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# ***UPDATE***

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## **Preventing Workplace Violence**

ORLANDO – A vast majority of workplace violence is avoidable, according to Paul Viollis, president of Risk Control Strategies.

In his presentation at the National Safety Council's Congress & Expo, Viollis said he has investigated and studied more than 3,000 cases of workplace violence, a leading cause of work-related fatalities, and he has concluded that it is avoidable and rarely spontaneous.

He said the costs and the probability of risk as shown in government data should have every employer acting to address workplace violence. With all the available data on workplace violence, no employer can claim credibly that it had no idea of the risk of workplace violence, including domestic violence, according to Viollis.

“You can avoid this,” he said. He noted that no one wants to have to give an employee's family member a death notification.

He said employers should never tolerate bullying in the workplace.

He noted that employers and safety managers must mitigate the risk of workplace violence by maintaining a “standard of care,” which includes having a comprehensive policy on workplace violence, training employees on what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior at work, and adhering to best practices of security and access control.

In training, employers should address when, how, and to whom employees should report incidents of workplace violence, Viollis said.

Workplace violence is defined as any physical assault, threatening behavior, or verbal abuse occurring in the workplace, according to co-presenter Joannell Powers of Regional Reporting, Inc.

Based on the study of 3,000 workplace violence cases, Viollis has developed a behavioral profile of a perpetrator of workplace violence.

The profile:

- Male
- Age 25-40
- Doesn't handle stress well
- Very territorial
- Chronic complainer with no solutions
- Extremely manipulative
- Socially withdrawn
- Good worker usually (rarely uses sick time or all of vacation leave)
- Doesn't have great interpersonal skills
- Work is his identity
- Difficulty accepting criticism
- Anti-management
- Fascination with guns
- Boasts about get-even plans

Viollis said a comprehensive policy and plan, including a reporting procedure and intervention plan, is critical. He said it is important to act early because a good employee-assistance program can help "defuse" an employee, which is why an effective reporting program is so important.

Viollis identified a violence continuum, which includes:

1. Indirect threats. An employee makes a threat about another employee to a third employee.
2. Loud outbursts.
3. Direct threats.
4. Signs of depression or substance abuse.
5. Withdrawal signs. The employee cleans out his desk or locker without quitting. Viollis said at this point, the employee is 72 hours or less from a violent act.

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