

Manager/Supervisor Risk Management

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A twice weekly e-mail training for YCPARMIA members

TOPIC: SAFETY – VIOLENCE AND THE OSTRICH APPROACH

YCPARMIA does not get many violence in the workplace claims. The most common and obvious claims are for injuries to law enforcement by resisting suspects, or to firefighters trying to control irrational patients. They receive training for dealing with these situations that hopefully mitigate risk. But there are a small number of other situations that arise on a semi-regular basis that should cause concern.

There are a number of unique jobs that cause member employees to come into contact with the public that are either prone to violence, or irrational behavior. Problems arise when the involved employees and/or their supervisors choose to ignore the potential danger. It is essential that the employees share their concerns with their supervisor, and that the supervisor responds in a timely manner. A sophisticated safety program tracks “near-misses”; a more dangerous approach is to ignore them, and hope that your luck holds. Broken door locks, disabled emergency alarms, isolated meeting rooms, and no emergency protocols or training have all been complained of by employees in the past.

While these exposures are from members of the public, a second problem involves the potential for violence from the employee’s family and acquaintances. The supervisor that becomes aware of the threat might see this as their employee’s personal business, but that ignores the employer’s responsibility to provide a safe and healthy work environment. In these situations, it must be recognized that the potential danger is not just limited to the employee – co-workers can also be exposed. As a general rule, if a supervisor learns that one of their employees has obtained a restraining order, a discussion and plan of action should be immediately developed.

The third situation that we have seen involves threats of violence from co-workers. These are sometimes seen in combination with employment liability claims for harassment, hostile work environment, and retaliation. Threats or acts of violence can go a long way towards proving a plaintiff’s case. Failure to document what the employer/supervisor knew, and what steps were taken, is a sure way to aggravate the potential exposure.

In summary, ignoring the potential for violence, especially after issues are recognized, is never the good answer. The duty to provide a safe work environment is not contingent on the employee’s agreement, or the supervisor’s comfort level. It is always a good idea to get HR involved when these issues are recognized.

Next Topic: Safety – Portable Fire Extinguishers