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Editorial – My View: Domestic Violence Enters Workplace

By Greg Haller

There's no question that the cost of domestic violence is devastating to individuals and families. What you may not realize is that domestic violence costs American businesses as much as \$5 billion annually in medical expenditures, employee turnover and lost productivity.

Domestic violence can cause far-reaching implications for your company's bottom line and employees' well being. It knows no social or economic boundaries. Nor is it prejudiced against race, culture or geographic location.

Consider that one in three women will experience domestic violence in her lifetime, according to a recent U.S. Department of Justice report. She could be your top sales performer. She could be your No. 1 go-to person for problem solving. She could be your efficient, dependable executive assistant.

Homicide is the leading cause of death for women in the workplace, and domestic homicide accounts for nearly one in five of these cases, according to the U.S. Department of Labor. If a perpetrator comes to your workplace, all employees are at risk.

Even if the abuser doesn't physically show up at your premises, the effects of abuse still make their way into the office. According to the American Institute on Domestic Violence, 96 percent of victims experience problems at work due to abuse. Seventy-four percent are harassed while at work by their abuser.

The toll to other employees can mean an increased workload to cover for an employee who's continuously late or unable to meet deadlines. Other employees may overhear harassing calls or face threatening visits to the office.

Businesses can, and should, make a difference. During National Domestic Violence Awareness Month this October, consider what you can do:

- Donate old wireless phones and accessories at any Verizon Wireless store. Through the company's HopeLineSM program, Verizon Wireless collects no-longer-used wireless equipment to be refurbished and sold. The proceeds are used to purchase newer wireless phones for domestic violence victims and to support domestic violence shelters and organizations.

- Ask your human resources department to initiate an open-door policy for employees to come forward if they are being abused or if they are concerned about a co-worker.
- Implement a Code of Business Conduct for employees if one is not already established.
- Incorporate domestic violence awareness training for your managers, such as the “None of Our Business” program underwritten by Verizon Wireless.
- Contact your local domestic violence shelter to see what your company can do to support domestic violence awareness programs.

Studies show that domestic violence worsens over time. It does not go away on its own. Indiana businesses need to get involved. Your company can make a difference.

Haller is region president of Verizon Wireless.

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