



Workplace violence: Can it happen where you work?

Workplace violence

About this guide

“Workplace violence: Can it happen where you work?” is an Oregon OSHA Standards and Technical Resources publication.

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Contents

Workplace violence: Can it happen where you work?	3
What is workplace violence?	4
Types of workplace violence	4
Employee rights and responsibilities	6
Employer responsibilities	6
Preventive practices	8
Employee training.....	8
Workplace violence prevention program evaluation	9
Oregon OSHA services	10



Workplace violence: Can it happen where you work?

Between 2016 and 2018, workplace assaults and other violent acts injured 1,997 Oregon workers.

The victims tended to be nurses and nursing aides, police officers, guards, and teachers. The offenders? Health care and residential care patients, criminal suspects, shoplifters, prison inmates, and students. And the workplaces? State hospitals, private health care and social services, public schools, and correctional facilities.

You may never encounter aggressive or violent people where you work, but you should think seriously about the risk that something could happen. If you find yourself thinking, "It can't happen here," you should reconsider. Even one violent incident is expensive; costs may include medical care, liability, legal fees, and lost business and productivity. The average cost for temporary disability and medical claims in Oregon between 2016 and 2018 for workers injured by workplace violence is \$16,100 per worker.

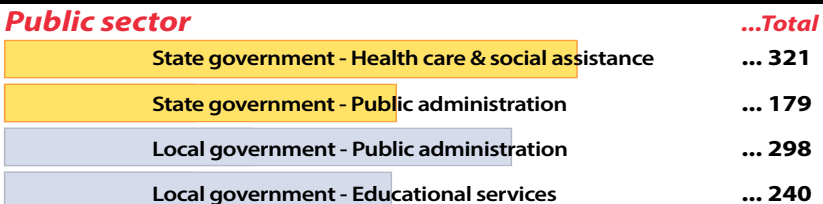
Table 1. Accepted disabling claims (from assault), by industry

| Oregon 2016 – 2018



Table 2. Accepted disabling claims (from assault), by industry

| Oregon 2016 – 2018



Source: Department of Consumer and Business Services, Central Services Division, October 2019

What is workplace violence?

Workplace violence is violence or the threat of violence against workers. It can occur at or outside the workplace, and ranges from threats and verbal abuse, to physical assaults and homicide. However, it shows itself, workplace violence is a growing concern for employers and employees.

Contrary to popular opinion, sensational multiple homicides still represent a small number of workplace violence incidents. The majority of incidents are assaults, stalking, threats, harassment, and physical or emotional abuse that make no headlines. Many of these incidents are not even reported to company officials or the police.

Responding to workplace violence requires attention to more than just an actual physical attack. Any conduct that creates anxiety, fear, and a climate of distrust in the workplace is part of the workplace violence problem. Prevention programs that do not consider harassment in all its forms are unlikely to be effective.

Types of workplace violence

Workplace violence falls under four categories. [Source CDC/NIOSH](#)

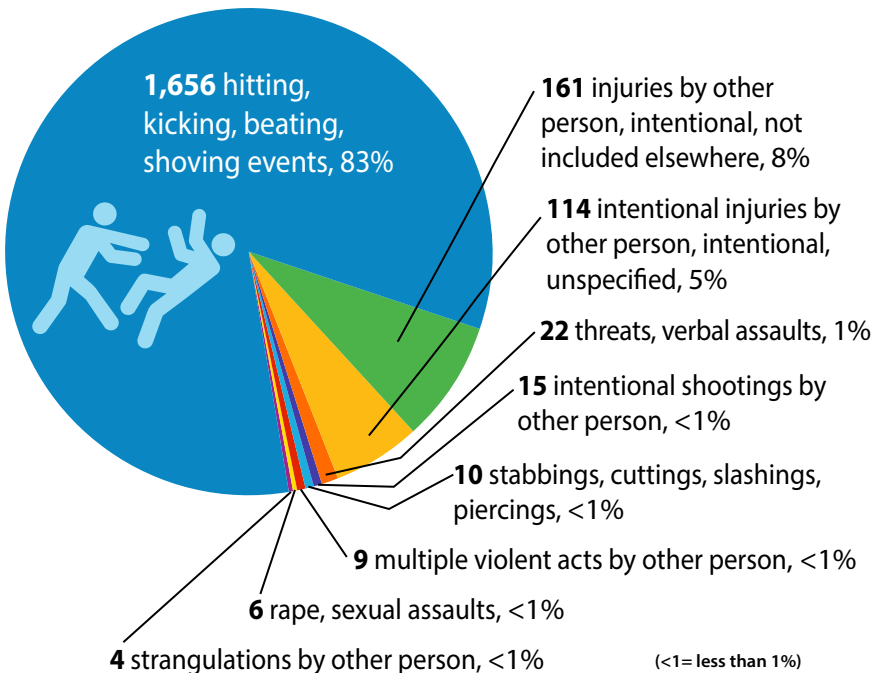
- 1. Violence by criminals:** Acts committed by those who have no other connection with the workplace but enter to commit robbery or another crime. Preventive strategies for this type of violence include an emphasis on physical security measures, employer policies, and employee training.
- 2. Violence by customers:** Acts committed by customers, clients, patients, students, inmates, or any others for whom an organization provides services. Such violence usually occurs as workers perform their normal tasks. In some occupations, dealing with dangerous people is inherent in the job, as in the case of a police officer or a mental health worker. In other occupations, violent reactions by a customer or client are unpredictable. They are triggered by an argument, anger, or some other precipitating event. Employees experiencing the largest number of these assaults are in the health care industry – nurses in particular, as well as doctors, aides (especially those who work with psychiatric patients), and members of emergency medical response teams.

