

Convenience Store Security

There are approximately 95,000 convenience stores in the United States. In 1976, a little over 20 years ago, there were only 32,000 convenience stores in the U.S. By the nature of their operations — long hours, late or all-night, etc. — convenience stores, are very susceptible to robbery, assaults and violence. In 1994, roughly 288 robberies per thousand convenience stores occurred. Convenience store robberies frequently result in homicide. Government studies show that about 1,000 workers, almost half of them employed in retail stores, are killed every year in robberies, while an additional 18,000 are victims of assaults and other violence. Homicide ranks as the leading cause of workplace death for women and the second highest for men after traffic accidents.

OSHA Recommendations

On April 28, 1998, the Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) issued a set of recommendations for workplace violence prevention in late-night retail establishments. Although these recommendations can apply to any late-night retail establishment, they identify a risk greater for those who work at night in convenience stores, liquor stores and gasoline stations.

The OSHA recommendations are not legally binding, but they will likely give legal assistance to plaintiff's attorneys representing convenience store employees hurt in robberies. Many of the OSHA recommendations have already been adopted by the larger convenience store chains in their corporate-owned stores and in gasoline station mini-marts. When implemented, these policies have been credited with cutting the retail murder rate substantially at these establishments. The Southland Corporation, the parent company for 7-11 Convenience Stores, has been particularly aggressive in attempting to reduce security risks in their properties.

The OSHA recommendations for late night retail establishments include five components: (1) management commitment and employee involvement, (2) work site analysis; (3) hazard prevention and control; (4) safety and health training; and (5) evaluation.

Recommendations

OSHA recognizes that each establishment is different, and accordingly, the recommendations encourage employers to evaluate their needs and adopt one or more, or all of the following recommendations.

- Improve visibility by providing adequate lighting and installing mirrors; keep signs and shelves low.
- Install drop safes and signs that indicate little cash is kept on-hand.
- Maintain video surveillance.
- Provide silent and personal alarms.
- Establish emergency procedures including communications systems, training and education.
- Restrict customer access by reducing store hours and closing portions of a store.
- Take precautions when going to remote, isolated spots such as garbage areas and outdoor freezers.
- Lock doors not in use.
- Increase staffing during high-risk periods.

- Install bullet-resistant enclosures.

Management Commitment and Employee Involvement

Management Commitment

Management provides the motivation and resources to deal effectively **with** workplace violence. The visible commitment of management to worker safety and health is an essential precondition for its success. Management can demonstrate its commitment to violence prevention through the following actions:

- Create and disseminate a policy to managers and employees that expressly disapproves of workplace violence, verbal and nonverbal threats, and related actions.
- Take all violent and threatening incidents seriously, investigate them, and take appropriate corrective action.
- Outline a comprehensive plan for maintaining security in the workplace.
- Assign responsibility and authority for the program to individuals or teams with appropriate training and skills. This means ensuring that all managers and employees understand their obligations.
- Provide necessary authority and resources for staff to carry out violence prevention responsibilities.
- Hold managers and employees accountable for their performance. Stating expectations means little if management does not track performance, reward it when competent, and correct it when it is not.
- Take appropriate action to ensure that managers and employees follow the administrative controls or work practices.
- Institute procedures for prompt reporting and tracking of violent incidents that occur in and near the establishment.
- Encourage employees to suggest ways to reduce risks, and implement appropriate recommendations from employees and others.
- Ensure that employees who report or experience workplace violence are not punished or otherwise suffer discrimination.
- Work constructively with other parties such as landlords, lessees, local police, and other public safety agencies to improve the security of the premises.

Employee Involvement

Management commitment and employee involvement are complimentary elements of an effective safety and health program. To ensure an effective program, management, front-line employees, and employee representatives need to work together in the structure and operation of their violence prevention program.

