

# Warning: Violence is third-leading cause of fatal occupational injuries

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*The Occupational Safety and Health Act's (OSH Act) General Duty Clause requires employers to provide a safe and healthful work environment for all covered workers, which includes protecting them against workplace violence. With many employees continuing to work remotely because of COVID-19, employers have let their guard down. But the physical, mental, and emotional stresses resulting from the pandemic mean you need to be prepared for conflicts now more than ever before.*

### ***Tensions rising during pandemic***

Disagreements over politics, vaccinations, and mask wearing have fueled violent workplace conflicts over the past 18 months. Based on the most recent available statistics from the National Safety Council, physical assaults in the workplace in 2019 resulted in 20,870 injuries (nearly double the 11,690 assault-related injuries reported in 2011) and 454 fatalities.

In light of the statistics, you must be prepared to confront potential workplace violence on the horizon. Here are some things you should know:

**What is workplace violence?** According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), workplace violence is “any act or threat of physical violence, harassment, intimidation, or other threatening disruptive behavior that occurs at the work site. It ranges from threats and verbal abuse to physical assaults and even homicide.”

**When must employers report workplace violence to OSHA?** It depends. OSHA doesn't have specific workplace violence reporting requirements. Rather, its general reporting requirements apply.

You must report any worker fatality to OSHA within eight hours and any amputation, loss of an eye, or hospitalization within 24 hours. Therefore, if the workplace violence results in a reportable injury as defined by the agency, you must report the situation accordingly.

**What measures should be taken to prevent workplace violence?** According to OSHA, “the best protection employers can offer is to establish a zero-tolerance policy toward workplace violence against or by their employees.” A zero-tolerance policy allows you to remove the violent offender at the first sign of violence, potentially preventing an escalation of the conflict down the road.

You should implement a workplace violence prevention program and incorporate training into regular safety meetings or other periodic policy discussions with employees.

**What should you do if workplace violence strikes?** Immediately triage the situation. Depending on the circumstances, building security or your local police department may need to get involved. Provide prompt medical evaluation and treatment as necessary, including calling paramedics or sending the employee to urgent care for needed assistance.

When the emergency is resolved, encourage the affected employees to report the circumstances of the incident. Use the information to learn from the situation, and institute corrective measures to avoid similar episodes in the future.

### ***Be prepared***

Don't forget to be prepared for the aftermath. Depending on the circumstances, the affected employees may need stress-debriefing sessions or

post-traumatic counseling services to help them recover from the violent incident. Understand what services are available to your workers, have referrals at the ready, and encourage them to take advantage of the assistance.

Assess whether an ongoing threat is possible. If so, consider whether an injunction against workplace harassment (i.e., a protection order) against the violent offender is warranted. In Arizona, an injunction may be obtained at your city, county, or justice courts.

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