

Workplace Violence... the Forgotten Threat

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There is little doubt that additional acts of terrorism will occur on our soil. Prudent property managers have taken precautions relative to the threat of domestic and international terrorism. Building perimeters have been strengthened, *vis-a-vis* the presence of physical security, the addition of card access systems, and the electronic monitoring of adjacent parking lots and grounds.

Unfortunately, with so much emphasis placed on limiting exterior vulnerabilities, property managers may have forgotten an interior vulnerability: workplace violence. Workplace violence is defined as, "any act in which an individual is abused, threatened, or assaulted in his or her place of employment."

Prior to the tragedies of 9/11, workplace violence was a big concern of employers. Between 1993 and 1999 in the United States, an average of 1.7 million violent victimizations per year were committed against persons age 12 and over who were at work or on duty.¹ More than 29,000 acts of

rape or sexual assault are perpetrated against woman at work each year.²

But how can property managers, who may have several companies within their building, minimize the threat of workplace violence? Property managers need to take a proactive role. If management does not have a critical incident policy relative to workplace violence issues, then they need to do so as soon as possible. If management already has such a policy, then it may need to be reviewed.

One of the greatest shortfalls I have found in reviewing commercial management's critical incident workplace violence policies is that they fail to establish a notification standard with their tenants. Property management needs to be notified when their tenants anticipate a hostile termination, or when an internal workplace violence incident has resulted in suspension of one of their employees. Encourage tenants to make a police report on all such incidents; these notifications are vital for the safety of all workers in the building. Managers should also keep a

log of all reported workplace violence incidents.

Court-issued "Orders of Protection" must also be brought to the attention of management. A study of domestic violence survivors found that 74 percent of employed battered woman were harassed by their partner while they were at work.³ Property management and/or building security should be tendered a copy of the order, along with a physical description of the respondent, description of vehicles he or she may drive, and, if possible, a photograph.

Another consideration management must face is to what extent their security personnel should commit to workplace violence issues. If you have designated your security personnel to a role no greater than that of a greeter at the information desk, then they should not be put in a confrontational situation; they simply haven't been trained to handle these types of situations. Managers must mandate additional professional training for

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these types of situations.

Considerations must also be given in regards to potentially hostile terminations. Very few terminations are done spontaneously. Unfortunately, local law enforcement may not be able to commit officers in assisting in these types of terminations. Consider having your tenant hire their own security personnel for these situations; committing your own security personnel may leave your building vulnerable because they have left their post(s). As with any termination, be sure any common building keys or swipe cards are confiscated or taken out of the access system.

Finally, don't allow yourself to be the last to know and the first to get blamed! Property managers need to consider the issues of civil liability in regards to acts of workplace violence. The likelihood is that management will be in a better position to defend itself in a suit involving workplace violence if it can demonstrate that, at the time of the incident, it had implemented its workplace violence critical incident policy.

¹ *Dubart, Delis T 2001. "National Crime Victimization Survey: Violence in the Workplace, 1993-1999." U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. Washington, D.C. Retrieved March 22, 2006 <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/ww99.pdf>*

² *Crime Characteristics: Summary Findings. 2001. U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. Washington D.C. Retrieved March 22, 2006. http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/cvict_c.htm*

³ *Family Violence Prevention Fund. 1998. The Workplace Guide for Employees, Unions and Advocates. San Francisco, CA.*



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