



SAUSALITO POLICE DEPARTMENT

John Rohrbacher
Chief of Police

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

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INTRODUCTION INTO WORKPLACE VIOLENCE:

“Two hundred years after its founding, America’s national characteristic isn’t freedom; it’s fear.” The retired Police Chief of the Los Angeles Police Department, Daryl Gates, said that in the early 1990’s and today almost 20 years later it is still true. The greatest fear we have is the fear of a violent crime happening to us, our families, our friends, or our co-workers. Experts say to avoid situations in which violent crime may occur: Don’t answer the door after dark unless you know who it is, try not to travel alone, and try not to take public transportation at night.

These suggestions are fine, however, if a violent crime is to occur, for which you are the victim of, odds are it will happen in your own workplace.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice the workplace is the most dangerous place to be in America. The problem is so pervasive that the Center for Disease Control has classified workplace violence as a national epidemic. The Occupational Health & Safety Administration reports 2 million Americans are victims of workplace violence each year.

Even though workplace violence is an everyday occurrence, very little of it gets publicized. While in the last few years the media has started covering more acts of workplace violence it still mostly goes unnoticed until a large tragic event occurs. Some famous or infamous acts of workplace violence are:

MacDonald’s Massacre - San Diego, CA. July 18, 1984

A 41 year old male with schizophrenia entered a McDonalds with a UZI sub machine gun, shot gun, and hand gun and went on a 77 minute massacre. The subject fired 2,156 rounds of ammunition in the restaurant, killing 21 and wounding 19 others.

Luby’s Cafeteria - Killeen, TX- October 16, 1991

A delusional 35 year old male drives his truck through a cafeteria window then goes on a 15 minute shooting rampage using two pistols. 24 people were killed and an additional 20 were wounded.

101 California Street - San Francisco, CA- July 1, 1993

A 55-year-old businessman entered the office building and made his way to the 34th floor to the offices of the law firm where he had been interviewed the day before regarding a failed business deal he was part of. The subject opened fire with a pair of TEC-9 handguns and a .45 pistol. 8 people were killed in the attack and 6 others were injured.



SAUSALITO POLICE DEPARTMENT

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DEFINITION:

What is workplace violence exactly? Well the Occupational Health & Safety Administration defines Workplace violence as:

“Violence or the threat of violence against workers. It can occur at or outside the workplace and can range from threats and verbal abuse to physical assaults and homicide”

Workplace violence can happen anytime and at anyplace. No City no matter how large or small is immune from workplace violence. Acts of violence occur in workplaces in every City each day and large scale deadly incidents have occurred in City’s coast to coast. Workplace violence can affect every type of profession and business. While some professions are more prone to violence than others (i.e. gas station attendants, Quick E Markets, Police, etc) violence can happen in anyone’s line of work. We have even experienced workplace violence here in Sausalito.

On February 25, 2000, a delusional 24 year old methamphetamine user with a history of mental illness, made an unprovoked attack on his coworker at 200 Gate 5 Road. The suspect used a sheet rock knife to slash his coworker’s throat and stab him several times throughout the body. The attack was because the suspect thought his coworker had murdered his brother in LA. The investigation later revealed that the victim had never even known the suspect’s brother. The suspect fled the scene and was later apprehended still holding the knife by Sausalito Officers after a foot pursuit.

In April 2004, a domestic violence incident led a 26 year old male with a history of arrests for stalking and violent crimes in New York to stalk and terrorize his girlfriend at her workplace, 3020 Bridgeway. Over a 4 day period, he made hundreds of threats on her life as well as the lives of her family and co-workers. The subject would also drive by the victim’s house as well as 3020 Bridgeway while making threatening and taunting phone calls. The victim and her co-workers feared for their safety so much that they stopped answering their phones, were afraid to leave the office, and even closed early. Several employees transferred due to the suspect’s actions. After day long negotiations with the suspect, he agreed to surrender to police. However, he attempted to flee in route to the Sausalito Police Department and was apprehended by the Sausalito Police in Marin City. 3 years later after being released from prison, he started to stalk and terrorize another former girlfriend in San Francisco.

