

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

What we learned at a violence in the workplace seminar in Pasadena



Jim Potts, right, owner of Potts & Associates, presented a free seminar at the Holiday Inn Express in Pasadena this week on "The Impact of Domestic Terrorism in the Workplace." (Photo by Walt Mancini/Pasadena Star-News/SCNG)

By [Kevin Smith](#), San Gabriel Valley Tribune

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Most California businesses have procedures in place to address an earthquake or fire.

But what about incidents of workplace violence, or even domestic terrorism?

Many companies have no plan to deal with such events. But incidents like the attack on health workers at the Inland Regional Center in San Bernardino in 2015 — in which 14 people were killed and 22 injured — have brought the need for companies to prepare for violence in their offices into greater focus.

Domestic terror attacks remain rare. Still, hundreds of thousands of workers — mostly police and mental health workers, but many in retail, education and medicine, among other industries — become victims of violent crimes each year, according to the most recent data on workplace violence [compiled by the U.S. Department of Justice](#).

Jim Potts, CEO of [Potts & Associates](#), a Pasadena-based employment consulting firm, is looking to educate businesses on what they need to do to respond to threats to their workers.

Potts ought to know. He served as a Los Angeles County Sheriff's deputy for nearly 20 years is also a certified terrorism investigator and a lawyer.

Potts assists employers in conducting site assessments, preparing workplace security plans and educating employees on their preparedness in the event that their workplace is confronted with an active shooter or some other form of violence.

On Tuesday he held a series of seminars on “The Impact of Domestic Violence on the Workplace” at the Holiday Inn Express in Pasadena.

Potts said employers need to alert their human resources department if they feel an employee is exhibiting signs that could lead to violent behavior. Those signs include a fascination with weapons, severe stress or depression, decreased productivity, social isolation and a drastic change in personality, among others.

He cited a case where a company wanted to rehire an employee who had been fired two years earlier for beating up a co-worker. The employee claimed he was a changed person, but Potts advised the company to not rehire him.

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“If he turns around and does any act of violence the person he beats up or hits is going to have a field day with his attorney suing the business,” he said.

He also advises people to refrain from carrying concealed weapons.

“More and more you're starting to hear about people trying to get concealed carry permits,” he said. “But you should stay away from that because it can get you in trouble. If you get out there and start blasting and shooting away and you shoot the wrong person thinking you're going to save some lives — and you kill somebody — you're going to jail. It's just that simple.”

Potts offered three things employees should do when confronted with an active shooter in the workplace:

- Run — Have an escape route and plan in mind, leave your belongings behind and keep your hands visible when law enforcement arrives

- Hide — Hide in an area out of the shooter’s view, block the entry to your hiding place and lock the door when possible

- Fight — Use this as a last resort and only when you feel your life is in imminent danger. Try to incapacitate the shooter, act with aggression and throw objects at the attacker.

Potts said businesses need to have a violence-in the-workplace strategy at the ready, not only to protect their employees, but also to avoid costly litigation down the road. There are numerous situations that can lead to unwanted legal action.

The [National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health](#) estimates that litigation related to violence in the workplace amounts to about \$120 billion a year.

The Workplace Violence Safety Act of 1994 requires that employers take “reasonable steps” to address credible threats that could lead to workplace violence. It allows employers to get a temporary restraining order and permanent injunction on behalf of their employees if they feel unsafe or threatened in the workplace.

A business can be sued for failing to protect its employees as a result of negligent hiring practices, a hostile work environment or negligent supervision.

Potts said employers have plenty of resources to draw from when crafting a workplace safety plan.

“There are videos out there and books, brochures, CD-ROMS...and anger management specialists,” he said.

Arthur Silbergeld, an attorney with the Los Angeles law firm [Thompson Coburn LLP](#), was also on hand at Tuesday’s seminars to offer legal perspectives on workplace violence.

“The law imposes a ‘duty of care’ upon employers to take action to protect their employees,” Silbergeld said. “There has to be knowledge that there is a risk and that there is an obligation to do something in the face of that risk.”



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