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## Labor-Management Strategies to Prevent Workplace Violence

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### I. DEFINITION OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

1. Any act which is physically assaultive.
2. Behaviors indicating potential for violence (throwing objects, shaking fists, destroying property, etc.).
3. Any substantial threat to harm another individual or endanger safety of employees.
4. Any substantial threat to destroy property.
5. Bizarre behavior that might signal emotional distress or illness.

### II. GOALS OF VIOLENCE PREVENTION ACTIVITIES

1. Reduce the:
  - frequency
  - seriousness
  - impact

### III. ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES REGARDING WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

- A. Documenting of:
  1. Violent events
  2. Threats – Verbal and Non-Verbal
  3. "Unusual" behaviors
- B. Responses to:
  1. Violent incidents
  2. Threats
  3. "Unusual" behaviors
- C. Joint Policies against Violent Behaviors
- D. Treatment/rehabilitation/disciplinary/termination/options
  - Try to “help the worker help himself/ herself”
- E. Establishing Reporting Systems for Threats or Violent Behavior
- F. Availability of trained Threat Assessment Team

### IV. POSSIBLE BEHAVIORAL INDICATORS OF THE POTENTIALLY VIOLENT EMPLOYEE

The first question many people ask when starting to develop a workplace violence prevention program is, *How can we identify potentially violent individuals?* It is understandable that people want to know this - and that “early warning signs” and “profiles” of potentially violent employees are in much of the literature on the subject of workplace violence. It would save time and solve problems if union representatives and managers could figure out ahead of time what behaviors and personality traits are predictive of future violent actions.

However, no one can predict human behavior and there is no specific “profile” of a potentially dangerous individual that can predict violence. However, indicators of increased risk of violent behavior are available. These indicators have been identified in past incidents of workplace violence.

Some of these “red flags” requiring further assessment are:

1. "Veiled" or indirect threats
2. "Conditional" threats
3. Excessive and intimidating references to other violent events
4. Special, excessive interest in police, military, survivalist activities
5. Inappropriate communications to co-workers
  - "I' m losing it"
6. Intimidating or frightening comments about weapons
  - not just gun collector
7. "Documenting" of other people who are "causes" of one's problems
  - keeps "notes"
  - makes "lists"
  - conducts "surveillance", "interviews"
8. Paranoia / Mental Health Issues
  - plots, conspiracies
  - "stealing" of loved one
  - externalizes, blames others
9. Repeatedly accusing others for causing one's problems
10. Depression, suicidal thinking
11. Non-specific anger, resentment, irritability
12. Litigious, filing of numerous grievances and lawsuits
13. "Loner" (P. Deitz; TAG )
14. Self-mutilation, fire-setting,
15. History of acting out behavior
16. Domestic Abuse, harassment
17. Specific threats to identifiable targets
  - plan
  - time
  - place
  - motive
  - means
18. Bringing, brandishing weapons at work

19. Festering conflicts that one cannot seem to resolve or compromise on
20. Behaviors that make others, who know the person over time, “uncomfortable”

Each of these behaviors is a “red flag” that something may be wrong. None should be ignored. By identifying potential problems and dealing with it appropriately, union representatives and managers may be able to prevent violence from happening.

Joint planning groups should ensure that the appropriate Threat Assessment Team or trained others are prepared to assist union representatives, supervisors and other workers in dealing with such situations. Early intervention and “helping employees help themselves”, keeps morale high and the workplace safe.

## **VI. Labor-Management Strategies to Reduce Violence**

### **A. Violence Labor-Management Partnership**

1. Joint Labor Management Strategies
  - a. Developing joint policies and intervention procedures against threats and violent acts
  - b. Training in recognizing "warning" signs of potentially violent individuals
2. Joint education about reporting threats and violent acts
3. Uniform standards of conduct and discipline
4. Establish Joint Threat Assessment Team / Safety Teams
5. Behavioral Assessment and Intervention with potentially violent employees
6. Conflict Resolution/Violence Diffusion Training
7. Access to grievance/appeals process
8. EAP/employee evaluation and counseling
9. Pre-hiring screening/background checks
10. Evaluation of organization climate
  - a. Leadership types
  - b. Stress reduction mechanisms
  - c. Focus groups
  - d. Anonymous employee surveys
11. Employee empowerment culture
12. Develop data base on threats and violent incidents
13. Conduct Post-Incident Analysis
14. Perform security assessment of physical sites /risks
15. Develop procedures for High Risk terminations
16. Establish liaison with law enforcement agencies
17. Develop Threat Management Response Plans
  - a. Assistance for identified targets/victims

18. Identify Threat Assessment Expert Consultants
19. Security emergency alerts during high alert situations
  - a. High risk situations
  - b. Personal protection
  - c. Access control
  - d. Employee notification
20. Analyze violence vulnerability trends/risks in similar industries
21. Outplacement services during downsizing
22. Monitor job performance behaviors for problems
23. Assess: -work setting x personality x cultural factors in assessing potential risk of violence

Note: These training materials are general in nature and have been designed and developed to facilitate discussion and to promote learning. The print materials are presented with the understanding that they are not to be construed as the direct rendering of, or as a substitute for, legal or specific case management advice.

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Dr. Kenneth Wolf has conducted violence prevention and threat assessment trainings for a wider range of organizations and industries, including the United States Postal Service, UAW, municipalities, Fortune 500 Companies. He assists organizations with developing comprehensive workplace violence prevention programs, trains threat assessment teams, conducts active shooter survival training exercises and designs crisis recovery programs.