TYPES OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE AND STATISTICS:

There are 6 types of workplace violence:

- Employer directed - violence against workplace authority: supervisor, manager, director
- Co-Worker directed - violence against a co-worker or peer in the workplace
- Service directed - acts of violence committed against an employee by a patron



SAUSALITO POLICE DEPARTMENT

John Rohrbacher
Chief of Police

- Domestic directed - partner or would be partner engages in violence against the object of his or her affections
- Property directed - acts against any property that the company/employer owns
- Commercial directed - an employee participates in events against the company that can include theft of money or property and may also involve violence

Nearly two million violent crimes occur in the workplace each year, which is 1/6th of all violent crimes in this country. The most prevalent cause of workplace violence is attacks by patrons at 44%. Also, workplace homicide is the fastest growing category of murder in the U.S. and is the leading cause of on the job death for women and the second leading cause for men. Homicide is the third highest work related cause of death in the United States and guns play a role in 75% of all workplace homicides.

There are approximately 1,000 homicides that occur in the workplace each year. Homicide is not the only type of violent crime happening at work thou. Each year approximately 51,000 rapes, 84,000 robberies, 396,000 aggravated assaults (assaults with weapons or assaults causing serious injury), and 1.5 million simple assaults (punches, kicks, fights) are happening in the workplace. In addition to the physical attacks, there are over 6 million acts of threats/harassment/intimidation occurring in the workplace each year.

Who are committing these acts of violence? Well as stated earlier, attacks by patrons are the most prevalent cause of violence in the workplace. Customers commit approximately 40% of all physical violence in the workplace (812,800) and 30% of the homicides (300). Strangers to the workplace account for approximately 25% of all violence in the workplace (508,000) and 60% of the homicides (600). Employees/Ex-employees are responsibly for 29% of the physical violence in the workplace (589,280) and 7% of the homicides (70). Domestic incidents (lovers spats, domestic violence, ex's, etc) which start at home and end up at work make up 6% of all workplace violence (121,920) and 3% of the homicides (30).

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE PREVENTION

When you go to work, don't leave your common sense at home. Any crime that can happen at home or on the street can happen in the workplace. But common sense prevention skills can help make life at work safer for us all.

Be alert to your surroundings while at work. Look for anything out of the norm or strange. Don't be afraid to call the police if you see something suspicious or something that causes you to worry.

When you are at work always let someone know where you'll be. Whether it's coming in late, working late, going to the photocopier, or the mailroom, going to lunch or a meeting.

Be aware of the five trouble spots at work:



SAUSALITO POLICE DEPARTMENT

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Chief of Police

1. **Stairwells and out of the way corridors**

Don't use the stairs alone. Avoid poorly lighted corridors and stairwells.

2. **Elevators**

Don't get into elevators with people who look out of place or behave in a strange or threatening manner. If you find yourself in an elevator with someone who makes you nervous, get off as soon as possible.

3. **Rest Rooms**

Attackers can hide in stalls and corners. Upon entering the restroom look around for anything that appears out of the norm or strange. Remain alert while using the restroom. Also beware of anyone loitering around the outside of the restrooms.

4. **After Hours**

Don't work late alone. Create a buddy system for walking to parking lots or call the police to escort you to your car.

5. **Parking Lots**

Park your vehicle in a well-lighted portion of the parking lot. Always lock your car and roll the windows up completely. If you notice any suspicious people hanging around the parking lot, notify the police. When you approach your car, have your keys ready. This not only will give you quicker access to your car but gives you a weapon to use against an attacker. The keys can be turned into a weapon by placing your keys between the fingers of your hand and making a fist. Remember to check the cars floorboard and front and back seats before getting in it. Also, lock your car immediately after you get in – even before buckling your seat belt.

