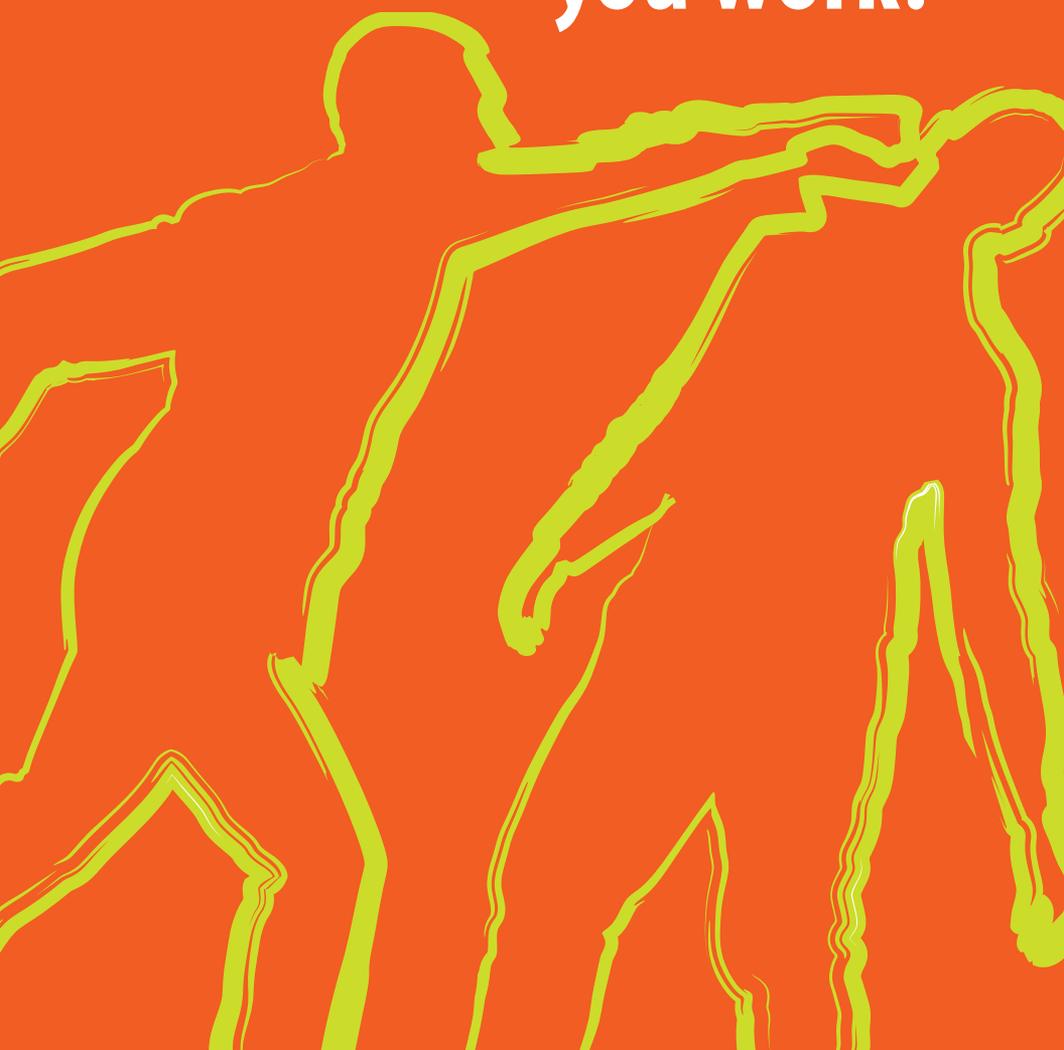


WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

Can it happen where
you work?



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About this guide

“Workplace violence: Can it happen where you work” is an Oregon OSHA Standards and Technical Resources publication. Thanks to designer Ron Conrad, editor Mark Peterson, Ellis Brasch, and Stephanie Ficek for crafting the final document.

Comments or suggestions for improving this guide? Contact Stephanie Ficek at stephanie.j.ficek@oregon.gov or call 503-947-7389.