Employee involvement is important for several reasons. First, front-line employees are an important source of information about the operations of the business and the environment in which the business operates. This may be particularly true for employees working at night in retail establishments when higher level managers may not routinely be on duty. Second, inclusion of a broad range of employees in the violence prevention program has the advantage of harnessing a wider range of experience and insight than that of management alone. Third, front-line workers can be very valuable problem solvers, as their personal experience often enables

them to identify practical solutions to problems and to perceive hidden impediments to proposed changes. Finally, employees who have a role in developing prevention programs are more likely to support and carry out those programs.

Methods for cooperation between employees and management can vary. Some employers could choose to deal with employees one-on-one or assign program duties to specific employees. Other employers may elect to use a team or committee approach. The National Labor Relations Act may limit the form and structure of employee involvement. Employers should seek legal counsel if they are unsure of their legal obligations and constraints.

Employees and employee representatives can be usefully involved in nearly every aspect of a violence prevention program. Their involvement may include the following:

- Participate in surveys and offer suggestions about safety and security issues.
- Participate in developing and revising procedures to minimize the risk of violence in daily business operations.
- Assist in the security analysis of the establishment.
- Participate in performing routine security inspections of the establishment.
- Participate in the evaluation of prevention and control measures.
- Participate in training current and new employees.
- Share on-the-job experiences to help other employees recognize and respond to escalating agitation, assaultive behavior, or criminal intent, and discuss appropriate responses.

Work Site Analysis

Common Risk Factors in Retail Establishments

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has identified a number of factors that may increase a worker's risk for workplace assault. Those pertaining to late-night retail include:

- Contact with the public.
- Exchange of money.
- Delivery of passengers, goods, or services.
- Working alone or in small numbers.
- Working late night or early morning hours.
- Working in high crime areas (NIOSH 1996).

Employees in some retail establishments may be exposed to multiple risk factors. The presence of a single risk factor does not necessarily indicate that the risk of violence is a problem in a workplace. The presence, however, of multiple risk factors or a history of workplace violence should alert an employer that the potential for workplace violence is increased.

Research indicates that the greatest risk of work-related homicide comes from violence inflicted by third parties such as robbers and muggers. Robbery and other crimes were the motive in 80 percent of workplace homicides across all industries in 1996. A large proportion of the homicides occurring in the retail sector are associated with robberies and attempted robberies. On average, one in 100 gun robberies result in a homicide. For this reason, effective programs that reduce the number of robberies should result in a decrease in the number of homicides.

Sexual assault is another significant occupational risk in the retail industry. Indeed, the risk of sexual assault for women is equal to or greater than the risk of homicide for employees in general.

Sexual assault is usually not robbery-related, but may occur more often in stores with a history of robbery. These assaults occur disproportionately at night and involve a female clerk alone in a store in the great majority of cases. The risk factors for robbery and sexual assault overlap (e.g., working alone, late at night, in high-crime areas), so actions to reduce robbery also may be effective for preventing sexual assaults.

Several studies have examined risk factors for robbery in retail establishment. In a 1975 study, researchers interviewed ex-convicts to determine which stores were most “attractive” to robbers. The stores that were most attractive had large amounts of cash on hand, an obstructed view of counters, poor outdoor lighting, and easy escape routes. Subsequent studies have confirmed that robbers do not choose targets randomly but, instead, consider environmental factors. Risk factors for robbery includes easy access or escape, and low risk of recognition or detection of robbers (such as lack of cameras, lack of customers or nearby businesses, and poor visibility from outside the store). Studies also have identified working alone, lack of police or armed guards, and a large amount of money on hand as risk factors for robbery.

The time of day also affects the likelihood of robbery. Studies have consistently found that retail businesses face an elevated risk of robbery during the nighttime hours. Retail robberies occur in the late evening and early morning hours more often than during daylight hours because it is dark and fewer people are on the street. Risks at night may vary by the number of neighboring businesses open late, the amount of traffic and the level of lighting (among other factors). While the risk of robbery is greater at night, the risks during daytime may also be significant, and also vary based on such factors as the amount of traffic and visibility.