Workplace violence can be further reduced by adding additional security measures to the workplace. Security measures most often recommended are:

- Position reception area so that it is visible to fellow employees
- Position office furniture so that it separates the employee from the public and places them closer to the exit than the patron, and so that the employee cannot be cornered
- Minimize/restrict the number of entrances to a workplace; assure all access points are highly visible and well lighted
- Enforce key control rules
- Add additional phone lines and have emergency numbers posted at each phone
- Using coded keys or cards to control access to the building or certain areas within the building
- Assure adequate exterior lighting in and around the workplace and near entrances



SAUSALITO POLICE DEPARTMENT

John Rohrbacher
Chief of Police

- Consider installing video surveillance equipment in business
- Consider installing an alarm system and/or duress/panic buttons where appropriate
- Change security codes each time an employee leaves permanently
- Provide training on how to identify hazardous situations and how to respond appropriately in emergencies
- Establish escape routes from the office
- Work with local police to identify hazards and to conduct security assessments
- Prepare a daily work plan so that you and others know where and when you are expected somewhere
- Keep co-workers informed of your location and consistently adhere to the call-in schedule
- Check the credentials of patrons
- Use the "buddy system", especially when you feel your personal safety may be threatened. Do not enter any situation or location where you feel threatened or unsafe
- Have pre-made emergency contingency plans
- Change the locks each time an employee is terminated or resigns
- Issue Beepers/Cellular phones to all employees

Cellular phones can also be a valuable tool in combating workplace violence since they allow an individual to stay in contact with the police as they remove themselves from a dangerous situation. However, if you're going to use a cellular phone to contact the police in an emergency have the Police Department's emergency phone number pre-programmed in your phone. Only a few cellular phone providers have systems that will connect you to your local Police Department if you dial 911 from them. If you dial 911 on the majority of cellular phones the call will be automatically sent to the California Highway Patrol's District Dispatch Center. It can be several minutes before our dispatchers get your 911 call and when they do the phone connection is usually bad because of the phone transfer.

In Marin County, 911 calls made from cellular phones will be routed to the appropriate Law Enforcement Agency for the area you are calling from. If you dial 911 on a cellular phone while on any part of the freeway that call will be sent to the CHP Center. The emergency phone number for Marin County Communications, the organization that handles our dispatching services and emergency calls is (415) 472-0911. Call this number to insure you contact Marin County Communications. This phone call will show up on the dispatcher's terminal as a 911 call and be treated as such.



SAUSALITO POLICE DEPARTMENT

John Rohrbacher
Chief of Police

HOW TO REACT DURING/AFTER WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

I have explained several different preventative measures for workplace violence. But, right now you're asking yourself, "What do I do if these preventative measures fail and I am confronted with a violent or threatening subject in the work place."

First, stay away from the subject. Do not approach, argue with, confront, or attempt to stop the subject. These people are very irrational and may consider any act you commit toward them as a threat. Remember distance is your friend.

Second, find a safe place away from the subject. This may mean leaving the building or in the worst case locking yourself into an office. Just get away from the subject.

If the subject has a gun and is firing it, get on the floor and make yourself as small as possible. Get behind an object that will stop a bullet. A chair, hollow door, desk, or window **will not stop** a bullet. Get behind a concrete wall for example. When the subject stops firing, run. Stay low and run away from the subject as fast as possible.

How will you react to a violent encounter? There is no one way everyone will react to a violent situation, everyone is different and their reactions will be based on their experiences, physical/psychological make up, and the situation itself. From the experiences of individuals that have been through violent encounters (Officers involved in shootings, soldiers in combat, victims of violent crimes, etc.) we see the following common reactions from people confronted with violence:

- Intense emotions (fear, anger, etc.)
- Adrenaline rush
- Auditory exclusion
- Intensified/Diminished sound
- Tunnel vision
- Autopilot (You don't know you're doing it)
- Visual clarity
- Slow/Fast motion time
- Temporary paralysis
- Memory loss
- Dissociation
- Intrusive thoughts
- Urinate/Defecate on yourself

Given a situation in which you're unable to get away from a violent or threatening subject remember the following:



SAUSALITO POLICE DEPARTMENT

John Rohrbacher
Chief of Police

- Stay calm
- Give the subject your full attention
- Speak in a calm voice
- Never belittle, embarrass, or verbally attack the subject
- Ignore challenges and insults
- Move away from objects that can be used as weapons
- Don't confront or touch the subject
- Do not attempt to disarm a subject or have the subject hand you the weapon
- Keep a positive mindset and never give up

If you are unable to call the police yourself or unable to tell another to call, develop ways of non-verbal communication between you and your co-workers. This type of communications can be done through hand signals, moving certain objects, or carrying a certain book in a certain hand.

