

INSURANCE JOURNAL

Study: Employers Ignoring Workplace Violence

July 27, 2004

A recent follow-up survey by the American Society of Safety Engineers (ASSE) has found that many companies and organizations in all industries have yet to address the problem of workplace violence.

The ASSE Risk Management/Insurance Practice Specialty group surveyed ASSE members in 1999 on what was being done to address workplace violence in their workplaces. The survey found that although the number of violent incidents in the respondents' workplaces stayed the same, 70 percent of employers said their organization had not undergone a formal risk assessment of the potential for violent acts.

The follow-up survey done this past spring titled "ASSE 2004 Workplace Violence Survey & White Paper" of ASSE members found that not much had changed.

In response to a question concerning actions taken since the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the anthrax scare, 56 percent of employers said they have established or revised their security policy; 44 percent changed emergency procedures; 34 percent increased employee contact, training and discussions on the topic while 18 percent made no changes in their organization.

According to 2002 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics homicides are the third highest cause of on-the-job deaths. Prior to 9/11, where terrorists killed closed to 3,000 workers, workplace violence/homicides were still one of the top causes of on-the-job fatalities.

The 2004 ASSE survey also found that there was no change from the 1999 survey in response to whether companies had provided training on how to identify the warning signs of violent behavior – 58 percent said yes and 42 percent said no.

The 2004 survey also showed that little or no workplace violence training has been provided and there was an increase in the number of respondents from the earlier survey, 74 percent, who said their company had not done a formal risk assessment. In 2004, only one percent of respondents said their company had a written policy addressing violence in the workplace. However, 90 percent of those responding said their company has a policy addressing weapons in the workplace.

"Employers must realize that under federal and state OSHA regulations they have a general duty to furnish to each employee, employment and a place of employment that is free from recognized hazards that are causing, or likely to cause, death or serious harm to

the employee,” ASSE member and co-author of the survey JoAnn M. Sullivan, noted in the ASSE white paper. “Employers, under the theory of respondent superior, are vicariously liable for any actions committed by its employees within the scope of their employment. The employer is liable for actions of the employee when the employee is working, even if the employee is not acting within company policy.”

Workplace violence includes homicides, physical attacks, rapes, aggravated and other assaults, all forms of harassment and any other act that creates a hostile work environment, Sullivan noted.

Some of the suggested recommendations contained in the “ASSE Workplace Violence Survey & White Paper” to help employers address workplace violence include:

- Officers and directors – establish a workplace violence prevention policy, upper management must promote a clear antiviolenace corporate policy; and, establish and maintain security policies.
- Human resource managers – examine and improve hiring practices; implement prescreening techniques; utilize background checks; encourage employees to report threats or violent behavior; establish termination policies; and, provide post-termination counseling.
- Risk management and safety, health and environmental departments – train all employees in the warning signs of aggressive or violent behavior; train management in threat assessment and de-escalation techniques; conduct a formal workplace violence risk assessment; increase security as needed; develop and communicate a contingency plan to all employees which includes crisis management and media relations; review insurance coverage and verify coverage and exclusions; and identify a defensive strategy.

A total of 4,560 surveys were mailed in April 2004 to randomly selected ASSE members and 755 surveys were returned, about a 17 percent return rate. A full copy of the “ASSE 2004 Workplace Violence Survey & White Paper” which also includes a list of resources can be found on the ASSE web site by going to <http://www.asse.org> and to ASSE News. Or request a copy by contacting ASSE directly at customerservice@asse.org .

The Des Plaines, Ill.-based ASSE is a professional safety organization with 30,000 members. For more information check <http://www.asse.org> .

Find this article at:

<http://www.insurancejournal.com/news/national/2004/07/27/44404.htm>

Copyright © 2004 Wells Publishing, Inc.