

PORTLAND PRESS HERALD

Domestic Abuse's Workplace Impact Revealed in Study

February 18, 2004

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Domestic abusers cause many problems at work, from accidents to the misuse of company resources, according to a new study by the Maine Department of Labor and Family Crisis Services.

While the report didn't put an overall dollar figure on the abuse-related problems, it did say that 70 of the abusers surveyed were absent from work due to arrests, for a total lost work time of 15,222 hours. Those absences added up to about \$200,000 in lost work time due to arrests.

The report studied how domestic abuse impacts abusers' workplaces to encourage employers to help address the problem.

The study recommends that employers have a domestic-violence policy that emphasizes safety and flexibility for those who are abused, and procedures to hold abusers accountable, up to termination.

The study also suggests training supervisors to recognize that an employee may be abusing a partner, and expanding the scope of accident investigations to include questions about concentration difficulties, possibly due to domestic abuse situations at home. Being aware of a problem earlier might allow employers to refer employees to services to stop the abuse.

The study surveyed 152 male domestic-abuse offenders attending classes at batterer intervention projects.

According to the study, 78 percent of offenders used workplace resources - a vehicle, telephone or cellular telephone - to express remorse or anger, check on, or pressure or threaten a victim. The study said 68 percent of the offenders said that domestic-abuse posters and brochures in the workplace would help prevent domestic abuse from impacting the business.

Because abusers are often obsessed with control over their victims, the report said, being at work represented a real and perceived loss of control. That loss, along with thinking

about home issues rather than work, caused accidents at work.

One distracted worker cut through his safety chaps with a chain saw, according to the report. One abuser was talking on a cell phone with his victim while he was driving a forklift; distracted, he smashed into and knocked over piles of heavy material. Another worker who was distracted forgot a key safety step while working with explosives and was burned as a result.

Other workplace issues include abusers who miss work or show up late because of behavior at home. One offender was so late to a job that it kept a large work crew idle for three hours, costing his employer more than \$1,000 in lost productivity.

As part of its workplace-violence surveillance initiative, the Maine Department of Labor plans to study later this year the impact of domestic abuse on employed women victims.