



WORKING IN THE “AGE OF RAGE”

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE PREVENTION FOR BREWERIES

PART I: RECOGNIZING THE SIGNS

Work is usually a great place to be: Congenial, productive, and safe. A craft brewery is often an even better place to be: Rewarding, communal, and fun. However, frequent shootings and other violent events are a grim reminder that violence can occur anywhere, including the workplace. In fact, the probability of violent incidents at work has risen dramatically in the past decade. According to the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), factors that may increase the risk of workplace violence include: Exchanging money with the public; working with volatile, unstable people; working alone or in isolated areas; working where alcohol is served; working late at night; and working in areas with high crime rates. Given many of the factors listed, a brewery may be more susceptible to incidents of violence. Employers have a legal obligation to provide a workplace that is reasonably free from hazards and to take reasonable steps to ensure that the persons they employ and do business with will not cause intentional harm to employees and others. Prevention of workplace violence is dependent on many factors, but two of the most important are awareness a problem exists and planning to avoid harm. Therefore, employers have to rely on their employees and customers to report matters of concern. One thing is very clear: **YOU CAN TAKE STEPS TO MAKE YOUR WORKPLACE SAFER!**

BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR DISRUPTIVE, THREATENING, OR VIOLENT BEHAVIOR

Disruptive Behavior: Disturbs, interferes with or prevents normal work operations (e.g., yelling, using profanity, waving one’s fists, or verbal abuse).

Threatening Behavior: Includes physical actions short of actual contact or injury (e.g., moving closer aggressively) and general threats – express or veiled – to people or property (e.g., “you better watch your back,” “I’ll get you,” “I know where you live,” “you’ll be sorry,” or “this isn’t over”).

Violent Behavior: Any physical assault with or without weapons; behavior that is reasonably interpreted as potentially violent (e.g., throwing things, pounding on a desk or door, the destruction of property); or specific threats to inflict harm (e.g., threat to shoot or otherwise harm a named individual).

WARNING SIGNS OR “RED FLAGS”

It is difficult, even for the most skilled professionals, to predict who will be violent or when violence will strike. However, behaviors, circumstances, traits, and attitudes that often indicate potential violent behavior include:

- Working under unusually high levels of stress
- History of violent behavior or making threats
- Romantic obsession
- Remains isolated – not an introvert – a “loner” who has very poor personal relationships
- Fascination with the killing power of weapons
- “Pathological blamer;” unable to accept responsibility for own actions; unreasonably suspicious; holds a grudge
- Paranoia; psychosis; loss of contact with reality; talking to one’s self
- Intimidating behavior, verbally abusive, harasses or mistreats others
- Abuse of drugs and/or alcohol; patterns of self-destructive behavior
- Fanatical or bizarre religious or political beliefs
- Experiences severe bouts of depression

- Unusually upset, or registers persistent complaints, over recent negative events at work or in personal life
- Sudden major negative change in behavior, demeanor, appearance
- Recent withdrawal from normal activities, family, friends, coworkers
- Outwardly “wishes” something bad would happen to a co-worker
- Frequently challenges or resists reasonable demands by supervisors
- Sudden marked increase in absenteeism
- Significant family problems or major instability (e.g., loss of a loved one)
- Sudden, uncontrollable mood swings
- Repeated angry outbursts, slamming doors, inability to control feelings
- Morally superior and self-righteous; absolute refusal to accept criticism
- Feels entitled to special treatment and that the rules don’t apply to them
- Feels wronged, humiliated, degraded and wants revenge
- Engages in threatening, harassing, or intimidating behavior via social media
- Feels without choices or options for action except only violence

Patterns of the above warning signs indicate that a high-risk employee could become dangerous. Ask yourself, and be prepared to describe, how many of the above behaviors have you observed; how often have they occurred; and how intensely are they carried out? For company leaders that receive reports of concerning behaviors or red flags, consider having a conversation with the individual about the appropriateness of the behavior in the context of the workplace and job performance (e.g., “I’ve noticed you have been angry/upset a lot recently and it seems to be impacting your work, is there anything I can do to help?”). You should be prepared to diffuse a situation early on and have a plan in place for how you will respond (e.g., asking the aggressor to leave the premises, calling the police, etc.) should the situation escalate.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION GUIDANCE ON WORKPLACE VIOLENCE PREVENTION, SEE ALSO:

- Working in the “Age of Rage”: Workplace Violence Prevention for Breweries - Part II: Responding to the Threat
- Working in the “Age of Rage”: Workplace Violence Prevention for Breweries - Part III: Prevention & Recovery