

## Workplace Safety



With the recent tragic events in San Bernardino, SDRMA members have been inquiring about what exactly the employer's duty is to provide a safe workplace. Understanding the potential sources of workplace violence is a key step in the process to a safer workplace.

A key issue for all employers in California, both public and private, is keeping employees safe at the workplace. Under OSHA's General Safety Clause, it states in part:

- (a) Each employer --
- (1) Shall furnish to each of their employees employment and a place of employment which are free from recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm to his employees.

### Types of Workplace Violence

- Violence by strangers.
- Violence by customers or clients.
- Violence by co-workers.
- Violence by personal relations/domestic violence.

### Work-Related Factors That May Increase the Risk of Violence

- Working with the public.
- Handling money, valuables, or prescription drugs (e.g. cashiers, pharmacists).
- Carrying out inspection or enforcement duties (e.g. government employees).
- Providing service, care, advice, or education (e.g. health care staff, teachers).
- Working with unstable or volatile persons (e.g. social services or criminal justice system employees).
- Working in premises where alcohol is served (e.g. food and beverage staff).
- Working alone, in small numbers (e.g. store clerks, real estate agents), or in isolated or low traffic areas (e.g. washrooms, storage areas, utility rooms).
- Working in community-based settings (e.g. nurses, social workers, and other home visitors).
- Having a mobile workplace (e.g. taxicab).
- Working during periods of intense organizational change (e.g. strikes, downsizing).

### Preventative Measures

Preventive measures generally fall into three categories: workplace design, administrative practices, and work practices.

Workplace design considers factors such as workplace layout, use of signs, locks, or physical barriers, lighting, and electronic surveillance.

- Building security is one instance where workplace design issues are very important.
- Positioning the reception area or service counter so that it is visible to fellow employees or members of the public passing by.
- Positioning office furniture so that the employee is closer to a door or exit than the customer so the employee cannot be cornered.
- Installing physical barriers, e.g. pass-through windows or bullet-proof enclosures.
- Using coded cards or keys to control access to the building or certain areas within the building.
- Using adequate exterior lighting around the workplace and near entrances.
- Strategically placing fences to control access to the workplace.



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Administrative practices are decisions you make about how you do business. For example, certain administrative practices can reduce the risks involved in handling cash. You should consider:

- Keeping cash register funds to a minimum.
- Using electronic payment systems to reduce the amount of cash available.
- Varying the time of day that you empty or reduce funds in the cash register.
- Installing and using a locked drop safe.
- Arranging for regular cash collection by a licensed security firm.

Work practices include all the things you do while you are doing the job. People, who work away from a traditional office setting, for example home care providers, can adopt many different work practices that will reduce their risk. For example;

- Prepare a daily work plan, so that you and others know where and when you are expected somewhere.
- Identify a designated contact at the office and a back-up.
- Keep your designated contact informed of your location and consistently adhere to the call-in schedule.
- Use the “buddy system,” especially when you feel your personal safety may be threatened.
- Do not enter any situation or location where you feel threatened or unsafe.

### Personal Workplace Security Keys:

- Keep your purse, wallet, keys, or other valuables with you at all times or locked in a drawer or closet.
- Check the identity of any strangers who are in your office. If anyone makes you uncomfortable, inform security or management immediately.

- Don't stay late if you'll be alone in the office. Create a buddy system for walking to parking lots or public transportation after hours, or ask a security guard to escort you.
- Report any broken or flickering lights, dimly lit corridors, broken windows, and doors that don't lock properly.
- If you notice signs of potential violence in a fellow employee, report this to the appropriate person. Immediately report any incidents of sexual harassment.
- Know your company's emergency plan. If your company does not have such a plan, volunteer to help develop one.
- If the company does not supply an emergency kit, keep your own emergency supplies (flashlight, walking shoes, water bottle, nonperishable food, etc.) in a desk drawer.
- Mark your equipment with identification numbers, and keep an updated inventory list (with photos, if possible) in a home safe or a bank safe-deposit box. It's a good idea to keep backups of your work in a secure, separate location as well.

This is not a complete list of preventative measures a district can take to help ensure the safety of all personnel. Each agency should review its security measures in conjunction with a review of the Emergency Action Plan as well as the Injury Illness Prevention Plan (IIPP) to evaluate individual risks. You may also want to contact your local law enforcement agency to inquire what services they can provide regarding your agency's safety plan. ^



Learn more about preventing workplace violence

with CSDA's On-Demand webinar, "Workplace Violence Prevention." Visit [www.csda.net](http://www.csda.net) and go to the "On-Demand Webinars" section.



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