Workplace Hazard Analysis

A work site hazard analysis involves a step-by-step, common sense look at the workplace to find existing and potential hazards for workplace violence. This entails the following steps: (1) review records and past experiences, (2) conduct an initial work site inspection and analysis, and (3) perform periodic safety audits.

Because the hazard analysis is the foundation for the violence prevention program, it is important to select carefully the person(s) who will perform this step. The employer can delegate the responsibility to one person or a team of employees. If a large employer uses a team approach, it may wish to draw the team members from different parts of the enterprise, such as representatives from senior management, operations, employee assistance, security, occupational safety and health, legal, human resources staff, and employees or union representatives. Small establishments might assign the responsibility to a single staff member or consultant.

Review of Records and Past Incidents

As a starting point for the hazard analysis, the employer would review the experience of the business over the previous 2 or 3 years. This involves collecting and examining any existing records that may shed light on the magnitude and prevalence of the risk of workplace violence. For example, injury and illness records, workers’ compensation claims, and police department robbery reports can help identify specific incidents related to workplace violence. Finding few documented cases of workplace violence does not necessarily mean that violence is not a problem in a workplace, because incidents may be unreported or inconsistently documented. In some cases, management may not be aware of incidents of low-intensity conflict or threats of violence to which their employees have been exposed. To learn of such incidents, the employer could canvass employees about their experience while working for the business. The following questions may be helpful in compiling information about past incidents:

- Has your business been robbed during the last 2 - 3 years? Were robberies attempted? Did injuries occur due to robberies or attempts?
- Have employees been assaulted in altercations with customers?
- Have employees been victimized by other criminal acts at works (including shoplifting that became assaultive)? What kind?
- Have employees been threatened or harassed while on duty? What was the context of those incidents?
- In each of these cases with injuries, how serious were the injuries?
- In each case, was a firearm involved? Was a firearm discharged? Was the threat of a firearm used? Were other weapons used?
- What part of the business was the target of the robbery or other violent incident?
- At what time of day did the robbery or other incident occur?
- How many employees were on duty?
- Were the police called to your establishment in response to the incident? When possible, obtain reports of the police investigation.
- What tasks were the employees performing at the time of the robbery or other incident? What processes and procedures may have put employees at risk of assault? Similarly, were there factors that may have facilitated an outcome without injury or harm?
- Were preventive measures already in place and used correctly?
- What were the actions of the victim during the incident? Did these actions affect the outcome of the incident in any way?

Employers with more than one store or business location could review the history of violence at each operation. Different experiences in those stores can provide insights into factors that can make workplace violence more or less likely. Contacting similar local businesses, community and civic groups and local police departments is another way to learn about workplace violence incidents in the area. In addition, trade associations and industry groups often provide useful information about conditions and trends in the industry as a whole.

Workplace Security Analysis

The team or coordinator could conduct a thorough initial risk assessment to identify hazards, conditions, operations, and situations that could lead to violence. The initial risk assessment includes a walkthrough survey to provide the data for risk identification and the development of a comprehensive workplace violence prevention program. The assessment process includes the following:

- Analyze incidents, including the characteristics of assailants and victims. Give an account of what happened before and during the incident, and note the relevant details of the situation and its outcome.
- Identify any apparent trends in injuries or incidents relating to a particular work site, job title, activity, or time of day or week. The team or coordinator should identify specific tasks that may be associated with increased risk.
- Identify factors that may make the risk of violence more likely, such as physical features of the building and environment, lighting deficiencies, lack of telephones and other communication devices, areas of unsecured access, and areas with known security problems.

- Evaluate the effectiveness of existing security measures. Assess whether those control measures are being properly used and whether employees have been adequately trained in their use.

Appendix A contains a sample checklist that illustrates a number of questions that may be helpful for the security analysis. Trade associations and other organizations also have materials that can help employers assess the risk of violent incidents in their business. In some areas, local law enforcement agencies provide free advice to business owners on ways to reduce exposure to crime. Security management consultants, insurance safety auditors, and loss-prevention specialists also can help employers analyze workplace risks and offer advice for solutions. Independent experts such as these can provide fresh perspectives on implementing and improving a violence prevention program.

