

BIE SAFETY ADVISOR

Preventing Workplace Violence on the Construction Site - Construction is a high-pressure industry. On occasion, this pressure causes confrontation, which can lead to verbal threats, shouting, cursing, fights, flared tempers and violent acts. When we think of violence in the workplace, the first thing that comes to mind is a disgruntled postal worker entering the office with a gun and shooting his boss. While workplace murders grab media attention, they are only part of the problem. For each murder, there are countless other incidents of workplace violence in which victims are harassed, threatened or injured.

According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), “Workplace Violence is any physical assault, threatening behavior or verbal abuse occurring in the workplace setting.” It includes, but is not limited to, physical violence, intimidation, rape, harassment, profanity or psychological trauma such as threats, threatening or obscene phone calls, an intimidating presence, being followed or shouted at and any other disruptive or potentially dangerous behavior.

Although the construction industry is not one of the industry sectors most frequently affected by violence in the workplace, many incidents go unreported. Workplace violence in any form is a serious health and safety issue that construction owners and safety directors should be prepared to deal with.

There are several categories of workplace violence of which employers should be aware. They include **Violence by a stranger**, where the stranger has no legitimate relationship with the worker or workplace. **Violence by customers/clients**, where someone who receives a service provided by the business is not satisfied or is disturbed by the business or its employees. **Violence by a co-worker**, where the perpetrator (current, former or prospective) has an employment relationship with the business. Also, co-worker violence that occurs outside the workplace, but results or arise from the employment relationship is included. **Violence by personal relationship**, where someone who has a personal relationship with the worker commits violence. Another area of great concern is that of **harassment** in its many forms. Harassment includes, but is not limited to, intimidation, bullying and sexual harassment.

What Do Employers Need to Do? There is no specific OSHA regulation that applies to violence in the workplace. However, under the General Duty Clause, Section 5(a)(1) of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA), employers are required to provide their employees with a place of employment that “is free from recognizable hazards that are causing or likely to cause death or serious harm to employees.” OSHA has interpreted this to mean that an employer who has identified or experienced acts of violence or becomes aware of threats or intimidation or other potential indicators of workplace violence has an obligation to implement a workplace violence prevention program.

What to Look For - Construction managers and foremen/supervisors need to be trained to identify and be on the lookout for potentially violent situations. Simple situations such as a foreman shouting at a worker because the worker made a mistake or a worker getting in the face of another because of a disagreement can lead to a violent eruption. Like it or not, it is management’s responsibility to deal with situations like this; they need to be dealt with, and the threat needs to be removed immediately before escalating into a real problem.

Perpetrators of workplace violations often exhibit a pattern of behavioral characteristics that indicate a tendency for violence. Supervision needs to be properly trained to identify these characteristics and how to address these situations when they arise.

Workplace Violence Prevention Programs- Employers should establish and implement a written workplace violence prevention program. The program should include a clearly written violence policy statement and establish: A plan for assessing risk factors; Procedures for: preventing and controlling incidents, Incident reporting and investigation, follow-up and program evaluation procedures; Training and education programs for management and employees; and Recordkeeping.

Many violent situations can be prevented when employees have been properly trained and understand what constitutes an act of violence in the workplace and what they are expected to do when they are involved with or witness workplace violence or harassment.



Monthly Toolbox Talk

TREE CARE SAFETY AWARENESS

With all the windstorms, remnants of hurricanes coming up the east coast, other weather events, invasive species like the Ash Borer Beetle and other tree related diseases, tree work and care seems to be a constant throughout New York State.

Tree care work can be dangerous. Many workers get hurt or killed from:

- Falls,
- Electrocutions, or
- Being struck by trees

ALWAYS ASSUME THAT POWER LINES ARE ENERGIZED!

- If clearing trees, contact the utility company to discuss de-energizing and grounding or shielding of power lines.
- Extreme caution is necessary when moving ladders and other equipment around downed trees and power lines.
- Always perform a hazard assessment of the work area prior to start of work.

Your employer is responsible for your safety! Employers must provide free protective equipment (hard hat, climbing spurs, chaps and harness) and train you to:

- Identify fall and electrical hazards.
- Know proper climbing techniques.
- Use protective equipment — climbing lines can save your life during a fall!
- Stand clear of the drop zone.

Supervisors must:

- Check the worksite for workplace hazards.
- Make sure the climbing gear provided is right for the tree size.
- Assume that all power lines are energized and can electrocute a person at any time.
- Know if workers will need to climb or use lifts. Provide equipment that is in good working condition.
- Ensure that ground and elevated workers can see and hear each other.
- Provide protections to prevent injuries.

Supervisors also need to:

- Have a trained professional check falling tree hazards before starting work.
- Keep work at least 10 feet away from electric power lines - or call the power company to de-energize and ground the line.
- Secure a drop zone with cones that is at least two times the height of the tree.
- Determine if rigging is necessary.

As a worker, you have the right to:

- A safe and healthy workplace. Your employer is required to provide a workplace that does not put you at risk of injury, illness or death.
- Say something about safety concerns without being punished. If you see hazards or an injury, speak up!
- Receive information and training in the language and vocabulary you understand. This includes information on workplace hazards, how to prevent them, and the OSHA standards that apply to your workplace.

