

A Proposed  
Workplace Violence Prevention & Response  
Training Program  
By: Critical Response Associates

Introduction and Overview

While media reports of incidents of workplace violence sometimes appear sensationalized, the fact of the matter is that violence and aggression in the workplace has risen dramatically in recent years. The Centers for Disease Control declared in 1992 that workplace violence had reached “*epidemic proportions*”.

Violence is the *leading cause of fatal occupational injuries* in women and the second leading cause of death for all workers, according to a 1994 Bureau of Labor Statistics report. A very recent (April, 2005) survey by the Society of Human Resource Managers (SHRM) report continued growth of this phenomenon, with more than half (*58 percent*) of their HR executives reporting that disgruntled employees have threatened senior managers in the past *12 months*.

Costs linked to workplace violence rose from \$4.2 billion in 1992 to \$36 billion in 1995, to an estimated *\$121 billion* in 2002, according to SHRM, with the average financial cost for each incident exceeding *\$250,000* by one study\*. Of course, this figure obviously cannot take into full consideration the numerous costs in morale, productivity, health care, workers comp claims, lost work time, etc.

The Employer’s Responsibility

According to requirements by the Federal Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA), the employer is obligated to provide their employees with a place of employment that is “free from recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm to ... employees.” This has been expanded, with companies now being cited for violations when it “*does nothing to prevent or abate...a recognizable hazard of workplace violence.*” (OSHA 3148, 1998).

The courts have also confirmed that employers have a *legal duty* to protect their employees and members of the general public from violence occurring in the workplace. This has resulted in some rather dramatic multi-million dollar awards for the plaintiffs in court cases involving workplace violence, with rulings of negligence in 1) *hiring* (failing to identify a potentially dangerous employee at application), 2) *training* (not sufficiently training employees in risk mitigation), 3) *supervision* (not adequately controlling a potentially violent employee), 4) *retention* (failing to take action against an employee

who represents a foreseeable risk), and 5) *security* (failing to adequately protect employees from foreseeable harm).

### CRA's Workplace Violence Training Program

As a network of psychological consultants specializing in this area, Critical Response Associates, under the direction of Dr. Marc McElhaney, has consulted in literally hundreds of incidents that have involved a risk of violence within the workplace. It has been our continuing experience that in *every one of these cases*, there were early indicators, such that if a more effective prevention and response program had been in place, the situation could have been resolved more quickly with less costs, less risk, and less legal exposure to the company.

Prevention and potential detection of aggressive or high-risk behavior in the workplace requires the incorporation of certain controls and processes long before the event occurs. It also includes educating the employees as to the company's policy and more specifically, how they can support and participate in the prevention process.

CRA offers a Workplace Violence Prevention and Response Training Program that will serve to reduce the risks to the organization, its employees and clientele, and therefore reduce the company's legal exposure. This process generally follows the accompanying outline, but applicability is dependent on the specific needs of the company, which can vary widely.

This program attempts to go beyond the notion of violent behavior as typically portrayed in high-profile "postal" incidents, and rather focuses on all behaviors that would be considered as presenting a potential risk to the organization. It focuses on the identification of the high-risk employee (or customer), avoidance of the common mistakes that can escalate the problem, and a delineation of the process that can lead to a safe resolution.

\*Based on a study by the National Safe Workplace Institute (1993)

# **CRA's Workplace Violence Prevention & Response Program**

## **General Outline of Services**

### **Initial Consultation**

In order to make certain that the training is relevant and addresses the specific needs and program parameters of the organization, this stage involves a discussion between CRA and the client organization, in order to:

- Identify any company-specific risks or issues of concern
- Review the existing organizational structure and controls
- Examine any particular legal obligations and areas of exposure
- Establish the company's goals and objectives
- Clarify expectations and responsibilities of employees and management
- Review relevant policy and procedural issues

### **Training Programs**

CRA offers essentially three levels of training for different employee groups. Depending on the company's organization, these can be combined, modified and adapted as needed.

