

# Preventing Workplace Violence



## WHAT IS WORKPLACE VIOLENCE?

Workplace violence is any act of violence or threat of violence that occurs within the worksite or while an employee is doing their job. It is an occupational hazard that can occur in any type of setting.

Workplace violence includes:

- Incidents of physical violence such as hitting, kicking, scratching, or spitting.
- Threats of physical violence that cause an employee to fear for their physical safety.
- Incidents where a firearm or other weapon is threatened or used, including where common objects are improvised into weapons.

The impacts of workplace violence are varied — from serious physical injury and death to emotional and psychological impacts. Any act of workplace violence can impact workers' health; therefore, it is an occupational hazard that must be addressed by the employer.

The definition of workplace violence includes not just incidents where physical force is used, but also incidents where threats of violence are made. Threats of violence can have damaging psychological impacts on workers' who experience them, causing fear and anxiety.

Workplace violence occurs without regard to intent and can come from any person present in the workplace, including co-workers, supervisors and customers. Regardless of intent, the impact on workers is the same, and employers have a duty to identify and remedy occupational hazards.

The definition of workplace violence does not include acts of self-defense or defense of others.



# Preventing Workplace Violence



## TIPS FOR ADDRESSING WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

### Communicate

It is vital to have communication between workers and management to keep each other safe. Share your concerns with co-workers and shop steward. Within each department, share your concerns with your supervisor. Keep each other informed about what is happening and work together to create a safe environment. If there's a health and safety committee in your workplace, bring up the issue through them and see if together you can track incidents and detect a pattern in the larger workplace.

### Report & Track

When incidents occur, it is essential to track them and find ways to mitigate or they will keep occurring. By collecting and tracking data, you can identify what type of incidents are happening as well as when and where they are happening in your facility. With that information, you can take action to prevent them from recurring. Reporting is important so you can hold employers accountable. If you are involved in an incident, use your facility's protocol to report it and then follow up with management.

### Know the Law

OSHA's General Duty Clause allows OSHA to cite employers for failing to provide a workplace free from recognized serious hazards. While OSHA does not require employers to implement workplace violence prevention programs, it provides voluntary guidelines, which our union shops should push to adopt in our CBAs. Additionally, some states have passed state laws to prevent workplace violence, particularly in the healthcare industry.

### Follow Up & Organize

Once you start, be persistent and work within the parameters of your facility. If you don't see any follow up or changes, it's time to organize. Work with your shop steward or union to develop an action plan. Get your workplace committees and co-workers involved. Organizing allows workers to band together and sends the message to co-workers and management that workplace violence is unacceptable and reminds employers that it's their legal responsibility to keep workers safe.



**Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union**  
[www.rwdsu.org](http://www.rwdsu.org)

May 2022