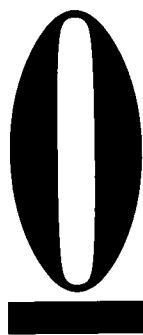


The Graveyard Shift



n June 9, 1993, a woman shot her supervisor to death in the parking lot of Pacific Electriccord in Gardena, California, and then shot and killed a coworker before killing herself. On July 1, 1993, a former client of Pettit & Martin opened fire in the law firm's San Francisco offices and left eight people dead and six more wounded before he turned the TEC-DC9 semiautomatic assault weapon on himself. And in October 1993, a disgruntled—and well-known—citizen in Newbury, New Hampshire, stormed into a town office and killed two people and himself because he believed that a property sale had gone sour.

There is no doubt that violence in the workplace is making headlines, but is it enough to warrant a response—at least from local government managers and risk managers? Paul Genovese, executive director of Compensation Funds of New Hampshire and a member of Public Risk Management Association's (PRIMA) Pooling Section, is realistic. "Strange things have happened working in workers' comp," he says. "There's an understanding that these things happen. It's not surprising."

He does agree, however, that the Newbury incident left a "chilling effect" on the town. "There was some reluctance several days after to go wait on customers in city halls in the area," he says, noting that even the governor beefed up his own security. "It made everyone think. The individual involved surprised everyone," Genovese says.

With these incidents popping up more and more in recent months, it seems as though it is time for managers nationwide to tackle this predicament head-on.

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Safety Is a
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Colleen Manigan
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Haunting Statistics

Since 1980, at least 750 people have been murdered at work every year, making murder in the workplace the third leading cause of occupational death and the first cause of death for women at work, according to a study by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). This steady increase makes workplace homicide the fastest-growing type of murder in the United States. The trend shows no signs of reversing.

In fact, in fall 1992, NIOSH issued a report declaring workplace homicide a "significant" public health problem and recently asked the Federal Bureau of Investigation to give these cases special attention. But although it is the homicides that grab the headlines, deaths are just part of the spectrum; experts estimate that there are 30,000 victims of on-the-job violence and harassment each year.

Studies support this. "Fear and Violence in the Workplace," a survey of 600 workers recently released from Northwestern National Life, found that one in four was attacked, threatened, or harassed on the job within the past year; one in six of those attacks was with a lethal weapon. And although violence by vengeful ex-workers tends to be in the news most, it is not the most common kind. The survey discovered that bosses and coworkers are more likely to be harassers but that attacks are more likely from customers, clients, or patients. Attacks by customers or clients made up 44 percent of incidents, followed by strangers, 24 percent; coworkers, 20 percent; and bosses, 7 percent. Only 3 percent of attacks were by former workers.

Most experts agree that the violent workplace reflects an increasingly violent society and that homicides at work are another example of how a once-safe refuge can turn into a battlefield. NIOSH blames some of this on limited gun control; 75 per-

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cent of workplace murders are committed with firearms.

Nevertheless, workplace crime happens for different reasons. Domestic violence spills into the workplace, clients believe they received poor advice, and sales clerks become caught in the middle of robberies. And in a stagnant economy, other people simply find mounting bills, job pressures, and unemployment too much to take.

But researchers with Northwestern National Life say that many things, including economic, social, and psychological factors, boost violent workplace behavior. Addressing these issues whenever possible lets risk managers protect their entities, employees, and citizens.

Job Stress. More competition for fewer jobs can lead to growing pressure at work and feelings of frustration, resentment, and anger. According to the Northwestern study, 37 percent of the workers surveyed said they expected to burn out on the job within two years, a

figure unchanged since 1991. Employees who considered themselves highly stressed suffered twice the violence and harassment that less-stressed workers suffered.

Corporate Downsizing. Forty-four percent of workers said their companies had cut jobs in the past year, up from 37 percent in 1991. Approximately two dozen employees kill their supervisors each year.

Substance Abuse. Alcohol and drug abuse were listed as the top social causes of violence. And 59 percent of workers surveyed listed such abuse as a major source of trauma, bigger than layoffs or poverty.

Gun Availability. Attackers, often infatuated by weapons, usually buy their guns legally. Although the most popular weapon of convicted gun criminals is a common Smith & Wesson .38 with a four-inch barrel, workplace killers usually go for more exotic automatic and semiautomatic firearms. Psychiatrists believe that a killer's weapon collection is often in place years before the situation explodes into action.

