

OSHA Issues Revised Guidelines Protecting Healthcare & Social Service Workers from Workplace Violence

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On April 2, OSHA issued a revision of its Guidelines for Preventing Workplace Violence for Healthcare and Social Service Workers. This recent revision updates previous versions issued in 1996 and 2004 by incorporating research performed over the last decade into the causes of and risk factors for workplace violence, as well as preventative measures that can be taken to address that risk.

The Guidelines summarize best practices and suggest methods for reducing the risk of violence in healthcare and social service settings. They outline risk factors for identifying and assessing violence hazards and present a number of key risk mitigation elements, including safety & health training, management commitment, and worker participation programs. Although the Guidelines cover a broad spectrum of workers, they do identify five specific settings of interest: (1) hospitals; (2) residential treatment facilities; (3) non-residential treatment and service facilities; (4) community care settings; and (5) field work settings.

Addressing workplace violence is particularly important in the healthcare and social service fields, as BLS estimates that those industries were responsible for more than 70% of the 23,000 significant injuries due to assault at work reported in 2013. Additionally, healthcare and social service workers are nearly four times more likely to be injured as a result of workplace violence than the average private sector employee.

While these Guidelines and “best practices” are seemingly voluntary, the Occupational Safety and Health Act imposes on employers a “general duty” to provide their employees safe workplaces. This “general duty” clause essentially serves as a catch-all allowing enforcement for conditions and incidents that may not violate specific mandates under the OSH Act or OSHA’s regulations thereunder. Accordingly, even though guidelines are not regulations, employers should pay close attention to guidelines and best practices because they can still be used as the basis for enforcement actions.

For more information, click [here](#) to see the Revised Guidelines.