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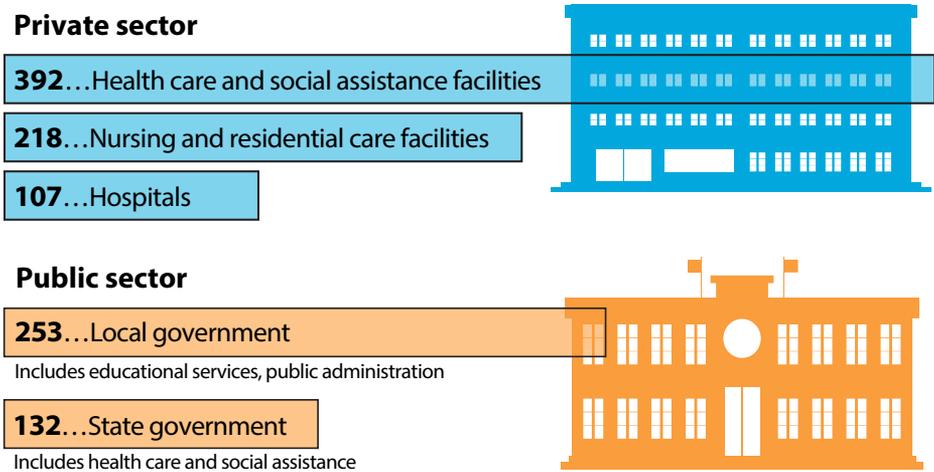
WORKPLACE VIOLENCE: CAN IT HAPPEN WHERE YOU WORK?

In 2013 and 2014, workplace assaults and other violent acts injured 1,040 Oregon workers.

The victims tended to be nurses and nursing aides, police officers, guards, and teachers. The offenders? Health care and residential care patients, criminal suspects, shoplifters, prison inmates, and students. And the workplaces? State hospitals, private health care and social services, public schools, and correctional facilities.

You may never encounter aggressive or violent people where you work, but you should think seriously about the risk that something could happen. If you find yourself thinking, "It can't happen here," you should reconsider. Even one violent incident is expensive; costs may include medical care, liability, legal fees, and lost business and productivity. In 2014, the temporary disability and medical costs for claims from Oregon workers injured by workplace violence averaged \$15,740 per worker.

Organizations with the most disabling claims for work-related injuries | 2013 and 2014



Source: Central Services Division, Oregon Department of Consumer and Business Services, November 2014

WHAT IS WORKPLACE VIOLENCE?

Workplace violence is violence or the threat of violence against workers. It can occur at or outside the workplace and can range from threats and verbal abuse to physical assaults and homicide. However it shows itself, workplace violence is a growing concern for employers and employees.

Contrary to popular opinion, sensational multiple homicides still represent a small number of workplace violence incidents. The majority of incidents are assaults, stalking, threats, harassment, and physical or emotional abuse that make no headlines. Many of these incidents are not even reported to company officials or to the police.

Responding to workplace violence requires attention to more than just an actual physical attack. Any conduct that creates anxiety, fear, and a climate of distrust in the workplace is part of the workplace violence problem. Prevention programs that do not consider harassment in all its forms are unlikely to be effective.

TYPES OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

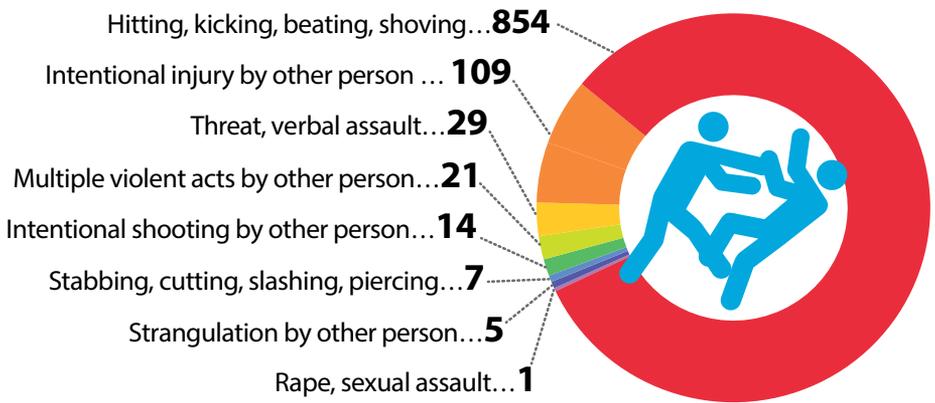
While agreeing on that broader definition of the problem, workplace violence falls under three categories.