Periodic Safety Audits

Hazard analysis is an ongoing process. A good violence prevention program will institute a system of periodic safety audits to review workplace hazards and the effectiveness of the control measures that have been implemented. These audits also can evaluate the impact of other operational changes (such as new store hours, or changes in store layout) that were adopted for other reasons but may affect the risk of workplace violence. A safety audit is important in the aftermath of a violent incident or other serious event for reassessing the effectiveness of the violence prevention program.

Hazard Prevention and Control

Prevention Strategies

After assessing violence hazards, the next step is to develop measures to protect employees from the identified risks of injury and violent acts. Workplace violence prevention and control programs include specific engineering and work practice controls to address identified hazards. The tools listed in this section are not intended to be a “one-size-fits-all” prescription. No single control will protect employees. To provide effective deterrents to violence, the employer may wish to use a combination of controls in relation to the hazards identified through the hazard analysis.

Since the major risk of death or serious injury to retail employees is from robbery-related violence, an effective program would include, but not be limited to, steps to reduce the risk of robbery. In general, a business may reduce the risk of robbery by *increasing the effort* that the perpetrator must expend (target hardening, controlling access, and deterring offenders); *increasing the risks* to the perpetrator (entry/exit screening, formal surveillance, surveillance by employees and others); and *reducing the rewards* to the perpetrator (removing the target, identifying property, and removing inducements).

Physical and behavioral changes at a site can substantially reduce the frequency of robberies. A test group of 7-Eleven stores that eliminated or reduced several risk factors experienced a 30-percent drop in robberies compared to a control group. Target-hardening efforts, including a basic robbery deterrence package, were implemented in 7-Eleven stores nationwide in 1976. The 7-Eleven program tried to make the store a less attractive target by reducing the cash on hand, maximizing the take/risk ratio, and training employees. After implementing the program throughout the company, the robbery rate at 7-Eleven stores decreased by 64 percent over 20 years.

The National Association of Convenience Stores (NACS) developed a robbery and violence deterrence program based on these elements and has made it available to its members and others since 1987. NACS also has supported research in these areas.

Other deterrents that may reduce the potential for robbery include making sure that there are security cameras, time-release safes, other 24-hour business at the location, no easy escape routes or hiding places, and that the store is closed during late night hours.

Engineering Controls and Workplace Adaptation

Engineering controls remove the hazard from the workplace or create a barrier between the worker and the hazard. The following physical changes in the workplace can help reduce violence-related risks or hazards in retail establishments:

- *Improve visibility* as visibility is important in preventing robbery in two respects: First, employees should be able to see their surroundings, and second, persons outside the store should have an unobstructed view of the street, clear of shrubbery, trees or any form of clutter that a criminal could use to hide. Signs located in windows should be either low or high to allow good visibility into the store. The customer service and cash register areas should be visible from outside the establishment. Shelves should be low enough to assure good visibility throughout the store. Convex mirrors, two-way mirrors, and an elevated vantage point can give employees a more complete view of their surroundings.
- *Maintain adequate lighting* within and outside the establishment to make the store less appealing to a potential robber by making detection more likely. The parking area and the approach to the retail establishment should be well lit during nighttime hours of operation. Exterior illumination may need upgrading in order to allow employees to see what is occurring outside the store.
- *Use fences* and other structures to direct the flow of customer traffic to areas of greater visibility.
- *Use drop safes* to limit the availability of cash to robbers. Employers using drop safes can post signs stating that the amount of cash on hand is limited.
- *Install video surveillance equipment* and closed circuit TV (CCTV) to deter robberies by increasing the risk of identification. This may include interactive video equipment. The video recorder for the CCTV should be secure and out of sight. Posting signs that surveillance equipment is in use and placing the equipment near the cash register may increase the effectiveness of the deterrence.
- *Put height markers on exit doors* to help witnesses provide more complete descriptions of assailants.
- *Use door detectors* to alert employees when persons enter the store.
- *Control access* to the store with door buzzers.
- *Use silent and personal alarms* to notify police or management in the event of a problem. To avoid angering a robber, however, an employee may need to wait until the assailant has left before triggering an alarm.
- *Install physical barriers* such as bullet-resistant enclosures with pass-through windows between customers and employees to protect employees from assaults and weapons in locations with a history of robberies or assaults and located in high-crime areas.

