



Dealing With Workplace Violence: A Guide for Agency Planners

U.S. Office of Personnel Management, Office of Workforce Relations

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“Dealing with Workplace Violence: A Guide for Agency Planners” addresses the issue that preventing workplace violence is a growing concern in the United States. Public interest and media attention have focused primarily on dramatic but very rare types of violence such as shootings by disgruntled employees in office buildings. Planners of workplace violence programs face the dual challenge of reducing employees’ anxiety about very rare risk factors while focusing their attention on more likely sources of danger. Undue anxiety about the “office gunman” can stand in the way of identifying more significant, but less dramatic, risk factors such as poorly lighted parking lots or gaps in employee training programs. This anxiety can also make it more difficult to cope with one of the most common workplace violence problems — the employee whose language or behavior frightens coworkers. Federal employees in organizations such as the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration have played a leading role in helping employers recognize and respond appropriately to the actual risks of workplace violence faced by their employees. At the same time, the risk of violence against Federal employees themselves has received increased attention, particularly in response to the tragic loss of life in the terrorist bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995. For many Federal workers, the anti-government sentiment they had handled on the job for years suddenly acquired a new and terrifying context. Even before the Oklahoma City tragedy, Federal managers and specialists, like their private sector counterparts, were becoming aware of the dangers of workplace violence and concerned about developing preventive programs for their employees. This was a challenging endeavor. When they turned to the private sector for expert guidance, they often found advice that was not necessarily compatible with Federal laws and regulations, or that failed to cover issues faced by Federal employees. However, in attempting to develop their own programs, agencies often discovered that they lacked the expertise necessary for a truly comprehensive approach. Depending on its mission, an agency might be rich in law enforcement personnel but without the needed resources in mental health or other disciplines whose input was essential. In the spirit of reinventing government, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management organized the Interagency Working Group on Violence in the Workplace. The purpose was to bring together a multi-disciplinary group of experienced professionals from throughout the Federal Government in order to develop comprehensive approaches to analyzing and responding to threats or incidents of violence in the Federal workplace.~

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