- A. Employee Awareness Training. This training is designed to alert employees at all levels as to the company's policy on workplace aggression and the company's expectations of their employees. This program will further educate the employees as to the designated reporting process and the basic warning signs of potentially high-risk individuals. This training or orientation typically lasts no more than 1 hour, but more abbreviated video and CD-based presentations can be made available.
- B. Management Training. This training will include the above training provided to all employees but will also address the specific responsibilities expected of those who supervise and manage others within the organization. In addition, this training will include techniques for recognizing high-risk employees and managing potentially volatile situations involving adverse employment actions. This training typically lasts from 1 hour to 1.5 hours, but more abbreviated video and CD-based presentations can be made available.
- C. Critical Personnel Training. This is generally for human resource, security, legal and other managers who have primary responsibility in preventing and managing high-risk incidents. While focusing on the above considerations provided to other employees, this also covers the entire process of threat assessment, response and management, including the termination process and the utilization of outside resources. A basic version can be presented within 1.5 hours, but 3 hours is

recommended. The 3-hour version also includes a discussion of response strategies to common scenarios, along with a presentation of techniques that can be used when having to de-fuse difficult or enraged employees.

### **Training Materials**

Each manager will be provided with a copy of Dr. McElhaney's *Aggression in the Workplace: A Quick Reference Guide for Managers*, which summarizes relevant issues and procedures. This guide will be adapted and modified to address company-specific issues, and will include the company's logo, etc. Attendees in the Critical Personnel Training will also receive a copy of the power-point presentation and a hard-bound copy of Dr. McElhaney's book, *Aggression in the Workplace: Preventing and Managing High-Risk Behavior*.

### **Topics for Presentation and Discussion**

Training topics will typically include (but are not limited to) the following:

- The sources and nature of workplace violence
- Principles of threat assessment
- Understanding the process of becoming violence
- What constitutes threatening behavior
- High risk indicators/Common warning signs
- Enlisting community resources
- When to call in law enforcement
- Common personality and emotional issues
- Common situational factors: internal and external
- Domestic-related threats
- Common issues, i.e., The "Disgruntled Employee"
- The "Overly Attached Employee"
- The "Workplace Bully"
- Common organizational triggers for violence
- Risk containment techniques
- Techniques of defusing and crisis negotiation
- Threat team roles and responsibilities
- Documentation
- Establishing an effective reporting system
- Safe terminations
- Common mistakes that lead to workplace violence
- 10 steps to an effective prevention program
- Hiring considerations
- Basic guidelines for managers
- De-escalation techniques

### Consultants and Trainers

Marc McElhaney, Ph.D. is a Consulting Psychologist and Director of Critical Response Associates and the Centers for Dispute Resolution, specializing in threat assessment and crisis management. He has worked with corporations and government agencies in hundreds of high-risk critical incidents, typically involving an active threat of violence. After years of being called in to consult and negotiate in high-risk incidents, Dr. McElhaney has recently authored a text for managers, entitled *Aggression in the Workplace: Preventing and Managing High-Risk Behavior*, published by Authorhouse Publications.

Todd Conklin, Ph.D., is a Senior Training Specialist at the University of California and the Los Alamos National Laboratory. Dr. Conklin enjoys a national reputation for his creative and humorous approach to sensitive and difficult topics. He has developed and conducted training programs in the areas of workplace violence, hostage negotiation, conflict management, security awareness, supervisor skills, for 11 years with the University of California and the Las Alamos laboratory, the FBI Academy and many public and private organizations throughout the world. He is the author of *Simple Revolutionary Acts: Ideas to Revitalize Yourself and Your Workplace*.

Robert P. Ehrlich, Ph.D. has been consulting for over twenty years with corporate human resources, security, medical and legal staff regarding employees with aggression, substance abuse, psychiatric and other behavioral problems. He has provided threat assessment services, employee assistance programs, and management training to major employers in both the public and private sectors. Dr. Ehrlich has extensive experience in training supervisors how to effectively detect, intervene with, and monitor troubled employees, and how to safely terminate aggressive employees when necessary. He also works in the areas of corporate crisis management, executive coaching and management consultation.

Carol H. Beavers, Ph.D. is a management consultant who develops strategies for helping management deal with crises within their organizations, in addition to providing counseling to impacted employees. She provides training throughout the United States in regard to harassment, workplace violence and critical incident management. Carol has worked with numerous governmental and private organizations and served as a consultant to companies impacted by the Oklahoma City bombing, the Atlanta "Day Trader" shooting and the 2001 World Trade Center attack. She has appeared on CNN and the Fox Network and regularly appears on local media, as the crisis expert following high profile events.

### **Our Clients**

CRA has provided consultation and training services to employers in diverse industries and organizations that have included:

- Manufacturing
- Telecommunications
- Food and Bottling Services
- Hotels and Restaurants
- Hospitals and Health Care
- Energy Services
- Banking and Finance
- Education
- Entertainment
- Retail
- Public Sector
- Public Utilities
- Computer/Software
- Information Technology
- Law firms and their clients

It is our policy not to reveal clients by name in our informational material. References and contact information are available on request.