Studies also show that women are at a much higher risk than men of becoming victims of such violence. According to the federal government's first-of-its-kind study of how people die at work, completed in fall 1993, women account for only 7 percent of on-the-job deaths. Forty percent of women who die on the job, however, are murder victims. This Labor Department study reported that only 15 percent of men who die at work are murdered.

Officials suggested that the slanted proportion of deaths among the sexes resulted from different occupational choices; men were more likely to work in such professions as construction that also had high rates of injuries and deaths due to accidents. Still, taxi drivers, police offi-

Don't Stress

Workplace stress comes with a high price tag, through physical and mental health claims, decreased job productivity, high turnovers, and absenteeism. Experts on workers' stress at organizations like the National Council on Compensation Insurance and *Men's Health* magazine suggest these tips to reduce burnout.

For employers:

- Let employees talk freely with one another.
- Reduce personal conflicts on the job.
- Give employees adequate control over how they do their work.
- Ensure that staffing and expense budgets are adequate.
- Talk openly with employees.
- Support employees' efforts.
- Provide competitive personal leave and vacation benefits.
- Maintain current levels of employee benefits.
- Reduce the amount of red tape for employees.
- Recognize and reward employees for their accomplishments and contributions.

For employees:

- Put a balance in your life. Participate in leisure activities that offer different experiences from your job.
- Exercise—especially if your job is sedentary. Thirty minutes of serious aerobic exercise immediately reduces body tension.
- Pad your work schedule. Almost every task takes longer than we think it will. To avoid deadline stress, add 20 percent more time than you think is necessary to complete a project.
- Get a grip. Squeeze a hand exerciser or tennis ball at stressful times to provide a release and satisfy the body's fight-or-flight response.
- Lend a hand. When you help other people, you gain a sense of accomplishment and self-respect. A 10-year study comparing workers who skipped out on volunteer work to those who volunteered at least twice a week reported that the first group had twice the death rate of the other.
- Know where your kids are. Parents do not rest easily if they constantly wonder where their offspring are.
- Do not contaminate your home life with work pressures. Set aside 10 minutes of quiet time before you get home to consciously leave the workday behind.

cers, convenience store workers, gas station attendants, and security guards top the list of the most violence-prone professions, according to a study of California employees in the *American Journal of Public Health*. Supervisors, proprietors, sales personnel, waiters, bus drivers, janitors, and truck drivers also were considered among those more likely to be endangered. All suffered on-the-job

homicide rates four to 20 times higher than the national average.

Risky Business

Many employers have learned, however, that legalities can tangle any efforts to protect employees from harm. Firing an employee suspected of a dangerous alcohol or emotional problem, for example, could violate

laws protecting disabled workers, and warning a prospective employer about a shaky applicant could provoke charges of slander. In addition, even looking into these problems may border on an invasion of privacy.

But on the flip side, according to a July 19, 1993, *Newsweek* article, employers can be smothered with huge financial problems if they ignore such signs. Courts in both Florida and Texas recently ordered negligent employers to pay awards to families of murder victims. In addition, individual managers and supervisors can be singled out for alleged negligence in predicting crimes and providing adequate security. Victims also can raise issues of negligent hiring and inadequate supervision. As a result of such claims, insurance premiums are rising.

Ray Kepner, a Los Angeles lawyer who often lectures on this topic, says that these situations can cause a snowball of litigation. "Taking too aggressive a stance can lead to lots of problems," Kepner says. "It's a rock-in-a-hard-place situation that the employer is in." Liability issues, he says, can arise when an employer either overreacts or underreacts to a potential problem. He does, however, believe the word is getting out.

"There's a keen awareness that this is a workplace problem", he says. "Personnel managers are very interested in this type of violence. I can't think of a similar topic where I've gotten more phone calls; it's got everyone's attention."

All the more reason to know what to look for.

Killer Instincts

Experts say that many workplace violence incidents can be prevented if employees are properly trained to spot dangerous coworkers. "Berserkers," as these violence-prone individuals are sometimes called, fit their own mold.

Dr. Thomas Harpley, clinical di-

rector of National Trauma Services in San Diego, says the typical workplace killer is a vengeful, middle-aged white male who fears losing his job and feels that violence is the only option. And because today's male often defines himself through his occupation, berserkers tend to lash out at their biggest source of identity—the workplace.

