Handling threats of potential violence:

An easily accessible, highly centralized system for handling reports of threats and/or harassment is necessary to address violence in its early stages. Some effective means in which organizations may receive reports of threats and/or harassment are: a 24-hour hotline or the receipt of reports by security, human resources, or supervisors.

When threats and/or harassment occur, it is critical that organizations promptly and thoroughly investigate the situation. A protocol outlines the steps an organization may take if the threatening and/or harassing behavior persists:

1) A verbal warning delivered by the supervisor.
2) A written reprimand, which reiterates the dissatisfaction expressed by the verbal warning.
3) Termination. The employer should give the employee specific reasons for his or her dismissal, while remaining factual and objective. Employees should be treated with respect, dignity, and given ample prior notice when being terminated.

It is important that an organization document all three disciplinary stages. Also, it is imperative that an organization attempt to evaluate an employee's social, emotional, and financial situation prior to termination, on the basis of the warning signs given earlier, in order to be prepared for any retaliation by the soon-to-be former employee.

6. Fostering a Supportive Work Environment

This involves the strengthening of interpersonal communication between management and employees, as well as between departments. Several ways in which an organization may do this is: encourage an open-door policy among co-workers, a suggestion box to solicit employee input, and recognize and reward employees for their accomplishments and contributions.

Crisis Planning

When a violent incident occurs in the workplace, it is important that an organization have a crisis plan in place in order to avert further damage. Workplace violence typically takes the form of a bomb (threat), a shooting, or a stabbing. Therefore, an organization needs to have evacuation routes and a set of broad guidelines that dictate what actions employees are to undertake in the event of a crisis. The routes and guidelines should be put forth in written form and available to all employees. Some suggestions for organizations are:

1) Notification of a crisis should be made through the use of a fire alarm system, intercom system, telephones, or messengers.
2) The CMT members should wear visual identifiers (e.g. hats or armbands).
3) Evacuation routes should be clearly identified and posted.
4) An organization should practice evacuation drills on a consistent basis.
5) Employees should remain calm, use common sense and good judgment, and follow the directives of emergency personnel.

Reactive Measures

After a violent act occurs in the workplace, it is necessary that an organization return to normal functioning as quickly as possible. Several initiatives that may help an organization achieve this are:

1) The human resources member of the CMT should call victims' families and express the organization's sincerity and sorrow.
2) Prepare a media statement as quickly as possible and eventually organize a press conference.
3) Security personnel should arrange the cleanup of the worksite if necessary.
4) Employee information meetings/debriefings should be set up by the CMT.
5) Initiate internal and external investigations.
6) Devise a plan for handling normal business responsibilities after the incident.

VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE

DEADLY CONSEQUENCES

Workplace Violence. . .

is an issue that has come to the forefront for many businesses, schools, and organizations due to their exposure to its occurrence, as well as the great deal of media attention that is devoted to violent incidents in the workplace. In addition, the incidence of violence in the workplace has increased by 32% over the past decade and is currently one of the fastest growing types of crime being tracked by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Several statistics and facts highlight the rate at which workplace violence is ascending.

• During the years 1980-1989, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) reports that there were an average of 15 people murdered at work each week.

• According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), workplace homicide was the third-leading cause of death in the workplace in the 1980's.

• The Bureau of Labor and Statistics (BLS) and NIOSH report that workplace homicide is now the second-leading cause of death in the workplace.

• A study by Northwestern National Life (NWNL) found that in 1993, 2.2 million Americans were victims of physical attacks, 6.3 million were threatened, and 16.1 were harassed while at work. In other words, at least one-fourth of American workers were attacked, threatened, and/or harassed.

The Five Types of Workplace Violence

Violence in the workplace typically falls into five categories, which are:

1. Armed robbery: this is the most prevalent form; constituting approximately 75-80% of workplace violence. The assailant(s) use force to obtain money and/or goods.

2. Customer/client-on-employee/supervisor: this type of crime differs from armed robbery in the respect that monetary gain is not the motivation for violence.

3. Employee or former employee-on-fellow employees and/or supervisors: this is perhaps the most notorious type of workplace violence; otherwise known as the "disgruntled employee".

4. Spouse/partner-on-employee: this type of incident is usually an artifact of domestic violence that spills over into the workplace.

5. Terrorism/hate crime: this type of workplace violence is typically motivated by intentions to advance a religious or political agenda.

Establishing a Violence Prevention Program

Three stages encapsulate the violent act in the workplace: before the incident, during the incident, and after the incident. In order to address workplace violence, then, it is necessary to devise and implement policies and measures that attempt to reduce its occurrence as well as deal with its aftermath.

Proactive Measures

A large portion of this pamphlet is afforded to taking preventive steps in combating workplace violence because it is far better and far easier to intercede before an incident occurs. There are six distinct proactive measures that an organization can apply in addressing workplace violence.

1. Establish a Crisis Management Team:
The purpose of the CMT is to devise, implement, and oversee a violence prevention program that touches on virtually every level of its organization. The members that typically comprise the CMT are: Executive office representative, human resources manager, security personnel, legal advisor, psychologist/Employment Assistance Professionals (EAP), and a public relations consultant.

2. Pre-employment Screening:
A pre-employment screening program typically consists of two stages: behavior-based interviewing and background, criminal, and reference checks. Any information that is used from the background, criminal, and reference checks must be evaluated with respect to job relevance. Otherwise, it is illegal for an employer to deny an applicant employment based on information obtained from background information

that is not relevant to the prospective job.

3. Policy:
A policy should consist of rules and procedures pertaining to workplace violence that are available to all employees in written form.

4. Security Measures:
These measures typically address external threats of violence, and are focused on the physical structure of the building(s) where an organization reside(s). Several examples are: sign-in sheet for guests, improving quantity and quality of lighting, bulletproof glass, security guards, locks or security codes on main entrances or all entrances, and in an electronic security system.

5. Threat Assessment:
When threats of violence are internal, it is necessary to have a system that is able to recognize and respond to those threats.

Recognizing threats of potential violence:
Among many acts of workplace violence, there have been warning signs that are indicative of an impending violent episode. Some of the red flags for potential violence are: externalizes blame for personal mistakes and difficulties, uses physical/verbal intimidation and/or threats, drug and/or alcohol abuse often accompanied by excessive absenteeism, entitlement mentality, socially isolated, romantic obsession/stalking of a former or current worker, fascination with previous incidents of workplace violence, verbal expression or paranoid/suspicious thought, brandishing a weapon, or weapons, at the workplace, and religious or political belief concerning ideologies often of a generally perceived extremist nature.