Syracuse Builders Exchange FOUNDED 1872

BIE SAFETY ADVISOR

Preventing Workplace Violence on the Construction Site

When you think of workplace violence, what comes to mind? If you follow the news, the answer may be an active shooter situation or the increased incidents of violence against law enforcement. These issues capture most of the headlines, and they are undoubtedly very important, but they don't capture the full scope of workplace violence in the U.S.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) there were 77,780 nonfatal serious injuries in the workplace resulting from an intentional injury by another person in 2024. There was also a total of 470 homicides, and 263 suicides reported in 2024. The construction industry accounted for 46 deaths due to violent acts.

"Unfortunately, these disturbing statistics still understate the number of people affected by violence in the workplace," says LIUNA General Secretary-Treasurer and LHSFNA Labor Co-Chairman Armand E. Sabitoni. "First, it's estimated that up to 25 percent of workplace violence incidents never get reported. The other issue is that worker safety agencies like OSHA only track injuries and fatalities from physical violence, not all types of workplace violence."

What Is Considered Workplace Violence?

Workplace violence is more than physical violence alone. Workplace violence is any threat of physical violence, harassment, intimidation or other threatening or disruptive behavior that occurs on the job. This includes sexual harassment and bullying. Harassment is defined as any unwelcome or discriminatory verbal or physical contact, while bullying is defined as unprovoked, repeated aggressive or hurtful behavior committed by one or more people against another.

Potential Impacts on Workers and Employers

All workers, regardless of industry, have the potential to be affected by workplace violence. In addition to injuries caused by physical violence, workers may experience numerous other physical and mental health effects. These include increased stress and anxiety, depression and lower self-esteem.

Employers that don't take steps to reduce and stop harassment, bullying and other types of workplace violence are likely to see increased absenteeism, reduced productivity when workers are on the job and lower morale overall on site. The pervasive threat of workplace violence alone can be a safety risk, as workers may be unable to concentrate or devote their full attention to the task at hand.

Recognizing and Addressing Workplace Violence on the Job

While workplace violence is a complex and multifaceted issue, as with any jobsite hazard, there are concrete steps that employers can take to reduce risk for all employees. Some of these steps include:

- Incorporating workplace violence into the company's formal safety and health program.
- Encouraging workers to report incidents that occur and overcoming a reluctance to report.
- Training supervisors to recognize potential warning signs and take appropriate action.
- Creating a stigma-free workplace so that employees feel supported by management and their co-workers.

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 to 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 has an employment relationship with the business. Also, co-worker violence that occurs outside the workplace, but arises from the employment relationship is included.
- Violence by personal relationship where someone who has a personal relationship with the worker commits the violence.

Monthly Toolbox Talk

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), the construction industry has the second-highest rate of suicide in the U.S. There are approximately 123 suicides per day. That breaks down to one death by suicide every 12 minutes. In construction, it is typical for us to discuss physical safety on a daily basis. The focus of our work plans has been on keeping ourselves and our co-workers safe from bodily harm. What we have not typically talked about is our mental health. When you see someone physically struggling with a task, do you stop them and ask them if they need help? What about our mental state and the ability to perform the task at hand? Do we conduct a Job Safety Analysis (JSA) to see what hazards are floating around in our heads that day? When we see someone emotionally struggling, do we stop them and ask them if they need help?

WHAT MAKES CONSTRUCTION WORKERS VULNERABLE

- Stoic, "tough guy or tough girl" culture
- Seasonal employment
- Exposure to physical strain
- Capability for fearlessness
- Fragmented community / isolation
- Industry with highest rate of prescription opioids
- Culture of substance abuse
- Access to lethal weapons
- High pressure with risk of failure

KNOW THE SIGNS

- Increased tardiness and absenteeism
- Decreased productivity
- Decreased self-confidence
- Isolation from peers
- Agitation and increased conflict among co-workers
- Increased feelings of being overwhelmed

WHAT DO WE DO

If you suspect someone may be at risk for suicide, it is important to ask directly about suicidal thoughts. Do not avoid using the word "suicide". It is important to ask the question without expressing negative judgment. The question must be direct and to the point. If you appear confident in the face of a suicide crisis, this can be reassuring for the suicidal person.

For example, you could ask:

Are you having suicidal thoughts? *Or*
Are you thinking about killing yourself? *Or*
Are you ok?