Code words are also an effective way of communicating your need for help to another. Develop specific sayings that can be used in front of violent or threatening subjects. The phrases "I need to take some lost time" or "We need some more time to talk" can be code for "Call the Police Immediately."

Remember your job is not to stop these violent people or to be a hero. Your job is to stay safe. If you follow these suggestions your chances of remaining safe dramatically increase.

After an incident of workplace violence, you will go through a whole host of emotions and feelings regarding your experience. This is normal; no one can encounter an incident of workplace violence and not be fazed by it. Some of the most common reactions people experience after workplace violence are:

- Relief
- Self-blame
- Intense emotions (anger, fear, sad, etc.)
- Stress
- Survivor guilt
- Uncertainty
- No memory of incident
- Disassociation
- Depression
- Distorted memory (absolutely convinced it happened)
- Re-experiencing the event/flash backs



SAUSALITO POLICE DEPARTMENT

John Rohrbacher
Chief of Police

- Devil don't care attitude
- Lack of enthusiasm/self-motivation
- PTSD

The best way to deal with any emotional issues you may be encountering after being thru workplace violence is to talk to someone about it. Employers should conduct a post incident debriefing of the event so those involved in it can share their feelings and experiences and help prepare plans so a similar incident won't happen again. Employers should also make counselors available to their employees so they can talk about their issues. Don't be shy or embarrassed about what you are feeling or going thru. Others have experienced the absolute same thing, reach out for help.

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE SUSPECT

Now let's take a look at the type of people who initiate violence in the workplace. The FBI's Behavioral Science Unit has studied the problem of workplace violence and the individuals who have committed violence in the workplace. The FBI's studies show that the typical suspect profile is a white male who is 35 years of age or older. He is a loner or extremist with a history of violence. He carries grudges and has difficulty accepting authority. He has extreme behavior changes and may have substance abuse problems or mental health problems and a traumatic event has recently occurred in his life.

The traumatic event, or "stressor", which causes a person to commit an act of violence in the workplace, can be anything. It is in the mind of the offender and can range from being laid off of work to someone looking at him wrong. The traumatic event was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. This last incident caused all the rage and hatred the person was holding inside to come rushing out in furry towards others.

Even though the majority of workplace violence offenders are middle age men, the violent offender can be someone of any age or sex. Violence can occur in any workplace be it a Forbes 500 business or a school.

Some behaviors a subject may show that indicates potential violence are throwing objects, shaking of fists, destruction of property, loud emotional outbursts, threats, and bringing/brandishing a weapon. At the first sign of potential violence, get and stay away from the subject, stay calm, pay attention to the subject, never belittle/embarrass/verbally attack the suspect, ignore challenges and insults, don't confront/touch or attempt to disarm the subject, and call the police immediately to have the person removed.

If you are having trouble with a certain individual creating disturbances ask the person to leave. If the subject refuses to leave, call the police and have us ask them leave. If they refuse to leave consider having the person arrested for trespassing. If this problem continues consider obtaining



SAUSALITO POLICE DEPARTMENT

John Rohrbacher
Chief of Police

a Temporary Restraining Order against the individual prohibiting them from entering the building or offices within that building.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The City of Sausalito has been lucky. The small amount of workplace violence we have experienced has not been deadly and is infrequent. However workplace violence has the potential to occur anywhere at any time. But if you remember your common sense skills, apply additional security measures at work, look for people that meet the violent subject's profile, and remember what to do in a crisis you will make the workplace a safer place for all.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Lieutenant William R. Fraass at (415) 289-4171 or at bfraass@sausalito.gov.