERST, NOVA SCOTIA • B4H 4W3 • (902) 667-7227 • FAX: (902) 667-0268

Canada has one of the worst records for workplace or occupational violence in the world. In a 2004 general survey on victimization, it was reported that there was 356,000 instances of workplace violence in the 10 Provinces. Nearly one-fifth of all instances of victimization occurred in the workplace and this would include physical assaults, robberies, and sexual assaults. While Canada has far fewer high profile workplace murders than the U.S., we are still not immune to such tragedies. The fatal shooting of two workers at a Nanaimo sawmill and the knifing incidents at a warehouse in Edmonton early this year point to a serious issue. Many individuals are using violence as a problem solving technique rather than talking through their issues or grievances.

There are 3 primary categories of workplace violence which may escalate into serious injury to employees:

- **Third party intrusions:** These often occur when a person who is not an employee of a business enters the workplace with an intent to commit a violent act. This could be an emotionally disturbed person, an estranged partner of an employee or a person who has a misdirected affection to someone in the business. With the unfortunate prevalence of domestic violence in our society, victims of domestic violence have to concern themselves with both protecting themselves at home and in their work environments. It is important for all employers to have some type of domestic violence safety plan for their employees. While it is a sensitive issue to report instances of domestic violence, employers should create an environment where such situations are shared without any judgment or prejudice. A safety plan should include a parking spot near the front door which allows the employee to minimize their travel time in a parking lot. Employers may even execute a plan where other employees will assist in escorting the domestic violence victim to and from their car. A security plan should be in place to prevent intruder's

access to the building. This could be as simple as security key cards that prevent the public's access into employee areas.

- **Disgruntled employees:** This will usually take place after an employee or ex-employee feels that they were personally slighted or wronged by a business. Motives could be that they were dismissed, failed to get a promotion, or received a poor performance review. The targets for these individuals would be fellow employees but usually the main focus is on supervisors and managers. Businesses can help minimize these dangers by enacting non-harassment policies in their workplace environments. Employees should be encouraged to report instances of harassment and the work environment must be changed to eliminate the "us" (employees) vs "them" (management) mentality. Providing a benevolent work environment that eliminates the authoritarian practices that managers used in the past can go a long way in eliminating workplace violence. Companies should still prepare for worst case scenarios and practice drills with their employees. Many schools employ code blue drills for students when faced with an armed intruder, taking action to minimize the threat. Companies should also provide training on the same type of drills for their own work force.
- **Robbery attempts:** This type of workplace violence occurs mainly in smaller businesses where there are usually only a few employees working. Convenience stores, restaurants, or fast food outlets are lucrative targets as they often have minimal security measures in place. Many criminals see that the profit that they will gain from the robbery outweighs the risks involved. It is best for businesses to employ techniques which reduces the profit that can be gained in a theft and increasing the risks that the criminal will be caught. Businesses can help minimize robbery attempts to their stores by making sure that there are not many posters or advertisements covering up the windows. Covered windows allows the criminals concealment and the ability to commit the robbery without anyone on the outside seeing. Employees should leave minimal amounts of money in the till and should have safety procedures in effect when putting items into a safe. A height chart near the door can help provide important details to police and employees should be cautioned to scan their environment when opening and closing stores to make sure that there are no suspicious persons about. If in doubt, call the police department and we will check it out. Security cameras are also of vital importance as they can deter thefts with their visual presence. Make sure that employees are trained to use the camera systems so that vital information can be given to officers at an expedited fashion.

While workplace violence cannot be entirely eliminated, it is best that employers and employees alike work together to help provide a safe and healthy environment for everyone.