

OPM 98-9

To: All Appointing Authorities

From: Oscar B. Jackson, Jr.
Administrator, Office of Personnel Management
Secretary of Human Resources

James L. Howard
Executive Director, Oklahoma Merit Protection Commission

Date: February 19, 1998

**Subject: Dealing with Workplace Violence
A Guide for Agency Planners**

Incidents of workplace violence are no longer rare and they create a high level of liability to employers. First, there are direct costs through injuries, loss of life and civil litigation as employees hold the employer directly responsible for the costs of injuries and increased stress related to an actual event. In addition, there are indirect costs resulting from lowered morale, long lasting emotional trauma to survivors, diminished productivity and increased turnover. Unfortunately, as Oklahomans, we know these costs all too well. The development of an effective workplace violence program can significantly reduce the potential for an incident of workplace violence and the direct and indirect costs associated with such an event.

Section 840-2.2 (5) of Title 74, the Oklahoma Personnel Act, directs the Administrator of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and the Executive Director of the Oklahoma Merit Protection Commission (MPC) to "...assist agencies in developing policies to prevent violence in state government workplaces without abridging the rights of state employees." Fortunately, these agencies have several programs in place to both help state agencies plan for workplace safety and prevent situations from escalating into violence.

To aid state agencies in developing workplace violence prevention strategies and plans, we have attached Dealing with Workplace Violence: A Guide for Agency Planners developed by the United States Office of Personnel Management. This handbook introduces a process for developing an effective

workplace violence program. This is done from the perspective of the public sector and with a full

understanding of the rights of government employees. This document may also be found on the Internet at <http://www.opm.gov/workplac>.

Poor conflict resolution skills is often cited as factor in workplace violence. If violence is the method of conflict resolution in an employee's past experience in the home, this may be the method most readily available in workplace conflicts. In addition, supervisors who are well trained in a variety of conflict resolution procedures are better able to defuse potentially violent situations. The following programs may be of assistance to agencies in this area.

- MPC's Voluntary Mediation Program is available to all state agencies and employees and provides a process where parties to a dispute may work to resolve a conflict to the mutual satisfaction of all. To find out more about this program call Scott Lange at (405) 525-9144. Merit Rule 455:10-17-8 provides details concerning this process.
- MPC also provides more formal conflict resolution services in areas where they have jurisdiction. These services are available to classified state employees and, in some situations, to unclassified state employees. Information about these services may be obtained by contacting the Commission's offices at (405) 525-9144.
- The Human Resource Development Services (HRDS) department of the Office of Personnel Management offers a one-day course on Conflict Management that is open to all state employees. Information about enrolling in this course may be obtained by contacting Grayson Bedwell at (405) 521-6334.

The state Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provides the following services. These services are confidential and may be accessed by calling EAP offices at (405) 947-7576.

- EAP will provides counseling and referral assistance to state employees and their families in seeking help with medical or mental health problems, including alcohol or drug abuse, emotional, marital, family relations, financial or other personal problems. In most cases, additional counseling and treatment service charges are covered by the employee's health insurance plan.
- EAP staff are available to assist supervisors who are concerned about an employee's behavior and/or having difficulty dealing with an employee.

- EAP staff are experienced in serving on Threat Assessment/Management Teams and are available in crisis situations.
- EAP staff are experienced in debriefing survivors if a violent incident takes place and can quickly get needed services in place to aid employees and employers in returning to normal functioning.

- EAP staff is available to consult with agency management in the development of a Drug Free Workplace program.

In addition to the course on Conflict Management mentioned earlier, HRDS provides the following courses that may be helpful in preventing workplace violence. Contact Grayson Bedwell at (405) 521-6334

- How to Handle the Troubled Employee - This course is taught by EAP staff.
- Workplace: A Supervisor's Guide - This course is taught by OK Capitol Patrol staff.
- You Angry, Me Angry - This course is taught by OK Capitol Patrol Staff.
- Other HRDS courses that may indirectly contribute to reducing the possibility of workplace violence include topics such as negotiating skills, communications skills, team building, grievance management and sexual harassment.

Please feel free to make use of these resources as you develop and implement your workplace violence prevention program.

Attachment