

# Work Frequently Isn't a Safe Haven for Victims of Domestic Violence



People who have a miserable life at home might view their work as a blessed escape, but if the misery involves domestic abuse, the workplace often isn't a safe haven for a victim.

According to the Vermont Attorney General's Office, one in five employed adults is a victim of domestic violence and 74 percent of employed battered women say they are harassed by their partner while at work.

Domestic violence carries a huge cost in the workplace in terms of reduced productivity as a result of trouble concentrating on work, and increased sick days. Also, distracted workers are more likely to be involved in injury incidents.

The danger to your workplace goes beyond the victims of domestic violence suffering injuries as a result of inattention, because other employees and customers/clients may also suffer injuries, or they may become targets for violence if a violent partner or ex-partner shows up at the workplace and they step in to try to help the victim.

The Vermont Attorney General's Office recommends the following measures to protect your workers against domestic violence that follows victims into the workplace:

- Provide front desk or security staff with copies of court orders and abusers' identifying information, including photographs and a description of vehicles, if available.
- Relocate victimized workers to safer workstations or other worksites.
- Install buzzer systems, panic buttons or other security devices.
- Limit access to your building and if feasible, use one entrance only.
- Provide escorts to victims who are walking to their cars and arrange priority parking spaces.
- Improve lighting in parking lots and install additional fencing and security cameras. Call a local security firm for guidance.
- Adopt telephone security measures, such as screening calls made to victims, or having caller identification on telephones.
- Document harassing or abusive behavior made against victims.
- Assist victims by developing a safety plan course of action, including when to call police. Call your local domestic violence program for more information.
- Work with your staff and/or local law enforcement agencies to develop a response

plan.

- Take sensitivity training to help you better understand the problem of domestic violence affecting workers and know how to respond effectively.
- Educate your workers to the problem of domestic violence by posting and distributing resource materials or inviting a domestic violence expert in to talk to your staff.
- Offer to connect victims with community programs or your employee assistance program.

If you suspect one of your workers is a victim of domestic violence, WorkSafeBC suggests talking to the victim in a safe and private place, away from other workers, and broaching the subject by saying words such as, "I'm concerned about you. You're such a good employee, but you've seemed distracted and upset recently. Sometimes when a person's performance changes at work, it could mean they are experiencing conflict at home. Could this be happening to you?"

If the person discloses abuse, WorkSafeBC suggests asking the following questions:

- What can we change here to help you feel and be safer at work?
- Has your partner ever threatened to come to work?
- Can I give you information about resources in the community that can support you?

Never make comments such as "I can't believe you put up with this" or "Things may get better with time" or "You have to leave." Such statements might lead the victim to feel that you don't believe their story or you are somehow blaming them for allowing the abuse to continue. Simply tell victims that you are there if they need to talk.

#### **Related content:**

This [\*\*safety talk\*\*](#) gives workers some valuable advice on what to do if they suspect a co-worker is a victim of domestic abuse.

[\*\*Here are\*\*](#) some eye-opening and disturbing statistics relating to spousal abuse.

[\*\*Here is a workplace domestic violence policy\*\*](#) covering worker awareness and training, incident response, safe work procedures, accountability of workers and firearms.