Knowing what to look for could prevent a violent incident and save lives. Psychologists say that berserkers have several common signs. They often are:

- Loners who may appear guarded, defensive, and hostile.
- Withdrawn from relationships with coworkers.
- Fond of violent films, books, and TV shows.
- Suspicious and even clinically paranoid.
- Without much social support.
- Apt to externalize or blame others for their own problems.
- Quick to perceive unfairness.
- Fascinated by weapons.
- Filled with job-related resentment.
- Intimidating enough that bosses, coworkers, and supervisors may let them get away with more than they should.
- Victims of a layoff or a personal loss such as divorce or separation.

Most employees who kill managers or colleagues have been fired or feel mistreated, and many make open threats of violence—a warning signal so obvious that many coworkers ignore it, Harpley says.

This seemingly no-win situation has sparked a new industry to help employers cover themselves: violence counseling services. According to *Newsweek*, numerous states, including California, have adopted statutes requiring mental health professionals to warn potential victims if a patient poses a violent threat. Nevertheless, many safety professionals suggest that employers learn the danger

Why Do They Do It?

- 26% Irrational behavior
- 19% Dissatisfied with service
- 15% Interpersonal conflict
- 12% Upset at being disciplined
- 10% Criminal behavior
- 8% Personal problems
- 2% Firing or layoff
- 1% Prejudice
- 7% Unknown

Source: Northwestern National Life Insurance.

signs and discover how to lessen the risk of an employee blowout.

Truth and Consequences

Injuries and loss of life are two obvious tragedies resulting from workplace violence. Less obvious, however, is the consequential damage to an organization from threatened violence. Robert Gardner, principal consultant and owner of Protection Concepts, a Ventura, California-based security and crime prevention consulting firm, says that morale and productivity can suffer if employees are frightened or disturbed by violent incidents or threats. Fear and anxiety can induce a variety of personnel problems. And if the victim is a key employee or supervisor, day-to-day operations can be seriously disrupted. In addition, bad publicity not only scares away prospective hires but can also direct current employees to look elsewhere for work. Customers may also be frightened away, and associates may sever ties to avoid a name with a bad reputation.

Just keeping employees happy and stress-free can prevent an outburst in your workplace. Gardner suggests that every organization, regardless of its size, develop a workplace violence program to cut down the risk. The

program should develop policy and procedures and provide mechanisms for reducing or eliminating threats. Experts suggest following a few simple guidelines.

Form a Crisis Management Team.

Because effective management of a workplace violence program requires input from a variety of disciplines, Gardner says that forming a crisis management team is the first essential prevention method. It is likely that no single individual has the training, experience, and authority to develop, implement, and administer all the necessary policies and procedures, so it is important to recruit the team from a variety of disciplines.

The ideal team would consist of a member of upper management, representatives from human resources and risk management, a security specialist, a legal adviser, a psychologist, and an employee representative. Individual team members should be experts and have a working knowledge of the entity as a whole. To continue an effective program, the team should meet regularly and undergo continuous review. In addition, it should create scenarios and conduct drills. It also can screen applicants and review at-risk employees. Gardner says that activating such a team only after problems occur can prevent you from maintaining an effective program. A proactive approach, he says, puts the organization in a much better position to defend itself if an incident occurs and litigation results.

Create a Policy Manual. It is important for employers to develop effective grievance procedures, good security programs, and strong anti-harassment policies—and then put them in writing. Policies and procedures, including incident-reporting methods and employee assistance programs (EAPs), should be carefully researched, understandable, and easily obtainable in the workplace-violence section of the em-

ployee handbook. If employees know office procedures from day one, they are less likely to be uncertain of policies when an incident comes up. Giving employees a handbook shows them their options and gives them direction. Employees need to realize that there are established ways to handle their gripes.

Maintain a Supportive Work Environment. Maintaining a supportive environment actually helps employee productivity. Let employees have adequate control over their work, and they will probably feel more valuable. Always communicate openly, and encourage an open-door policy among coworkers. At the same time, let employees know that their conversations are held in confidence. Create focal groups or a suggestion box to solicit employee input. Employees should be trained to resolve conflicts by developing team-building and negotiating skills. Employees who feel that their employer cares about them are less likely to become violent.

