HOTEL WORKERS AT RISK

What the Hotel Industry Can Learn from the Healthcare Industry About

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE PREVENTION

omnigo

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECURITY INNOVATION: LEVERAGING IDEAS FROM COMPETITORS AND OTHER INDUSTRIES

Often, businesses don't think in terms of innovation when thinking about security. Security isn't, after all, how most businesses make their money. Yet security missteps do impact business reputations – and ultimately revenue. Not only that, but most businesses have a genuine interest in keeping their employees and customers safe.

That's why the American Hotel and Lodging Association introduced the 5-Star Promise, an unprecedented voluntary agreement among members – including Hilton, Hyatt, IHG, Marriott, and the Wyndham – to commit to making their industry safer. Brands participating in the 5-Star Promise agree to provide US hotel employees with hotel safety devices (ESDs) and improve training and other resources to create a safer workplace.

When it comes to addressing workplace violence and implementing prevention programs, the hotel industry could learn a lot from is the healthcare industry. According to OSHA, hospitals are one of the most dangerous places to work.

The healthcare industry sees one of the highest rates of workplace violence among all industries. The U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics reports that healthcare and social service workers are five times more likely to experience workplace violence than all other workers, and their work-related injuries comprise 73% of those across all industries.

The problem of workplace violence in healthcare has been addressed often by academic studies, certifying organizations, and detailed state and proposed federal legislation.

Few other industries have received this much attention when it comes to determining the most effective solutions to workplace violence. For this reason, guidelines and requirements around workplace violence prevention in healthcare should serve as a model for other industries, and the hotel industry in particular could benefit from a few key insights.

HEALTHCARE WORKERS, HOTEL WORKERS, AND THE PROBLEM OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY

Each industry has unique circumstances in which workplace violence occurs. Not every solution used in the healthcare industry is going to be applicable for the hotel industry. However, because of the thoroughness with which the problem has been studied and addressed in the healthcare industry, there are some proven solutions other industries should consider adopting and adapting.

In fact, the hotel industry shares some contextual commonalities with the healthcare industry that impact workplace violence. OSHA reports that 80% of violent incidents in healthcare settings are caused by patients inflicting violence on healthcare workers. One contributing factor is simply access. Clinical healthcare workers are often alone in the room with patients, making them easy targets if a patient should become violent.

In the hotel industry, workers also often find themselves alone with a guest in a guest room, making them easy targets of violence. For this reason, housekeepers in particular find they frequently become victims of violence at work.

The source of workplace violence can be hotel guests or other hotel employees, and workplace violence doesn't only include assault. Bullying and harassment are particularly common and can have a lasting impact on the health and wellbeing of hotel staff.

Hotel employees often work late-night shifts with few other employees around them. They work in isolated spaces, spread-out facilities, and inside guest rooms, and alcohol is usually readily available. These environmental factors, along with permissive culture, can make the hotel setting a distressing place to work for some employees.

A survey of Chicago-area hotel workers reveals that 58% of hotel employees have been harassed by a guest, but of those who have experienced harassment, only 33% reported it to their supervisor.

Reasons cited for not reporting it include:

▶ Belief that very little can or will be done to address the problem

▶ Acceptance that this behavior is so commonplace it's part of the job

▶ Fear that they will be told it's their own fault

▶ Fear the guest will return and retaliate

Of those who did report the behavior, only 38% were satisfied with the response.

