6 Tips for Reducing Risk of Workplace Violence & Harassment



Workplace violence and harassment take their toll on both the victims and their employers. Every jurisdiction in Canada either directly or implicitly requires employers to take steps to protect workers from these hazards. And it's critical that you address both harassment *and* violence. Harassment occurs more frequently than acts of violence. In addition, harassment often precedes violence and serves as an early warning that violence can result if workplace issues aren't addressed. But you may not know the exact steps to take to deal effectively with these hazards.

A study from the Conference Board of Canada identifies six actions that companies can take to significantly reduce the human, financial and reputational costs of workplace violence and harassment. This study, *Managing the Risks of Workplace Violence and Harassment*, is based on research conducted by the Conference Board's Council on Emergency Management and Council of Industrial Relations Executives.

Conference Board Study

The study notes that the risk of workplace violence and harassment comes from individuals both within and outside the organization, including:

- Co-workers: Fellow or former employees
- Clients: Those who receive products or services from the organization
- Individuals who have or had a relationship with a worker, such as a current or former spouse, relative, friend or acquaintance
- Criminals: Individuals who target and enter workplace to commit a crime, such as robbery.

The study says that employers can comply with OHS requirements and significantly reduce the risks of workplace violence and harassment by taking six key actions:

1. Conduct periodic risk assessments.

2. Heed early warning signs. Management and employees at all levels of an organization must be able to spot the signs of potentially violent individuals and work situations.

3. Make targeted use of professional assistance service options, such as employee assistance programs. These specialists can identify and manage workplace violence and harassment, provide expert consultation services that identify risks and suggest

elimination or mitigation strategies

4. Have appropriate policies and resources to respond when needed. Workplace violence and harassment policies should include clear expectations and consequences for individual conduct. Other options include regulating physical access to workplaces (such as “layered levels” of access in health-care settings) and redesigning jobs and schedules to ensure that individuals don’t work alone.

5. Review prevention and response plans continually.

6. Provide effective crisis leadership and response in the event of violence or harassment. Key actions include:

- Acknowledging the incident
- Communicating with both compassion and competence
- Outlining the steps that are being taken to bring the workplace back to normal and make it more resilient.