

Workplace Violence Prevention

5 ways to ensure the safety and security of employees and customers

Small businesses face a wide range of potential threats, from de-escalating conflicts with frustrated customers to more serious incidents like theft-related violence. While these challenges may seem overwhelming, establishing a workplace violence prevention program is an essential step toward ensuring the safety and security of your employees and customers.

TIP 1: Address the full range of threats

A common misconception is that workplace violence only refers to active assailant incidents. However, an [NRF report on violence](#) highlights that violence occurs more often during a crime, guest dissatisfaction and employee-related conflicts. Develop a program that addresses all threats. Have clear, written policies and training for de-escalating disruptive situations and managing aggressive customers or individuals.

TIP 2: Prioritize de-escalation training

Managing conflict is a regular occurrence in retail. Invest in de-escalation training for your staff to identify and manage customer conflicts with calm professionalism. Teaching staff to listen actively, stay composed and offer solutions can significantly reduce the potential for a situation to turn violent.

TIP 3: Develop a response plan for critical incidents

Create a written response plan for high-risk scenarios (i.e., active assailant or mall shutdown). Train staff so they know exactly how to react to protect themselves and others. Include clear protocols for how and when to shelter in place or evacuation. Make sure staff members know all exits and how to assist or direct customers to safety. Practicing these drills can make all the difference in a real emergency.

TIP 4: Stay informed on state-specific legislation

Workplace violence prevention is a legal as well as a practical concern. It's crucial to understand and comply with any state-mandated requirements. States like California and New York have enacted laws with specific requirements for WPV programs, including prevention, reporting and investigation protocols. Check with your local and state offices; you can ensure that your program meets all legal requirements and that your staff receives the necessary training.

TIP 5: Leverage available resources

The NRF Foundation's [Customer Conflict De-escalation Credential](#) is a 30-minute online program created with the Crisis Prevention Institute specifically for front-line employees. NRF has partnered with [The Power of Preparedness](#) to offer resources on a range of topics, including de-escalation, active assailant and security strategies. You also can find free [federal government resources online](#) or check with local police to see if they offer free training or resources.