Administrative and Work Practice Controls

Administrative and work practice controls affect the way employees perform jobs or specific tasks. The following examples illustrate work practices and administrative procedures that can help prevent incidents of workplace violence:

- *Integrate violence prevention activities* into daily procedures, such as checking lighting, locks, and security cameras, to help maintain work site readiness.
- *Keep a minimal amount of cash* in each register (e.g., \$50 or less), especially during evening and late-night hours of operation. In some businesses, transactions with large bills (over \$20) can be prohibited. In situations where this is not practical because of frequent transactions in excess of \$20, cash levels should be as low as is practical. Employees should not carry business receipts on their person unless it is absolutely necessary.
- *Adopt proper emergency procedures* for employees to use in case of a robbery or security breach.
- *Establish systems of communication* in the event of emergencies. Employees should have access to working telephones in each work area, and emergency telephone numbers should be posted by the phones.
- *Adopt procedures for the correct use of physical barriers*, such as enclosures and pass-through windows.
- *Increase staffing levels* at night at stores with a history of robbery or assaults and located in high-crime areas. It is important that clerks be clearly visible to patrons.
- *Lock doors* used for deliveries and disposal of garbage when not in use. Also, do not unlock delivery doors until the delivery person identifies himself or herself. Take care not to block emergency exits — doors must open from the inside without a key to allow persons to exit in case of fire or other emergency.
- *Establish rules* to ensure that employees can walk to garbage areas and outdoor freezers or refrigerators without increasing their risk of assault. The key is for employees to have good visibility, thereby eliminating potential hiding places for assailants near these areas. In some locations, taking trash out or going to outside freezers during daylight may be safer than doing so at night.
- *Keep doors locked before business* officially opens and after closing time. Establish procedures to assure the security of employees who open and close the business, when staffing levels may be low. In addition, the day's business receipts may be a prime robbery target at store closing.
- *Limit or restrict areas of customer access*, reduce the hours of operation, or close portions of the store to limit risk.
- *Adopt safety procedures and policies for off-site work*, such as deliveries.

Administrative controls are effective only if they are followed and used properly. Regular monitoring helps ensure that employees continue to use proper work practices. Giving periodic, constructive feedback to employees helps to ensure that they understand these procedures and their importance.

Post-Incident Response

Post-incident response and evaluation are important parts of an effective violence prevention program. This involves developing standard operating procedures for management and

employees to follow in the aftermath of a violent incident. Such procedures may include the following:

- Assure that injured employees receive prompt and appropriate medical care. This include providing transportation of the injured to medical care. Prompt first aid and emergency medical treatment can minimize the harmful consequences of a violent incident.
- Report the incident to the police.
- Notify other authorities, as required by applicable laws and regulations.
- Inform management about the incident.
- Secure the premises to safeguard evidence and reduce distractions during the post-incident response process.
- Prepare an incident report immediately after the incident, noting details that might be forgotten over time. Appendix B contains a sample incident report form that an employer may use or adapt for its own purposes.
- Arrange appropriate treatment for victimized employees. In addition to physical injuries, victims and witnesses may suffer psychological trauma, fear of returning to work, feelings of incompetence, guilt, powerlessness, and fear of criticism by supervisors or managers. Post-incident debriefings and counseling can reduce psychological trauma and stress among victims and witnesses. An emerging trend is to use critical incident stress management to provide a range or continuum of care tailored to the individual victim or the organization's needs.

Training and Education

Training and education ensure that all staff are aware of potential security hazards and the procedures for protecting themselves and their co-workers. Employees with different roles in the business may need different type and levels of training.

