



## **Recognition of Individuals with the Potential for Workplace Violence**

The risk of workplace violence can be minimized by the careful observation of behavior. Specific stress factors, behaviors, and personality traits have been associated, after the fact, with almost every incidence of workplace violence. The presence of several of these indicators greatly increases the likelihood of violent actions. Most people will not just “snap”. An escalating series of clues usually precedes an act of workplace violence. The risk of a violent outburst is greatly increased when the following warning signs are ignored.

### **WARNING SIGNS**

**Boundary crossing** includes pushing the limits of acceptable workplace behavior and continual testing of established rules.

**Chemical dependence** upon alcohol and/or drugs may agitate or create paranoia and aggressive behavior.

**Concentration problems** such as difficulty recalling instructions, forgetfulness, repetition of errors, and staring into space indicate a troubled employee.

**Depression** can potentially cause sufferers to commit a violent act either upon themselves or other. Symptoms of depression include: despair, ambivalence, slowed work pace, continual sad or blank facial expressions, withdrawal, self-condemnation and self-destructive behavior, hopelessness, helplessness, inappropriate guilt/shame, and poor personal hygiene.

**History of violence**, including domestic abuse, is the best predictor of violent behavior.

**Inconsistent work patterns and attendance problems** include periods of very high and very low productivity as well as unexplained or improbable excuses for absences.

**Obsessive interest in weapons and violent incidents** may be revealed by preoccupation with hobbies such as marksmanship. An obsession with an impending apocalypse, or destruction of the world, is also common among unstable individuals.

**Obsession with job** causes a deeper sense of loss in the case of a poor performance review or termination. These individuals may be loners, having little else of importance in their lives.

**Pathological blamers** cannot take responsibility for their own actions. They will not admit wrongdoing, even for minor mistakes, always blaming other people, the organization, or the system.

**Personality disorders** can result in antisocial behavior such as repeated fighting and domestic violence. These individuals have little remorse about wrongdoing and will find ways to justify their violent behavior. Mood shifts, inappropriate anger, skillful manipulation of others, and a preoccupation with self are indicators of personality disorders.

**Personal Stress** can result in excessive personal phone calls, desk pounding or throwing of objects, crying, lapses in attention, and general frustration with the surrounding environment. Debt, separation, divorce, or the death of a relative can all cause excessive stress.

**Poor interpersonal relationships** may result in belligerence, overreaction to criticism, and verbal harassment.

**Psychosis** is a loss of contact with reality which may be manifested as paranoia, loss of association during conversations, flat facial expressions, extreme ambivalence, hallucinations, poor insight, talking to self, or bizarre delusions.

**Romantic obsession** is a fixation upon and idealized romantic love for another person. Behavioral signs may include stalking, numerous phone calls, spying, and unwanted visits and gifts.

**Safety issues** like recklessness and a sudden increase in accident rate reveal lapses in concentration and disregard for personal/coworker safety.

**Unusual/changed behavior** includes verbal outbursts, inappropriate remarks, and threats such as “they’ll regret this”. A series of escalating threats is a particularly important indicator of potential violent actions.