Introduction

Purpose of Handbook

This handbook, developed by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management and the Interagency Working Group on Violence in the Workplace, is the result of a cooperative effort of many Federal agencies sharing their expertise in preventing and dealing with workplace violence. It is intended to assist those who are responsible for establishing workplace violence initiatives at their agencies. However, we anticipate that its usefulness will extend well beyond the planning phase since many of the sections provide information that can be helpful for managers and specialists as they deal with difficult workplace violence situations.

Overview

Part I of the handbook introduces a process for developing an effective workplace violence program. It guides an agency's planning group through the basic steps of developing programs, policies, and prevention strategies.

Case studies

Part II presents a set of case studies for the planning group to use in analyzing agency needs, planning programs, and training personnel to respond to workplace violence situations. The case studies introduce a wide range of challenges an agency may face, and they provide discussion questions to help the planning group develop the most effective approach to these challenges.

Basic technical information

Part III offers basic technical information on several areas of expertise that may be involved in workplace violence programs. Its purpose is to serve as a reference for planning group members as they find themselves working with colleagues whose professional background is different from their own. While in no way comprehensive enough to serve as a training manual, it helps the planning group become more familiar with the technical language, legal constraints, and other special issues that each profession brings to the interdisciplinary group.

Guidance

The guidance is based on the collective expertise and experience of Federal Government law enforcement officers, security specialists, criminal investigators, attorneys, employee relations specialists, Employee Assistance Program counselors,

Overview (continued)

forensic psychologists, and union officials. It consists primarily of "lessons learned" from many years of experience with actual cases involving potentially violent employees.

The guidance covers not only incidents of physical violence, such as shootings and assaults, but also the far more prevalent incidents of intimidating, "bullying," and other inappropriate behavior that frighten employees. It covers incidents involving employees and incidents involving individuals from outside the agency threatening violence against agency employees.

The Importance of Planning

The central theme which emerges from the shared experience of these specialists from different disciplines is this: While some cases of workplace violence can be dealt with swiftly and easily by a manager with the assistance of just one specialist or one office, most cases can be resolved far more easily and effectively if there is a joint effort which has been planned out in advance by specialists from different disciplines.

Be prepared

Many who have never experienced workplace violence say, *I don't need to worry about this. It would never happen in my office.* Violent incidents are relatively rare, but they do occur, and lives can be lost. A little preparation and investment in prevention **now** could save a life. There is no strategy that works for every situation, but the likelihood of a successful resolution is much greater if you have prepared ahead of time.

The benefits of a joint effort

The experience of agencies who have developed programs has shown that managers are more willing to confront employees who exhibit disruptive and intimidating behavior when they are supported by a group of specialists who have done their homework and are prepared to reach out to others when they know a situation is beyond their expertise. This team approach promotes creative solutions and much needed support for the manager in dealing with difficult situations that might otherwise be ignored.

Deal with disruptive situations

Ignoring a situation usually results in an escalation of the problem. Morale and productivity are lowered; effective employees leave the organization. On the other hand, dealing effectively with situations like hostility, intimidation, and disruptive types of conflict creates a more productive workplace. This can have a

The Importance of Planning (continued)

deterrent effect on anyone contemplating or prone to committing acts of physical violence. Employees will see that there are consequences for their actions and that disruptive behavior is not tolerated in their organization.

This handbook is intended to complement existing Federal Government publications on workplace violence, such as the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health's *Violence in the Workplace Risk Factors and Prevention Strategies*, and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's *Guidelines for Preventing Workplace Violence for Health Care and Social Service Workers.*