

## Take Steps to Thwart Violence in Workplace Firings

By Holly Culhane, Contributing Columnist



Recent incidents of workplace violence have created shocking headlines. Just last month, an Oklahoma man decapitated a co-worker with a knife used at a food packing plant shortly after he was fired. In Birmingham, Ala., a UPS worker returned to his workplace the day after he was fired and fatally shot two bosses and then himself.

While workplace violence is still relatively uncommon, it occurs much more frequently than we would like to believe.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, between 2004 and 2008, an average of 564 work-related homicides occurred in the U.S. each year. While the majority of these deaths occurred during the commission of crimes, such as robberies, co-workers and former co-workers were assailants in about 12 percent of the cases, or an average

of 68 homicides per year.

Perhaps the most emotional and potentially volatile workplace situation involves an employee's firing. For supervisors and managers, it is a gut-wrenching experience because they recognize how the firing will affect a person's career, livelihood and self-esteem. And the firing likely will trigger a wide range of emotions in the employee being fired.

There is no fool-proof formula that can be used to prevent violence from occurring during or after a firing. But preventative steps can be taken to help protect supervisors, co-workers, company property and even fired employees.

--Make sure the firing is your last resort. It should follow a careful, thoughtful and fair process that has included appropriate disciplinary measures, coaching and training. A firing should not be a surprise, or an unexpected consequence. Even if the termination is the result of a reorganization or economic downturn, affected employees should be aware of the potential for job loss whenever practical.

--If the firing is a necessity, prepare for the meeting. Be prepared to explain such things as the specific reasons for the firing; when the termination is effective; details of severance arrangements, including pay and benefits; and employee assistance and training that will be provided. Arrange off-site assistance resources and provide information about the resources to the employee.

--Have another supervisor or representative from human resources in the room. This may diffuse anger and help keep the employee focused on moving on from the job. Respectfully listen to what the employee has to say. Resist responding to hostile criticism.

--Escort the employee back to his or her desk, or work space to collect belongings. The employee may wish to make an arrangement to return at a later, more private time. Collect such things as access passes and company ID badges. Remove the employee from the company's email system and computer log-on systems.

-- Alert security in advance that a firing will be taking place. While it is rare for an employee to become violent, precautions should be taken. If your company does not employ a security force, temporary help can be arranged and, in some cases, should be. "Better safe than sorry," as the saying goes.

--Escort the worker to the door and watch as he or she leaves the premises. Instruct security to alert supervisors, or those who would be the first to see the individual, if the employee returns.

--Within the bounds of required confidentiality, communicate to co-workers the employee is no longer with the company. Caution co-workers about sharing company access and information with the former employee.

Business owners, managers and supervisors are responsible for protecting their company's physical workplace, intellectual property and their employees.

While it is hoped that all will go well during a stressful employee separation, steps must be taken to assure a safe outcome for everyone.

***This article written by Holly Culhane first appeared online and in The Bakersfield Californian on Wednesday, October 28, 2014. Holly Culhane is president of the Bakersfield-based human resources consulting firm P.A.S. Associates. She can be contacted through her website [www.pasassociates.com](http://www.pasassociates.com) and through the [PAS Facebook](#) page or by phone at 631-2165.***

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