Workplace Safety

Officer Clark and Rebekah Ziesemer
Community Programs
Olympia Police Department
Workplace Violence

Violence or the threat of violence against workers.

It can happen in *any* working environment and can range from threats and verbal abuse to actual physical assaults including homicide.
Importance of Workplace Safety

- 1.7 million injured per year
- 1 in 5 know someone capable of violence
- Financial cost
- Loss of productivity
Topics we’ll Discuss

- Thinking about safety
- Determining your risk factor
- Recognizing & preventing dangerous situations
- Communication
- Developing a plan
Thinking about Safety

- Everyone is responsible for themselves and their own safety
- Everyone is responsible for acting on unsafe conditions
- Everyone is responsible for sharing information that can alert others
Almost all violence is preventable
Verbal de-escalation works
Strong customer service prevents violence
The best defense against workplace violence is a trained and alert staff
Levels of Awareness

- **WHITE** - OBLIVIOUS TO SURROUNDINGS (easy target)
  -- thinking of personal life, problems, joys

- **YELLOW** - CONSTANTLY SCANNING SURROUNDINGS
  -- look for strange situations when coming to work and throughout the day

- **ORANGE** - FOCUSES ON INDIVIDUAL OR LOCATION, PLANNING OPTIONS
  -- keep composure at this point

- **RED** - PREPARED FOR ACTION, FIGHT or FLIGHT
  -- don’t be afraid of embarrassment or perceptions
Determining your Risk Factor

- Environment/Security
- Job Assessment
- Preparation/Recognition
Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)

Proper design and effective use of the built environment can lead to a reduction in the incidence and fear of crime and an improvement in the quality of life.

- Emphasis:
  - Physical Environment
  - Behavior of people
  - Productive use of space
  - Crime/loss prevention
Key CPTED Concepts

- Natural Surveillance
- Access Control
- Territorial behavior
- Maintenance

*Keep the honest people honest and force the dishonest to give away or modify their plan.*
Physical Security in the Workplace Mindset...

- Lock doors that lead to non-public areas
- Filter all guests to a front reception desk
- Guests must be escorted by an employee at all times
- Document inappropriate behaviors
- Use physical barriers
- Establish as part of your job to be on alert for suspicious persons, activity, and behaviors
- Apply CPTED standards
Where does WP Violence come from?

- Clients/Visitors (staff example?)
- Transients/strangers/criminals
- Vendors/contractors
- Co-workers/Supervisors/Company Mgmt.
- Former co-workers
- Relatives/visitors of co-workers
Job Risk Factor Questions

- Do you affect a person’s family, money or work?
- Do you deliver bad news?
- Could you be the target of transferred anger?
- Have you rehearsed what you’ll do?
  - Fight, flight, freeze – planning will help
Preventing Dangerous Situations

- Trust your instincts!
- Use sound crime prevention techniques
  - Lock vehicle doors/windows
  - Store valuables in a secure location
  - Use the buddy system
  - Establish an escape route

- What does “suspicious” mean?
  - People
  - Vehicles
  - Activity

- Is there recent criminal activity in your neighborhood?
  - [www.Crimereports.com](http://www.Crimereports.com)
  - Communicate with surrounding businesses
What some have said:

- “If I’m attacked, I’ll just freeze up and I won’t be able to do anything; not even speak!”
- “If someone tries to take my purse or breaks into my house, I will do whatever I can to make sure the scumbag gets nothing of mine!”
- “Nothing will happen to me in this area.”

Prevention & Pre-Planning will help.
Being a good Witness 101

- Suspicious persons/activity/dress (Yellow zone)
  -- strange/inappropriate dress
  -- hanging out in parking lot/in front of your building
  -- bulges in clothes
  -- touching something in their waistband/coat
  -- casing the area
    -- letting customers cut in line/waiting until they’re alone

- Descriptions are very, very important
Practice getting a good description

- Size up suspicious persons or suspects with a **visual** pat-down
  - The basics
  - Dress (details)
  - Distinguishing marks or tattoos,
  - Speech/what they say
  - Direction of travel,
  - Vehicle
Recognize Changes

- Loss of significant other
- Loner
- Collects, talks about weapons
- Talk of frustration, retaliation
- Has no empathy
- Jealousy
- Describes explicit plan
- Documents, blames others
- Availability of means (weapons)

- Veiled or direct threats
- Considers himself/herself a victim
- Depressed, suicidal
- Files grievances and lawsuits
- Unreasonable demands
- Boasts of prior violence
- Irrational thoughts
- Sees violence as a solution
Mental Illness

A person should seek professional help when:

- Multiple symptoms are present
- Self-care is impacted
- Symptoms are intensifying, prolonged or intolerable
- They experience sudden, rapid deterioration
- Suicidal/Homicidal ideation is expressed
Assessing a Threat

- What statements were made?
- Who made the statement?
- Against whom was the statement made?
- How was the threat communicated?
- What were the circumstances?
- Witnesses?
- Were weapons involved? Mentioned?
- Tantrum behaviors?
- Any prior threats?
  - Previous violence?
  - Previous property destruction?
  - Drugs or alcohol involved?
  - Mental issues?
- Any recent significant changes? Failure to get a promotion, transfer etc…?
Key Points

What is the biggest mistake professionals make regarding workplace violence?