Moreover, most incidents of harassment aren't required to be reported by OSHA, since they may not result in physical injury. But that doesn't mean the victim isn't injured. 58% of women who experienced harassment by a guest felt in was unsafe to return to work afterwards, and PTSD and symptoms of trauma commonly result from harassment.
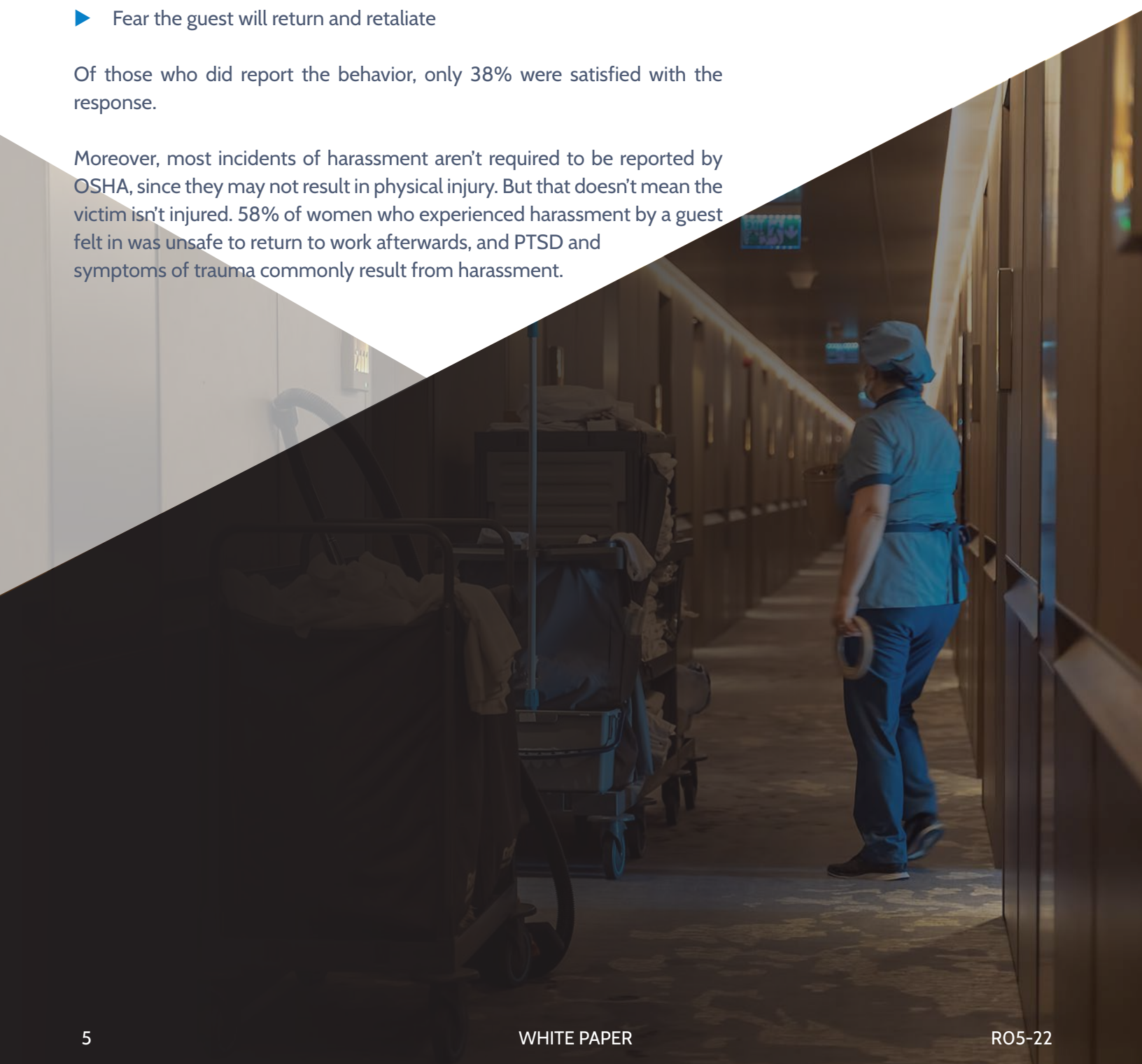
HOTELS AND MUNICIPALITIES RESPOND

In response to growing awareness about workplace violence in the hotel industry, members of the American Hotel and Lodging Association (AHLA) – nearly 60 brands, representing more than 2,000 hotel properties in the US – have voluntarily united to commit to making the workplace safer for hotel employees.

The 5-Star Promise focuses on developing anti-sexual harassment policies and providing employees with anti-harassment and anti-trafficking training, as well as employee safety devices, or panic buttons. AHLA has also helped streamline implementation by partnering with employee safety device providers to secure discounts on the devices for their members.

In addition to this private commitment among the major hotel brands, many governments and municipalities have begun to introduce regulations aimed at protecting hotel workers from violence and injuries resulting from their duties at work.

One solution that stands out as a primary focus across all commitments and regulations is the distribution of panic buttons to hotel workers. Hotels in the past have been reluctant to distribute panic buttons because of the expense, but with greater demand and awareness of the problem, including regulations forcing the solution in some cities, hotels are stepping up. There is no doubt that panic buttons help workers feel safer, and they can be effective at preventing or mitigating the severity of workplace violence. But are they enough?

ARE PANIC BUTTONS ENOUGH?

What the Hotel Industry Can Learn from the Healthcare Industry

Panic buttons are a reactive solution. To truly prevent hotel staff from becoming victims of workplace violence, hotels need to provide outstanding violence prevention training, develop targeted solutions based on robust data, and develop a zero-tolerance culture around workplace violence.

Consider how the hotel industry can learn from the best practices for workplace prevention programs in the healthcare industry. Academic researchers, professional and certifying organizations, and legislators have devoted ample resources to studying and regulating workplace violence prevention programs in this high-risk industry.

One resource that's been viewed as a model and roadmap for developing an effective workplace violence prevention program in the healthcare industry is the California Code of Regulations, Title 8, section 3342. This is a detailed set of legal requirements for healthcare organizations in California.

When these regulations were developed in California, they were notable because of the unusual level of detail included in the requirements. In 2018, California began revising their workplace violence prevention regulations for general industry, the category under which hotels fall. Public stakeholder comments about the proposed general industry workplace violence prevention regulations overwhelmingly referenced the detailed regulations outlined in the California code for the healthcare industry. Stakeholders argued that for the greatest wellbeing of workers in other industries, the general industry regulations should be modeled on the specific and detailed regulations set forth in the healthcare code.

