



Virginia Workplace Law

Workplace Violence Stalks Virginia

By: Broderick Dunn. *This was posted Wednesday, August 25th, 2010*

On August 3, 2010, a disgruntled employee of Hartford Distributors, a Connecticut beer distributor, [killed eight employees](#) and wounded two others, including the senior vice president for human resources.

Sadly, workplace shootings and assaults are becoming more commonplace. The most recent Bureau of Labor Statistics data show [156 fatal occupational injuries](#) in the state of Virginia in 2008. Of those 156 fatalities, 37 resulted from violent acts, second only to automobile accidents.

Under the [Occupational Safety and Health Act](#)'s general duty clause, employers must provide workers with a reasonably safe and secure workplace. If evidence exists of employer negligence — such as ignoring warning signs and potentially dangerous behavior — an employer could face a litany of legal issues including [negligent hiring](#) and [negligent retention](#).

Despite these grim statistics, experts and workplace security specialists say that most violent workplace incidents can be prevented if employers take the appropriate steps.

Here are some specific steps employers can take to avoid workplace violence:

1. Formulate a specific security plan and appoint a person within your organization to be in charge of implementing it. Employers should conduct practice drills from the plan at least twice a year, and the plan should be revised as necessary.
2. Investigate all threats. Employers should have a zero-tolerance policy for threatening or harassing behavior. Zero-tolerance doesn't have to mean automatic termination for violating company policy. Rather, a zero-tolerance policy can mean that employers promptly investigate all credible reports of threatening or harassing behavior.
3. Employers should encourage employees to be vigilant in recognizing problem behaviors and take steps to help employees deal with stress and workplace conflicts so that they are defused before they escalate to violence. Employers should also consider implementing an [Employee Assistance Program](#).

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Have you had any direct experience with workplace violence? What is your company's level of preparation for such events?

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