



# MARKETPLACE



POINT OF VIEW | JUDI BRASWELL of Behavioral Health Systems

## Violence a challenge for the workplace

**S**afety in the workplace is once more the topic at water coolers and board rooms alike.

With the horrific massacre at Virginia Tech still fresh in our minds, we are again faced with the reality that our safety, even in schools and workplaces, is not to be taken for granted. The 2005 Liberty Mutual Workplace Safety Index Findings said that workplace violence was the 10th leading cause of injuries in 2003.

Workplace safety is an issue that requires the attention of every member of an organization from the CEO to the lowest level employees. Appropriate policies that define unacceptable and inappropriate behavior must be implemented and enforced. The work environment must be analyzed for areas of vulnerability and include input from all levels of employees to ensure that no area is overlooked.

Every workday, an estimated 16,400 threats are made, 723



workers are attacked and 43,800 workers are harassed. Before workplace violence can be prevented, we must acknowledge that it can happen where we work. All workers and workplaces must have a zero tolerance for any type of abuse in the workplace and be willing to follow company policy to address the perpetrators of such abuse.

Although workplace violence may occur with no discernible warning, many times workplace violence follows some sort of "trigger" that pushes an already vulnerable person to drastic action. The best predictor of vio-

lence is past violence. An individual with a history of violent behavior or involvement in the criminal justice system should be considered a higher risk.

Other risk factors include being bitter and unhappy, problems in childhood such as bad grades in school or an abusive home life and substance abuse. Individuals who have committed workplace assaults often told someone else what they were planning but weren't taken seriously. They may report feeling that they've been treated unfairly, have been forced to wait a long time for something such as a promotion or raise and have been recently disciplined. Many showed signs of mental instability and had begun to isolate themselves or were thought of as a "loner."

Even with the best planning, workplace violence continues to be a possibility.

Employers should be prepared to provide post-incident assistance to employees and

their families. Employers should be prepared to provide post-incident assistance to employees and their families. Often licensed professionals are brought onsite to assist employers and employees recognize when a stress reaction may require professional assistance.

Employee assistance programs often provide this service along with assessment and short-term counseling on the impact of trauma and development of effective coping strategies.

Workplace training is an essential element in workplace violence prevention.

As we learned from the tragedy at Virginia Tech, it's always better to be more prepared than less prepared.

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