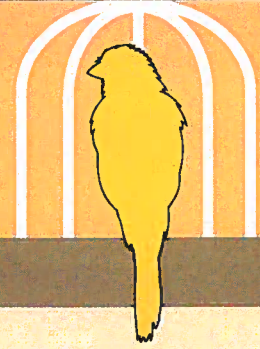


Violence in the Workplace



HEALTH AND SAFETY FACT SHEET

CUPE Canadian Union
of Public Employees

What is workplace violence?

Workplace violence is a serious health and safety concern. Workers do not expect to be victims of workplace violence. However, violence can happen in any workplace and can have serious effects on workers, their families, their colleagues, and the way work is conducted.

While most people think of violence as physical assault, in reality it's a much broader problem. Violence in the workplace is any incident in which an employee is abused, threatened or assaulted during the course of his or her employment, including the application of force, threats, verbal abuse, and sexual, racial or personal harassment.

Workplace violence is broadly defined, and not limited to incidents that occur within traditional workplaces. Violence can occur at functions and locations related to work, such as conferences, training sessions, social gatherings, work travel, a client's home, or other work-related situations.

Anticipation or fear of violence is a stress factor that can cause physical and psychological problems for workers.

What factors put workers at risk of violence?

Almost all workers are at risk of being exposed to violence in the workplace, however those who deal with the public are at a greater risk. Many workers are at a greater risk because they are exposed to discrimination-based violence, including women, racialized, Aboriginal, and LGBTTI workers, and workers with a disability.

Additional risk factors include:

- Handling money, prescription medication or items of significant value.
- Providing health care, educational, or personal support services.
- Conducting offsite inspections or performing enforcement duties.
- Working with people who are unable to control their behavior because of mental health conditions.
- Working with people who may be under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- Working shorthanded or in high stress, low control work environments.
- Working alone, in isolation, in low traffic areas, or near areas that are at risk of violent crime.

What legislative protections do workers have from violence in the workplace?

At the time of publication, all provinces with the exception of New Brunswick have specific violence prevention language in their Occupational Health and Safety Act or related regulations. These laws require employers to provide a safe and healthy workplace by developing a violence prevention policy and making it accessible to all employees.

Employers must also perform a hazard assessment to determine if and where their workers may be exposed to violence. Information about factors contributing to workplace violence must be made available to all employees and assistance must be provided to those who have been exposed to workplace violence.

What can my local union do to help prevent violence in the workplace?

Unionized workers have additional options available to them to deal with violence in the workplace. Your joint health and safety committee or your health and safety representative should:

- Develop a workplace violence prevention policy that contains precise, concrete language. Training on this policy must be provided to management, workers, clients, contractors, and anyone who has a relationship with your workplace.
- Outline a confidential process by which employees can report violent incidents that ensures and communicates that no reprisals will be made against employees reporting violent incidents.
- Identify all the factors that contribute to workplace violence, remove these factors where possible, and implement control measures to reduce the likelihood of violence occurring.
- Regularly monitor and update the violence prevention policy. Also monitor the hazards analysis and corrective measures used to control hazards that remain.
- Bargain violence prevention language into your collective agreement.

What to do if you're faced with violence in the workplace?

If it is safe, inform the person inflicting the behaviour that it is unwanted and to cease immediately. If it is not safe, then take the steps needed to remove yourself from the violent situation.

- Report the incident. If your life has been threatened or the situation warrants it, contact the police. Document the incident(s) and inform your supervisor, health and safety representative, and union representative of the incident(s). If the incidents continue, keep documenting and reporting them.
- If you feel that your health and safety are at risk, you have the right to refuse work until the issue is rectified. It may also be possible to file a grievance or a complaint with the human rights commission.
- If you're unable to resolve the issue through the steps mentioned above, contact the government inspectors and request that they come to your workplace to investigate the incident(s).
- Request additional support and information about any of these steps from your local health and safety committee members or representative, local executive, national CUPE servicing representative, or your national health and safety representative.

Violence and harassment can often occur simultaneously, and confronting these workplace hazards can be difficult. For additional resources, please consult CUPE's Violence Prevention Kit and CUPE's Harassment fact sheet.

FIND MORE RESOURCES: cupe.ca/health-and-safety

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