

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

We all go to work thinking about our duties for the day and look forward to seeing everyone from customers to coworkers. What we do not expect is to be verbally or physically assaulted; unfortunately, this can and does happen. According to OSHA, nearly two million American workers report having been victims of workplace violence each year, and from 2016 to 2018, 1,997 Oregon workers reported being victims of workplace violence.



The top three industries that have the highest risk are health care and social assistance, public administration, and educational services. Even if your work does not fall into one of these categories, you can help determine your risk by reviewing the following four questions:

- Do employees interact with the public?
- Does an exchange of money occur?
- Do employees work late at night or early morning hours?
- Do employees work in high-crime areas?

There are 3 levels of severity to consider when we talk about workplace violence:

Level 1 – This may include refusal to cooperate with supervisors, spreading rumors to intend harm, arguing with customers or coworkers, swearing at others, and harassment. External threats may include aggressive action by customers toward employees.

Level 2 – This may include physical intimidation, violation of district policies, sabotaging equipment, or employees seeing themselves as the victim. External customers may intrude on private spaces or lean over counter or place their hands on counters aggressively.

Level 3 – This may include suicidal threats or physical fights, destruction of property, or even the use of weapons. External customers may display or also claim to have weapons.

Once you have identified your potential risks, you will have a better idea of how to recognize and mitigate these risks. We have provided some ideas below to assist you.

- Authorize employees to call 911 if they feel threatened
- Adopt a workplace violence prevention program

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- Provide regular training in preventative measures
- Have support systems in place for victims
- Create a trusting and respectful environment
- Provide de-escalation training for staff
- Document instances of workplace strife and take pro-active measures to support, and if necessary, discipline or terminate employees who repeatedly threaten, harass, or bully others
- Install security cameras monitoring particularly vulnerable settings such as entryways, parking lots/garages, cash registers/boxes, safes, customer service departments and other office areas
- If collecting cash, use drop boxes
- Secure entryways and use security screens at front desks
- Discourage employees from engaging in volatile situations they may be uncomfortable with and employ a “buddy system”, if possible
- If your district becomes a frequent target of workplace violence, consider the construction of a “panic room” onsite
- Ensure adequate lighting to walkways and parking lots at night
- Conduct risk assessments with local law enforcement

Everyone deserves a safe and secure workplace and we hope our suggestions will help your district to meet this goal. If you have any questions regarding workplace violence, please contact the Risk Management Department at 800-285-5461 or riskmanagement@sdao.com.