I often speak on violence in the workplace and the challenges affecting employers with creating or enhancing a formal or informal workplace violence program. Public entities face a myriad of risk including, but not limited to, home visits with clients, public utilities, hazardous materials, trenching and shoring, driving, law enforcement, fire service and emergency medical services. One risk that comes up with increasing frequency is violence in the workplace. It sometimes seems that the news covers a story every month on a violent incident occurring at an office building, mall or other venue. In the most recently published data from the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health for workplace violence-related deaths and injuries resulting in lost time, government agencies topped the list.

While public entities continually request the need for active shooter/assailant training, there is a need to address the underlying concerns to prevent or reduce the chance of an active assailant incident. This can be achieved by having a comprehensive workplace violence program.

**FIRST THINGS FIRST**

In order to have a comprehensive program, an agency must start with workplace violence policy and protocols addressing threats and threatening behavior in the workplace. Workplace isn’t just limited to what happens in the office, but includes domestic violence and stalking. The policy components should include a policy statement.

An example of a policy statement is:

Threats, threatening behavior, or acts of violence by anyone on (city/school/district/agency) property against clients, employees, visitors, guests, or other individuals are not tolerated. Violation of this policy may lead to: 1) disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal; and 2) removal from premises, arrest and criminal prosecution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Injuries</th>
<th>Deaths</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>37,110</td>
<td>128</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education and health services</td>
<td>22,590</td>
<td>35</td>
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<td>Professional and Business Services</td>
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<td>Retail</td>
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<td>Leisure and hospitality</td>
<td>2,380</td>
<td>107</td>
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<tr>
<td>Financial activities</td>
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<td>37</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transportation and warehousing</td>
<td>840</td>
<td>71</td>
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<td>Construction</td>
<td>680</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>36</td>
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</table>
Other components of the program are: reporting, investigation, domestic violence, orders of protection (the agency’s compliance with such orders), warning signs, potential sources of threats, entities support structure for victims, work rules, disciplinary action for violations, Employee Assistance Program support, filing false reports and any exceptions to disclosure through the Public Information Act with regards to open records requests, threats of harm, threatening behavior or acts of violence and the entities stance on such behavior.

**ESTABLISH A REPORTING PROCESS**

One of the most important aspects of the program will be the reporting process. As in workers’ compensation, liability and property losses, reporting incidents is the only way to know they occurred.

Employees should report all incidents to a specific department. I recommend that all security incident reports be filed with risk management and safety division. A Security Incident Report form with instructions for completion must be readily available and easy to use for employees to actively report concerns and/or incidents. An online version is best for ease of use, but an active PDF or Word document works well, too.

The agency should also establish response protocols to serious incidents and threats considered a risk to personal safety. Conduct trending and analysis to demonstrate areas of concern in the same manner as injury trend reports. This will allow entities to focus their safety and security efforts in areas of need. An entity will not realize how many incidents are occurring within their location or in the field, until a reporting process is implemented.

**STAFF TRAINING**

Public entities should establish a workplace violence program that addresses the core of the program, reinforcing policy, procedure, reporting of incidents and response and recovery measures. Determine the best method to reach all employees. In my former position with a public entity, I was responsible for training over 54,000 employees throughout Texas. I thought the best method was computer based training; however, over 20,000 of those employees did not have their own computer.

**Solution:** Computer based training (CBT) with DVDs of the training for those without access to the CBT. Be innovative with your training and training delivery to reach all employees. Keep in mind that training curriculum for front line staff may differ from training curriculum for staff conducting home visits with clients.

Employees will also want to know what internal support is available for victims of threats, threatening behavior, domestic violence, stalking or other acts of violence. Public entities can develop personal safety planning for employees who are in fear for their personal safety. Each safety plan is written for the specific employee, based on his or her specific situation. In my experience, I have written hundreds of personal safety plans for individuals in threatening situations. Training employees to prepare personal safety plans for staff in threatening situations is a key support mechanism for the entity’s workplace violence program. Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), Disaster Behavioral Health (DBH) services and Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) teams are also essential for employee support after a catastrophic event to address employee counseling and debriefing.

**ESTABLISH A THREAT OR INCIDENT ASSESSMENT/ MANAGEMENT TEAM**

Managing threats, threatening behavior or other acts of violence is necessary to reduce the likelihood of an incident from occurring or reduce the impact of a potentially violent act. The focus of this multi-disciplinary team is to assess and manage threats of violence in the workplace, and the workplace includes all areas where employees are conducting work in course and scope of their employment.

The team must consist of decision makers who are familiar with the policy, and may include representatives from human resources, risk/safety management, mental health, legal, facility management, law enforcement/security and others with specific expertise, as needed. The team will gather information, assess the situation, determine action measures and determine mitigation measures or recovery measures, if post incident.

Establishing a comprehensive workplace violence program is critical not only to address the threat to staff, but to reduce the liability and reputational risk. Remember to:

- Establish a policy and protocols addressing threats, threatening behavior and acts of violence to include domestic violence and stalking
- Establish a reporting process and track incidents
- Establish training programs for employees addressing threats, threatening behavior and acts of violence
- Establish a Threat or Incident Assessment/Management Team
- Change you culture to one of awareness and preparedness
- Partner with EAP, CISM and DBH services for employee support

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

If you’d like to learn more about Workplace Violence and how to prevent it, a number of governmental agencies publish useful information:

- National Safety Council
  - Is Your Workplace Prone to Violence
- OSHA
  - Workplace Violence Prevention Programs
- Cal/OSHA
  - Cal/OSHA Guidelines for Workplace Security