



# **Violence in the workplace**

## The Role of the Facility Manager

Wayne D. Veneklasen, Ph.D., CFM and Donald J. Barnes, BA

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MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH CONTRIBUTIONS GENEROUSLY  
DONATED IN MEMORY OF W. DAVID BEVERLY.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

W. David Beverly— (husband of Linda Beverly, CAE, Vice President of the International Facility Management Association), a long-time NASA engineer, was murdered on April 20, 2007 at Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas. A contract engineer shot and killed David then held another co-worker hostage for over three hours before committing suicide. This incidence of workplace violence impacted the lives of thousands to varying degrees.

While it may not be possible to prevent future acts of violence in the workplace we hope the following pages prove useful as a guide aimed specifically at preventing such devastating events. We encourage you to utilize the practical forms, templates, policies and check lists included in this report as well as gain insights from the case studies presented. Most importantly, we appreciate your continued commitment to safety in the workplace.



## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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## SPECIAL THANKS

The IFMA Foundation would like to thank the following:

**BOMA** for their cooperative effort in helping us with this publication that addresses workplace violence from the FM and building owner/operator's perspective

**NASA** for their willingness to work with us and share some of the things they learned during the tragic events that surrounded the death of David Beverly

**Our Subject Matter Experts (SMEs)** that helped in the development of the content requirements and the finished product

Mike Coleman	– Allied Barton	Joel Walker	– NASA
Bob Chartier	– Allied Barton	Jessica Handy	– Newmark Knight Frank
Karla Beth Kudatzky	– CB Richard Ellis	Shari Epstein	– IFMA

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# INTRODUCTION

In 1995, IFMA released Research Report #15: Violence in the Workplace which served as a defining piece of research to better understand the phenomenon of workplace violence (WPV) and to develop appropriate management practices. ***Violence In The Workplace – The Role Of The Facility Manager*** is not a replacement report or even an extension of the report mentioned above. It is a stand-alone report that looks at the history of workplace violence, provides operational definitions, examines the current scope of the problem, discusses some of the regulations and statutes that surround it and, finally, provides tools for planning, responding and recovering from WPV.

WPV should not be viewed in isolation. Rather, it should be considered as part of a systemic crisis that is permeating our society. Historically, most of the research and information on WPV is the purview of the human resources group, however, there are certain impacts that are mediated by the facility itself. Those issues are the direct responsibility of the facility manager and can be positively influenced on behalf of the building owner. Therefore, the perspective and focus taken in this document is from that of the facility manager and the building owner. Issues related to the effectiveness and efficiency of the human resources organization are only briefly touched on and only as clarification for other points.

Chapter 1 is an overview of the WPV topic and how it has evolved into a global crisis, the related impacts and the definition of who is responsible for what. Chapters 2, 3 and 4, discuss the “Three P’s”: procedures, personnel and physical space. Each of these elements is interwoven with the other two in each stage of planning, responding and recovering. Chapter 2 (prevention) presents the role of planning – who does it, how is it done, conducting assessments, why they are important and some mention of training. Chapter 3 (response) describes the process of responding to an event should one occur, how an event can escalate, investigation of the event and what records to maintain. Chapter 4 (recovery) looks at the recovery process, organizational challenges and opportunities for organizations to learn, heal and move forward. Chapter 5 (training) discusses education and training as a critical component of any successful strategy for managing WPV. The appendices include a variety of examples of procedures, forms and other tools that can be adapted or adopted by the reader including a valuable collection of case studies and practice exercises.

There is a great deal of valuable information in this report. Take your time in reading it and digesting the contents. Share it with your staff, other managers and executives in your organization. Almost anyone can find some nugget of information or suggestion that can be applied to their work environment. The goal is to have a safe work environment for all employees.



# VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE

## THE ROLE OF THE FACILITY MANAGER

### **1 OVERVIEW**

The big yellow school bus was filled with excited elementary school kids on a field trip to the sculpture garden. Suddenly, the children quieted as they heard pounding on the side of the bus. Then they heard a man yelling obscenities at their lady bus driver. He was trying to climb into the bus driver's window while still yelling at the driver. Security guards appeared, subdued the man and removed him to await the arrival of the police. What the children had no way of knowing was that, the previous day, the bus driver had divorce papers served on that same madman. The children became the unintended victims of his wrath.

Furious spouses, spurned lovers, disturbed teenagers, despondent students, loners... the list goes on. Each is the potential source of violence in a mall, school, museum, stadium, park, office or almost anywhere else. Workplace violence crosses all boundaries, including age, race, socio-economic status, education, religion, sexual orientation as well as the physical boundaries of the workplace itself. This destructive behavior toward another person finds expression in physical assault, homicide, verbal abuse, bullying, sexual harassment and acts leading to mental stress (Cooper and Hoel, 1999).

The size of the business has no bearing. Workplace violence (WPV) can happen in international conglomerates or small businesses. Once a WPV incident occurs, the impact on the business itself can be catastrophic. This is especially true for small businesses as statistics show that 40 percent of them do not fully recover from a WPV incident and 28 percent never recover (Jensen, 2008).



# VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE

## THE ROLE OF THE FACILITY MANAGER

## 2 PREVENTION

As a point of reference, violence is an aggressive behavior with the potential to cause harm. Broadly speaking, there are three forms of workplace violence:

- Non-physical violence (intimidation, abuse, threats, bullying, harassment, etc.)
- Physical violence (slapping, spitting, punching, kicking, pushing, etc.)
- Aggravated physical violence (use of weapons such as guns, knives, syringes, pieces of furniture, bottles, glasses, etc.)

Each of these three classifications can be categorized in four different ways:

1. Criminal violence: violence perpetrated by individuals who have no legitimate business relationship to the workplace or the victim. Normally, the aim is to access cash, drugs, stock or commit an unlawful act.
2. Customer violence: violence perpetrated by individuals who either receive services from or are under the custodial supervision of the affected workplace or victim. Assaults can be current customers, former customers, passengers, patients, students, inmates or even prisoners. An event or altercation often arises through frustration with service delivery or some other by-product of the organization's core business activities. Violence by customers or clients may occur on a daily basis in certain industries and this type of violence represents the majority of non-fatal injuries related to WPV.
3. Co-worker violence: violence perpetrated by individuals who work within the organization such as colleagues, supervisors and managers. This often is linked to protests against specific staff members or in response to disciplinary action that the individual perceives as being unjust. Fatalities related to violence by co-workers have received much media attention, but account for only a small proportion of all WPV-related fatalities.
4. Domestic violence: violence perpetrated by individuals outside of the organization, but who have a personal relationship with an employee outside of work such as a spouse, partner, lover, relative or acquaintance. The assailant's actions are motivated by his/her perceived difficulties in the relationship or by psychosocial factors that are specific to the assailant. This often is perpetrated within the work setting, simply because the offender knows where a given individual is during the course of a working day.



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