Take Time Out. Taking time out to meet with your staff and explain security measures can save hours of unproductive work time in the end. Entities should review their security procedures, harassment policies, and reporting procedures. Use EAPs before and after incidents to help employees understand and prepare for such traumas. Citizens Against Crime, an organization based in Allen, Texas, has 48 franchised locations in the United States and conducts more than 25,000 safety seminars each year for employees at some of the country's biggest corporations, including the American Telephone & Telegraph Co., McDonald's, and Federal Express. It also works with associations, schools, hospitals, and government organizations.

Use Prevention Methods. Devise a crisis plan, and provide job counseling for those who have been fired or

U.S. Occupational Homicides, 1980-1988	
Number and Occupation per 100,000 Workers by Industry	
Retail trade	2,518
Services	1,176
Public administration	778
Transport/communication/ public utilities	647
Not classified.....	539
Manufacturing.....	469
Construction.....	274
Agriculture/forestry/ fishing.....	207
Finance/insurance/ real estate	206
Wholesale trade.....	100
Mining.....	42

Source: National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health

laid off. Talk to professionals about how to handle breaking such news and possible reactions. Supervisors should improve their interpersonal skills and learn to recognize signs of a troubled employee, and employees should learn to notice when something is out of the ordinary and report concerns to security. Some employers have even installed hotlines to pick up tips on employees most likely to explode when a layoff is announced. Most important, keep reporting methods centralized and anonymous; this de-personalizes the concept and encourages responses.

Beef Up Security. Increasing security measures in high-risk job atmospheres puts employees at ease. Install surveillance cameras in reception and other high-traffic areas, and place locks or security codes on entrances. Alarm systems also are im-

portant. Post emergency phone numbers. Use such natural surveillance methods as large, unobstructed windows, good signs, and lighting.

Maintain a Safe Workplace Inside and Out. Remember, too, that workplace crime does not just happen in offices. Review safety tips to minimize crime in parking garages and lots, elevators, and stairwells. Employees should not walk alone at night, should avoid suspicious situations, and should always keep their car doors locked and their keys in hand. Parking lots should be monitored by security and video cameras. Avoid printing names on parking spots. Remind employees who work late to alert security and avoid opening the door to strangers. An employee alone in the office should not let callers know that there is no one else around.

Reincarnation?

Although any program's goal is to eliminate violent incidents, some people involved in risk management, including Genovese, can see high-pressure security techniques as a way to add gravel to the grave. Although his office does not have a program in place yet, he does not think that many others do either. "You can pretty much walk right down the hall and into the governor's office," he says. "Police departments are about the only ones protected."

Genovese suggests, however, that the coldness and aloofness of bullet-proof glass walls and locked gates could be part of the problem. "It's ironic that this is happening in a time when there's all this talk about 'reinventing government.' The public sector has to become more motivated to have customer service and to think about citizens as customers," he says. "Sometimes, the government is not a friendly place. It can be a sterile, stiff environment, and [this] could be the thing that sets people off. A friendly

reception area can sometimes defuse violent situations. The public sector's got to reinvent itself."

Nevertheless, in October, this problem found its way to Genovese's neck of the woods and to the back roads of New Hampshire—where some people feel so comfortable that they leave their houses without locking their doors. But now, folks realize that they never can be too careful. "Unless you've got complete security, you've got to recognize that this could happen," Genovese says.

In these days of deadline pressure, staff meetings, budget restrictions, and citizen satisfaction, those just might be words to live by. **PM**

Colleen Manigan is editorial assistant, Public Risk magazine, Public Risk Management Association, Arlington, Virginia.

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Help Is Just a Phone Call Away

Citizens Against Crime

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Employee Assistance Professionals Association

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Arlington, VA 22203-1516
703/522-6272

Employee Involvement Association

111 E. Wacker Drive
One Illinois Center, Suite 200
Chicago, IL 60601-4298
312/616-1100

National Crime Prevention Institute

University of Louisville
Shelby Campus

Burhans Hall, Room 134
Louisville, KY 40292
502/588-6987

National Employment Counseling Association

5999 Stevenson Avenue
Alexandria, VA 22304
703/823-9800

National Safety Council

1121 Spring Lake Drive
Itasca, IL 60143-3201
708/284-1121

National Safety Management Society

12 Pickens Lane
Weaverville, NC 28727
800/321-2910