- 1. Violent acts by criminals**, who have no other connection with the workplace, but enter to commit robbery or another crime. Preventive strategies for this type of violence include an emphasis on physical security measures, employer policies, and employee training.
- 2. Violence by customers, clients, patients, students, inmates, or any others for whom an organization provides services.** In general, these violent acts occur as workers are performing their normal tasks. In some occupations, dealing with dangerous people is inherent in the job, as in the case of a police officer, correctional officer, security guard, or mental health worker.

For other occupations, violent reactions by a customer or client are unpredictable, triggered by an argument, anger at the quality of service or denial of service, delays, or some other precipitating event. Employees experiencing the largest number of these types of assaults are those in health care occupations – nurses in particular, as well as doctors, and aides who deal with psychiatric patients; members of emergency medical response teams; and hospital employees working in admissions, emergency rooms, and crisis or acute care units.

- 3. Violence by current or former employees or violence by someone who has a personal relationship with an employee** – an abusive spouse or domestic partner. Violence in this category, which comes from an employee or someone close to an employee, has a greater chance to have warning signs in the form of observable behavior. Those warning signs, along with the appropriate prevention programs, can at the very least, mitigate the potential for violence or prevent it altogether.

Violence in Oregon workplaces | 2013 and 2014
 Accepted disabling claims for work-related injuries, by event



Source: Central Services Division, Oregon Department of Consumer and Business Services, November 2014

EMPLOYEE RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Workers have a right to a safe workplace. They have the right to expect a work environment that promotes safety from violence, threats, and harassment. They can actively contribute to preventive practices by doing the following:

- Accept and adhere to an employer's preventive policies and practices.
- Become aware of and report violent or threatening behavior by co-workers or other warning signs.
- Follow procedures established by the workplace violence prevention program, including those for reporting incidents.

The law requires employers to provide their employees with working conditions that are free of known dangers. The OSHA law also prohibits employers from retaliating against employees for exercising their rights under the law (including the right to raise a health and safety concern or report an injury). For more information, see www.whistleblowers.gov for worker rights.

EMPLOYER RESPONSIBILITIES

Employers have a legal and ethical obligation to promote a work environment free from threats and violence. Employers can face economic loss as the result of violence in the form of lost work time, damaged employee morale and productivity, increased workers' compensation payments, medical expenses, and possible lawsuits and liability costs.

Oregon OSHA can cite employers who do not protect their employees from violent acts under provisions of the state's Safe Employment Act, which requires all workplaces to be safe and healthful.

Employers' roles in violence prevention can include:

- Adopting a workplace violence prevention program and communicating the policy to employees.
- Providing regular training in preventive measures for all new and current employees, supervisors, and managers.
- Supporting, not punishing, victims of workplace or domestic violence.
- Adopting and practicing fair and consistent disciplinary procedures.
- Fostering a climate of trust and respect among workers and between employees and management.
- Seeking help from threat-assessment psychologists, social service agencies, law enforcement, and other outside sources when necessary.

Employers can also offer protections, such as the following:



- Provide safety education for employees so they know what conduct is not acceptable, what to do if they witness or are subjected to workplace violence, and how to protect themselves.
- Secure the workplace. Where appropriate to the business, install video surveillance, extra lighting, and alarm systems; and minimize access by outsiders through identification badges, electronic keys, and guards.
- Provide drop safes to limit the amount of cash on hand. Keep a minimal amount of cash in registers during evenings and late-night hours.
- Equip field staff with cell phones and require them to prepare a daily work plan and keep a contact person informed of their location throughout the day. Keep work vehicles properly maintained.



- Instruct employees not to enter any situation where they feel unsafe. Introduce a “buddy system” or provide police escort help in potentially dangerous situations or at night.
- Develop procedures covering visits by home health-care providers. Address the conduct of home visits, the presence of others in the home during visits, and the worker’s right to refuse to provide services in a clearly hazardous situation.

PREVENTIVE PRACTICES

Preventive measures can include pre-employment screening, identifying problem situations and risk factors, and security preparations.



Identifying and screening out potentially violent people before hiring is an obvious means of preventing workplace violence. Pre-employment screening practices must, however, be consistent with privacy protections and antidiscrimination laws.

A thorough background check can be expensive and time consuming. The depth of pre-employment scrutiny will vary



according to the level and sensitivity of the job being filled and the policies and resources of the prospective employer. However, as an applicant is examined, the following can raise red flags:

- A history of drug or alcohol abuse.
- Past conflicts (especially if violence was involved) with coworkers.
- Past convictions for violent crimes.
- A defensive, hostile attitude and a tendency to blame others for problems.