General Training

Employees need instruction on the specific hazards associated with their job and work site to help them minimize their risk of assault and injury. Such training would include information on potential hazards identified in the establishments, and the methods to control those hazards. Topics may include the following:

- An overview of the potential risk of assault.
- Operational procedures, such as cash handling rules that are designed to reduce risk.
- Proper use of security measures and engineering controls that have been adopted in the workplace.
- Behavioral strategies to defuse tense situations and reduce the likelihood of a violent outcome, such as techniques of conflict resolution and aggression management.
- Specific instructions on how to respond to a robbery (such as the instruction to turn over money or valuables without resistance) and how to respond to attempted shoplifting.
- Emergency action procedures to be followed in the event of a robbery or violent incident.

Training should be conducted by persons who have a demonstrated knowledge of the subject and should be presented in language appropriate for the individuals being trained. Oral quizzes or written tests can ensure that the employees have actually understood the training that they received. An employee's understanding also can be verified by observing the employee at work.

The need to repeat training varies with the circumstances. Retaining should be considered for employees who violate or forget safety measures. Similarly, employees who are transferred to new job assignments or locations may need training even though they may already have received some training in their former position. Establishments with high rates of employee turnover may need to provide training frequently.

Training for Supervisors, Managers, and Security Personnel

To recognize whether employees are following safe practices, management personnel should undergo training comparable to that of the employees an additional training to enable them to recognize, analyze, and establish violence prevention controls. Knowing how to ensure sensitive handling of traumatized employees also is an important skill for management. Training for managers also could address any specific duties and responsibilities they have that could increase their risk of assault. Security personnel need specific training about their roles, including the psychological components of handling aggressive and abusive customers and ways to handle aggression and defuse hostile situations.

The team or coordinator responsible for implementation of the program should review and evaluate annually the content, methods, and frequency of training.

Program evaluation can involve interviewing supervisors and employees, testing and observing employees, and reviewing responses of employees to workplace violence incidents.

Evaluation

Record keeping

Good records help employers determine the severity of the risks, evaluate the methods of hazard control, and identify training needs. An effective violence prevention program will use records of injuries, illnesses, incidents, hazards, corrective actions, and training to help identify problems and solutions for a safe and healthful workplace.

Employers can tailor their record keeping practices to the needs of their violence prevention program. The purpose of maintaining records is to enable the employer to monitor its on-going efforts, to determine if the violence prevention program is working, and to identify ways to improve it. Employers may find the following types of records useful for this purpose:

- Records of employee and other injuries and illnesses at the establishment.
- Records describing incidents involving violent acts and threats of such acts, even if the incident did not involve an injury or a criminal act. Records of events involving abuse, verbal attacks, or aggressive behavior can help identify patterns and risks that are not evident from the smaller set of cases that actually result in injury or crime.
- Written hazard analyses.
- Recommendations of police advisors, employees, or consultants.
- Up-to-date records of actions taken to deter violence, including work practice controls and other corrective steps.
- Notes of safety meetings and training records.

Prevention Programs

Violence prevention programs benefit greatly from periodic evaluation. The evaluation process could involve the following:

- Review the results of periodic safety audits.
- Review post-incident reports. In analyzing incidents, the employer should pay attention not just to what went wrong, but to actions taken by employees that avoided further harm, such as handling a shoplifting incident in such a way as to avoid escalation to violence.
- Examine reports and minutes from staff meetings on safety and security issues.
- Analyze trends and rates in illnesses, injuries or fatalities caused by violence relative to initial or “baseline” rates.
- Consult with employees before and after making job or work site changes to determine the effectiveness of the interventions.
- Keep abreast of new strategies to deal with violence in the retail industry.

Management should communicate any lessons learned from evaluating the workplace violence prevention program to all employees. Management could discuss changes in the program during regular meetings of the safety committee, with union representatives, or with other employee groups.

The OSHA guidelines, titled “*Recommendations for Workplace violence Prevention Program in Late Night Retail Establishments,*” are available on the Internet at:

<http://www.osha.gov>