3. Violence by current/former employees: Acts committed by current or former employees, or by someone who has a personal relationship with an employee – for example, an abusive spouse or domestic partner. Violence in this category, which comes from an employee or someone close to an employee, has a greater chance of having warning signs in the form of observable behavior. Those warning signs, along with the appropriate prevention programs, can, at the very least, mitigate the potential for violence or prevent it altogether.

Table 3. Accepted disabling claims

Oregon 2016 - 2018

Due to assaults and violent acts, by event of injury or illness



Total events: 1,997

Source: Department of Consumer and Business Services, Central Services Division, October 2019

4. Personal relationship: The perpetrator has a relationship to the nurse outside of work that spills over to the work environment. For example, the husband of a nurse follows her to work, orders her home and threatens her, with implications for not only this nurse but also for her coworkers and patients.

Employee rights and responsibilities

Workers have a right to a safe workplace. They have the right to expect a work environment that promotes safety from violence, threats, and harassment. They can actively contribute to preventive practices by doing the following:

- Accept and adhere to an employer's preventive policies and practices.
- Become aware of and report violent or threatening behavior by co-workers or other warning signs.
- Follow procedures established by the workplace violence prevention program, including those for reporting incidents.

The law requires employers to provide their employees with working conditions that are free of known dangers. The OSHA law also prohibits employers from retaliating against employees for exercising their rights under the law (including the right to raise a health and safety concern or report an injury). For more information, see www.whistleblowers.gov for worker rights.

Employer responsibilities

Employers have a legal and ethical obligation to promote a work environment free from threats and violence. Employers can face economic loss from violence in lost work time, damaged employee morale and productivity, increased workers' compensation payments, medical expenses, and possible lawsuits and liability costs.

Oregon OSHA can cite employers who do not protect their employees from violent acts under provisions of the state's Safe Employment Act, which requires all workplaces to be safe and healthful.



Employers' roles in violence prevention can include:

- Adopting a workplace violence prevention program and communicating the policy to employees.
- Providing regular training in preventive measures for all new and current employees, supervisors, and managers.
- Supporting, not punishing, victims of workplace or domestic violence.
- Adopting and practicing fair and consistent disciplinary procedures.
- Fostering a climate of trust and respect among workers and between employees and management.
- Seeking help from threat-assessment psychologists, social service agencies, law enforcement, and other outside sources when necessary.

Employers can also offer protections, such as the following:

- Provide safety education for employees so they know what conduct is not acceptable, what to do if they witness or are subjected to workplace violence, and how to protect themselves.
- Secure the workplace. Where appropriate to the business, install video surveillance, extra lighting, and alarm systems; and minimize access by outsiders through identification badges, electronic keys, and guards.
- Provide drop safes to limit the amount of cash on hand. Keep a minimal amount of cash in registers during evenings and late-night hours.
- Equip field staff with cellphones and require them to prepare a daily work plan and keep a contact person informed of their location throughout the day. Keep work vehicles properly maintained.
- Instruct employees not to enter any situation where they feel unsafe. Introduce a "buddy system" or provide police escort help in potentially dangerous situations or at night.
- Develop procedures covering visits by home health-care providers. Address the conduct of home visits, the presence of others in the home during visits, and the worker's right to refuse to provide services in a clearly hazardous situation.



Preventive practices

Preventive measures can include pre-employment screening, identifying problem situations and risk factors, and security preparations.

Identifying and screening out potentially violent people before hiring them is an obvious means of preventing workplace violence. Pre-employment screening practices must, however, be consistent with privacy protections and anti-discrimination laws.

A thorough background check can be expensive and time consuming. The depth of pre-employment scrutiny will vary according to the level and sensitivity of the job being filled and the policies and resources of the prospective employer. However, as an applicant is examined, the following can raise a history of drug or alcohol abuse.



- Past conflicts (especially if violence was involved) with co-workers.
- Past convictions for violent crimes.
- A defensive, hostile attitude and a tendency to blame others for problems.

Employee training

All employees must understand their organization's policy, recognize situations that may become hostile, and know how to respond to them. Managers and supervisors should also know best practices for dealing with layoffs and terminations, employee discipline, and conflict resolution.

Train employees and supervisors to detect out-of-bounds behavior or other warning signs, and how to report that behavior to managers. Training can also help educate workers on how to best respond to someone who seems troubled or potentially dangerous. It should include a clear statement to all employees on what to do if they see, or become aware of, a weapon (in almost all circumstances, leave the location and call for help).

