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WORKPLACE VIOLENCE: RISK FACTORS AND PREVENTION STRATEGIES

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for
Disease Control and Prevention and National Institute for Occupational
Safety and Health Division of Safety Research:

The circumstances of workplace violence also vary and may include
robbery-associated violence; violence by disgruntled clients, customers,
patients, inmates, etc.; violence by coworkers, employees, or employers;
and domestic violence that finds its way into the workplace. These
circumstances all appear to be related to the level of violence in
communities and in society in
general. Several reasons exist for focusing specifically on workplace
violence:

Violence is a substantial contributor to death and injury on the job. NIOSH
data indicate that homicide has become the second leading cause of
occupational injury death, exceeded only by motor-vehicle-related deaths
[Jenkins 1996]. Estimates of nonfatal workplace assaults vary dramatically,
but a reasonable estimate from the National Crime Victimization Survey is
that approximately 1 million people are assaulted while at work or on duty
each year; this figure represents 15% of the acts of violence experienced
by U.S. residents aged 12 or older [Bachman 1994].

Workplace violence is not distributed randomly across all workplaces but is
clustered in particular occupational settings. More than half (56%) of
workplace homicides occurred in retail trade and service industries.
Homicide is the leading cause of death in these industries as well as in
finance, insurance, and real estate. Eighty-five percent of nonfatal
assaults in the workplace occur in service and retail trade industries [BLS
1994d]. As the U.S. economy continues to shift toward the service sectors,
fatal and nonfatal workplace violence will be an increasingly important
occupational safety and health issue.

The risk of workplace violence is associated with specific workplace
factors such as dealing with the public, the exchange of money, and the
delivery of services or goods. Consequently, great potential exists for
workplace-specific prevention efforts such as bullet-resistant barriers and
enclosures in taxicabs, convenience stores, gas stations, emergency
departments, and other
areas where workers come in direct contact with the public; locked drop
safes and other cash-handling procedures in retail establishments; and
threat assessment policies in all types of workplaces.

Long-term efforts to reduce the level of violence in U.S. society must address a variety of social issues such as education, poverty, and environmental justice. However, short-term efforts must address the pervasive nature of violence in our society and the need to protect workers. We cannot wait to address workplace violence as a social issue alone but must take immediate action to address it as a serious occupational safety issue.

For additional resource information on Workplace Violence, Risk Factors and Prevention Strategies, visit: http://www.humanitarian.net/challenges.html