EMPLOYEE TRAINING

All employees must understand your organization's policy, recognize situations that may become hostile, and know how to respond to them. Managers and supervisors should also know best practices for dealing with layoffs and terminations, disciplining employees, and resolving conflict.

Employees, supervisors, and managers can receive training to help them detect out-of-bounds behavior or other warning signs. Training can also help educate workers and supervisors on how to respond to someone who seems troubled or potentially dangerous and how to report that behavior to managers. Training should include a very clear statement to all employees on what to do if they see or become aware of a weapon (in almost all circumstances, leave the location and call for help). Any training program should be sensitive to cultural assumptions and stereotypes and emphasize focusing on an individual's manner, conduct, and behavior rather than ethnic or other group identity or a "profile" of a dangerous person.

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAM EVALUATION

As part of the overall program, employers should evaluate safety and security measures. Top management should regularly review the program and evaluate the program with each incident. Managers, supervisors, and employees should re-evaluate policies and procedures on a regular basis to identify deficiencies and take corrective action.

Management should share workplace violence prevention evaluation reports with all workers. Any changes in the program should be discussed at regular meetings of the safety committee, union representatives, or other employee groups.

All reports should protect worker and patient confidentiality, either by presenting only aggregate data or by removing personal identifiers if individual data are used.

Processes involved in an evaluation include:

- Establishing a uniform violence reporting system and regular review of reports.
- Reviewing reports and minutes from staff meetings on safety and security issues.
- Analyzing trends and rates in illnesses, injuries, or fatalities caused by violence relative to initial or “baseline” rates.
- Measuring improvement based on lowering the frequency and severity of workplace violence.
- Keeping up-to-date records of administrative and work practice changes to prevent workplace violence to evaluate how well they work.
- Surveying workers before and after making job or worksite changes or installing security measures or new systems to determine their effectiveness.
- Tracking recommendations through to completion.
- Keeping abreast of new strategies available to prevent and respond to violence in the health care and social service fields as they develop.
- Surveying workers periodically to learn if they experience hostile situations in performing their jobs.
- Complying with OSHA and state requirements for recording and reporting injuries, illnesses, and fatalities.
- Requesting periodic law enforcement or outside consultant review of the worksite for recommendations on improving worker safety.

RESOURCES

Oregon OSHA’s **Violence in the Workplace** webpage

Federal OSHA **Workplace Violence** webpage

CDC’s **Occupational Violence** webpage

US Dept. of Justice – FBI’s **Issues in Response**

OREGON OSHA SERVICES

Oregon OSHA offers a wide variety of safety and health services to employers and employees:

Appeals: 503-947-7426; 800-922-2689; admin.web@oregon.gov

Conferences: 503-378-3272; 888-292-5247, Option 1;
oregon.conferences@oregon.gov

Consultative Services: 503-378-3272; 800-922-2689;
consult.web@oregon.gov

Enforcement: 503-378-3272; 800-922-2689; enforce.web@oregon.gov

Public Education: 503-947-7443; 888-292-5247, option 2;
ed.web@oregon.gov

Standards and Technical Resources: 503-378-3272; 800-922-2689;
tech.web@oregon.gov

For more information, call the OR-OSHA office nearest you.
(All phone numbers are voice and TTY.)

Salem Central Office

350 Winter St. NE, Rm. 430, Salem, OR 97301-3882

503-378-3272, Toll-free: 800-922-2689

Fax: 503-947-7461, en Español: 800-843-8086, www.orosha.org

Portland

16760 SW Upper Boones Ferry Road

Suite 200

Tigard, OR 97224-7696

503-229-5910

Consultation: 503-229-6193

Salem

1340 Tandem Ave. NE, Suite 160

Salem, OR 97303

503-378-3274

Consultation: 503-373-7819

Eugene

1140 Willagillespie, Suite 42

Eugene, OR 97401-2101

541-686-7562

Consultation: 541-686-7913

Bend

Red Oaks Square

1230 NE Third St., Suite A-115

Bend, OR 97701-4374

541-388-6066

Consultation: (541) 388-6068

Medford

1840 Barnett Road, Suite D

Medford, OR 97504-8250

541-776-6030

Consultation: 541-776-6016

Pendleton

721 SE Third St., Suite 306

Pendleton, OR 97801-3056

541-276-9175

Consultation: 541-276-2353



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