All training programs should be sensitive to cultural assumptions and stereotypes. Above all, they should emphasize focusing on an individual's manner, conduct, and behavior, rather than ethnic or group identity or social profile.

Workplace violence prevention program evaluation

As part of the overall program, employers should evaluate safety and security measures. Top management should regularly review the program and evaluate the program with each incident. Managers, supervisors, and employees should re-evaluate policies and procedures on a regular basis to identify deficiencies and take corrective action.

Management should share workplace violence prevention evaluation reports with all workers. Any changes in the program should be discussed at regular meetings of the safety committee, union representatives, or other employee groups.

All reports should protect worker and patient confidentiality, either by presenting only aggregate data or by removing personal identifiers if individual data are used.

Processes involved in an evaluation include:

- Establish and train employees on a uniform violence reporting system, including a systematic review of all reports of all forms of violence including near misses.
- Reviewing reports and minutes from staff meetings on safety and security issues.
- Analyzing trends and rates in illnesses, injuries, or fatalities caused by violence relative to initial or “baseline” rates.
- Measuring improvement based on lowering the frequency and severity of workplace violence.
- Keeping up-to-date records of administrative and work practice changes to prevent workplace violence to evaluate how well they work.
- Surveying workers before and after making job or worksite changes or installing security measures or new systems to determine their effectiveness.
- Tracking recommendations through to completion.
- Keeping abreast of new strategies available to prevent and respond to violence in the health care and social service fields as they develop.
- Surveying workers periodically to learn if they experience hostile situations in performing their jobs.
- Complying with OSHA and state requirements for recording and reporting injuries, illnesses, and fatalities.
- Requesting periodic law enforcement or outside consultant review of the worksite for recommendations on improving worker safety.

Oregon OSHA Services

Oregon OSHA offers a wide variety of safety and health services to employers and employees:

Enforcement

503-378-3272; 800-922-2689; enforce.web@oregon.gov

- Offers pre-job conferences for mobile employers in industries such as logging and construction.
- Inspects places of employment for occupational safety and health hazards and investigates workplace complaints and accidents.
- Provides abatement assistance to employers who have received citations and provides compliance and technical assistance by phone.

Consultative Services

503-378-3272; 800-922-2689; consult.web@oregon.gov

- Offers no-cost, on-site safety and health assistance to help Oregon employers recognize and correct workplace safety and health problems.
- Provides consultations in the areas of safety, industrial hygiene, ergonomics, occupational safety and health programs, assistance to new businesses, the Safety and Health Achievement Recognition Program (SHARP), and the Voluntary Protection Program (VPP).

Standards and Technical Resources

503-378-3272; 800-922-2689; tech.web@oregon.gov

- Develops, interprets, and gives technical advice on Oregon OSHA's safety and health rules.
- Publishes safe-practices guides, pamphlets, and other materials for employers and employees.
- Manages the Oregon OSHA Resource Center, which offers safety videos, books, periodicals, and research assistance for employers and employees.

Appeals

503-947-7426; 800-922-2689; admin.web@oregon.gov

- Provides the opportunity for employers to hold informal meetings with Oregon OSHA on concerns about workplace safety and health.
- Discusses Oregon OSHA's requirements and clarifies workplace safety or health violations.
- Discusses abatement dates and negotiates settlement agreements to resolve disputed citations.

Conferences

- **503-378-3272; 888-292-5247, Option 1;** oregon.conferences@oregon.gov
- Co-hosts conferences throughout Oregon that enable employees and employers to learn and share ideas with local and nationally recognized safety and health professionals.

Public Education

- **503-947-7443; 888-292-5247, Option 2;** ed.web@oregon.gov
- Provides workshops and materials covering management of basic safety and health programs, safety committees, accident investigation, technical topics, and job safety analysis.

Need more information? Call your nearest Oregon OSHA office.

Salem Central Office

350 Winter St. NE
Salem, OR 97301-3882
Phone: 503-378-3272
Toll-free: 800-922-2689
Fax: 503-947-7461
en Español: 800-843-8086
Website: osha.oregon.gov

Bend

Red Oaks Square
1230 NE Third St., Suite A-115
Bend, OR 97701-4374
541-388-6066
Consultation: 541-388-6068

Eugene

1500 Valley River Drive, Suite 150
Eugene, OR 97401-4643
541-686-7562
Consultation: 541-686-7913

Medford

1840 Barnett Road, Suite D
Medford, OR 97504-8250
541-776-6030
Consultation: 541-776-6016

Pendleton

200 SE Hailey Ave.
Pendleton, OR 97801-3056
541-276-9175
Consultation: 541-276-2353

Portland

Durham Plaza
16760 SW Upper Boones Ferry
Road, Suite 200
Tigard, OR 97224-7696
503-229-5910
Consultation: 503-229-6193

Salem

1340 Tandem Ave. NE, Suite 160
Salem, OR 97301
503-378-3274
Consultation: 503-373-7819

Resources

[Oregon OSHA's Violence in the Workplace webpage](#)

[Federal OSHA's Workplace Violence webpage](#)

[CDC's Occupational Violence webpage](#)

[US Dept. of Justice – FBI's Issues in Response](#)

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