What are two strong indicators that an individual may be violent?
How do we communicate??

- Body Language
- Tone of Voice
- Words
Communication....

- Body Language  68%
- Tone of Voice   25%
- Words          7%
Crisis Defined: An emotionally stressful event or traumatic change in a person's life.

However defined, it is very real to the person experiencing it.
Anger Escalation Scale

- Confused
- Frustrated
- Angry
- Hostile
Defusing Strategies...

- Recognize it!
- Perform quick assessment
- Recognize early warning signs
- Reflect Calm
- Actively Listen
- Open Hand Gestures
- Re-phrase
- Chin Shakes/Agree
- Apologize
- Get Help or Evacuate
Avoid...

- Using patronizing phrases – “calm down”, “I know how you feel”
- False promises
- Technical jargon
- Insults/Sarcasm
- Non-verbal challenges – defensive stance, rolling eyes, sighing
You must control yourself to control others
You have expectations to meet for your customers/citizens
Your first words set the tone:

“What can I do to help you with this problem?”
“I understand why you are so upset. Here’s what I can do.”
“When you can talk to me in an acceptable manner, I can help you.”

No one can make good decisions when they’re angry
Allow venting (as much as it hurts!!!), be empathetic, nod head, eye contact, diversion techniques…
Communication Skills for De-escalation

- Some customers/citizens may not “gel” with you—
  “Service swap”
- Presence of additional co-workers/supervisor can help.
- If you are concerned for their welfare, call dispatch or ask if they have a friend or family you can call.
Communication Skills for De-escalation

- Do not rise to their level of anger
- Calmly and clearly state store policy
- Give advisement – warning with a consequence
- Don’t try to be kind and compassionate at the expense of your safety
- If it doesn’t subside, let them know you’ll call for help & follow through – don’t minimize the problem.
- DON’T FEEL GUILTY dialing 911 if you are in fear of immediate threat of any kind.
**De-escalating people with mental illness**

- BE SAFE – control yourself and the environment, assess the risk, anger vs rage
- Remember person first – don’t judge too quickly (medical reasons?)
- Model the behavior you want (calm, quiet, respectful words and body language)
- Explain what you are doing, be direct and brief
- Try to get to the core issue and gain agreement
- Be patient – give them (and yourself) time to process
- Ok to acknowledge hallucinations or delusions but don’t agree or contradict
- Avoid humor
- Take threats seriously, set limits
- Address most concerning behavior first, repeat simple requests
FOUR STAGES OF ASSAULT

1. Anxiety Stage

2. Defensive Stage

3. Physically Acting Out Stage

4. Tension Reduction Stage
1. Anxiety Stage

- Pacing
- Heavy Breathing
- Hand Wringing
- Voice Change
- Shaking
- Eye Tic
- Exaggerated Body Movements
- Other Signs?

★ Ask if you can help them
★ Don’t ignore them!
Use Positive Statements

Rule of Five:

- Five Words or Less
- Five Letter Words or Less

- “We can make this work”
- “I can tell you are upset”
- “I want to help you”
- “What can I do to help?”
2. Defensive Stage

- Cursing
- Threats
- Challenging
- Refuse To Be Helped

- Give them options/choices
- Set limits to their behavior
- Give them time
- Have them help to resolve the problem
Personal Space

- **Avoid:**
  - Toe-to-toe
  - Crossing your arms
  - Having your hands behind you – safety
  - Unsolicited personal contact

- **Don’t point**

  - **Do:**
    - Have your hands open and to your sides
    - Stand at 45 degree
3. Physically Acting Out Stage

- Attacking others physically
- Destroying property

**WARNING SIGN:**
- Invasion of your personal space

★ Evade and get help
★ Call 911
4. Tension Reduction Stage

- They are physically spent
- Emergency responders should re-establish communication with them

★ Don’t leave them alone.
★ If left alone, they may re-escalate!
★ Cycle of violence could continue - even escalate
Developing A Plan

- Share information with co-workers
- Develop a code word – or not?
- Keep a safe distance/Use barriers
- Determine what your limit is – you can disconnect respectfully
- Call in a second person (or more) if necessary
- Assign a point of contact for difficult people
- Plan ahead to minimize risk – parking lot, opening, closing
- Self-assessment – what are you willing to do to survive?
- “Disaster” drills
Developing A Plan

- Strategies for employees to disassociate from disorderly people
- Clear policies
- Do employees feel supported in how they respond?
- Discuss tactics as regular part of training
What now?

- Attitude – it can happen to you!
- Be aware of your environment
- Don’t ignore the signs – address the issue and/or report it
- Remember your tools
  - Attitude
  - Problem solving
  - Communication skills
  And…..
9-1-1 Tips

- Pre-program on phone
- Give us much info. as possible
- Call & leave off the hook if you can’t talk
- Enhanced 911
- If calling on a cell phone, give location
- Non-emergency # is (360)704-2740 – Thurston County
- Don’t be afraid to call; there’s no limit!
Thank you

Officer George Clark
gclark@ci.olympia.wa.us
360-709-2786

Rebekah Ziesemer
rzieseme@ci.olympia.wa.us
360-239-5301

Contact local law enforcement agency to establish relationship
and inquire about additional training.