AMONG MANY IMPORTANT SOLUTIONS THAT HAVE SEEN PROVEN RESULTS IN THE HEALTHCARE INDUSTRY, THESE THREE PRIORITIES STAND OUT:

1. Training
2. Reporting
3. Culture and communication

The hotel industry's recent focus on panic buttons is important and commendable, but in order to develop the most effective workplace violence prevention program, panic buttons must be part of a more comprehensive program that adopts and adapts the three priorities that have proven to be effective in healthcare settings.

There are many training programs to choose from, and it's important to choose one that feels specifically relevant to the people being trained. Some workplace violence prevention training programs are more relevant to the security team than the employees in other departments, and, in some cases, programs should be nuanced among several departments. What's relevant to the housekeeping staff might be different from what's relevant to the front desk or café staff. That's why a multidisciplinary group of hotel employees should be involved in choosing, creating, reviewing, and updating workplace violence prevention training programs for their organization. Hotel employees know what they encounter every day and will be the best people to evaluate whether a program will meet their needs.

Once chosen, implementing a relevant training program means tailoring the program even further to the employees being trained. Ideally, trainers should include both a security professional and a hotel employee from the same general area as those being trained. Even seasonal and part-time employees need comprehensive workplace violence prevention training, and all employees should repeat training yearly.

TRAINING

There are many training programs to choose from, and it's important to choose one that feels specifically relevant to the people being trained. Some workplace violence prevention training programs are more relevant to the security team than the employees in other departments, and, in some cases, programs should be nuanced among several departments. What's relevant to the housekeeping staff might be different from what's relevant to the front desk or café staff. That's why a multidisciplinary group of hotel employees should be involved in choosing, creating, reviewing, and updating workplace violence prevention training programs for their organization. Hotel employees know what they encounter every day and will be the best people to evaluate whether a program will meet their needs.

Once chosen, implementing a relevant training program means tailoring the program even further to the employees being trained. Ideally, trainers should include both a security professional and a hotel employee from the same general area as those being trained. Even seasonal and part-time employees need comprehensive workplace violence prevention training, and all employees should repeat training yearly.

REPORTING AND ANALYSIS

Complete, efficient, and consistent reporting is the number one solution that enables all other workplace violence interventions to succeed.

You can't know where your employees need extra support or which intervention will be most effective if you don't know exactly what's happening, where it's happening, and when it's happening. It's also difficult to justify additional spending for security needs when you don't have robust data to back up your requests.

When you know exactly where and what your problems are, you can begin to develop an informed strategy for solving them.

WHAT ARE SOME HELPFUL METRICS TO TRACK?

▶ **Rate of violent incidents**
Knowing the rate of incidents in each department helps you identify high-risk departments that might need more resources or an updated violence prevention plan.

▶ **Severity of incidents**
When you have to prioritize, begin with departments that have both a high rate and high severity of incidents

▶ **Location, time, and day of occurrence**
You might find you need more security presence in a particular wing of your hotel on Friday evenings, or you mind find that housekeepers would be safer working in pairs during certain hours or in certain locations on the property. You could also find that violent incidents increase during certain yearly events that happen in your community, and you may change your operating protocols during those events to help prevent increased violence.

▶ **Patron information**
Some municipalities now require hotels to ban visitors who have been credibly accused on violent behavior for 3-5 years. Whether or not you are required to do so, banning these visitors keeps your staff safer at work and helps them feel supported.

▶ **Incident details**
You may notice patterns in violent behavior that help you develop more effective prevention techniques.

▶ **Response details**
Tracking response details helps you discover what's working and what's not, so you can use the data to optimize your training and processes.

▶ **Mishaps**
Did something "almost" go wrong? Recording mishaps helps you learn what caused the situation to "almost" go wrong, and what you did to prevent a bigger problem.

The only way to improve your workplace violence prevention strategies is to keep meticulous records of what's happening, what you're doing about it, and how it's working. A multidisciplinary team should regularly review the data from your reports to learn what's working well and consider what can be improved.

CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION

Reporting is the one intervention that enables all others to succeed, but without the right culture and communication strategies around workplace violence, you won't get the data you need.

Of the hospitality workers surveyed in Chicago, only 33% said they told a supervisor or manager when a guest harassed them. Underreporting is a significant problem in the hotel industry, and the problem starts with culture.

WHAT FACTORS LEAD TO UNDERREPORTING

Acceptance
Especially for hotel housekeepers, workplace violence happens so frequently that employees view it as part of their job. When it's perceived as normal, it's unlikely to be reported.

Inefficacy
43% of hotel workers surveyed in Chicago say they know someone who reported workplace violence, and nothing was done about it. When employees don't feel like anything will change, they don't report.

Fear
Sometimes hotel workers fear they will be told it's their fault or that the guest will be allowed to return and then will retaliate.

Transience
A lot of hotel workers are seasonal employees. It's difficult for hotels to provide detailed training and keep short-term employees informed of reporting protocols.
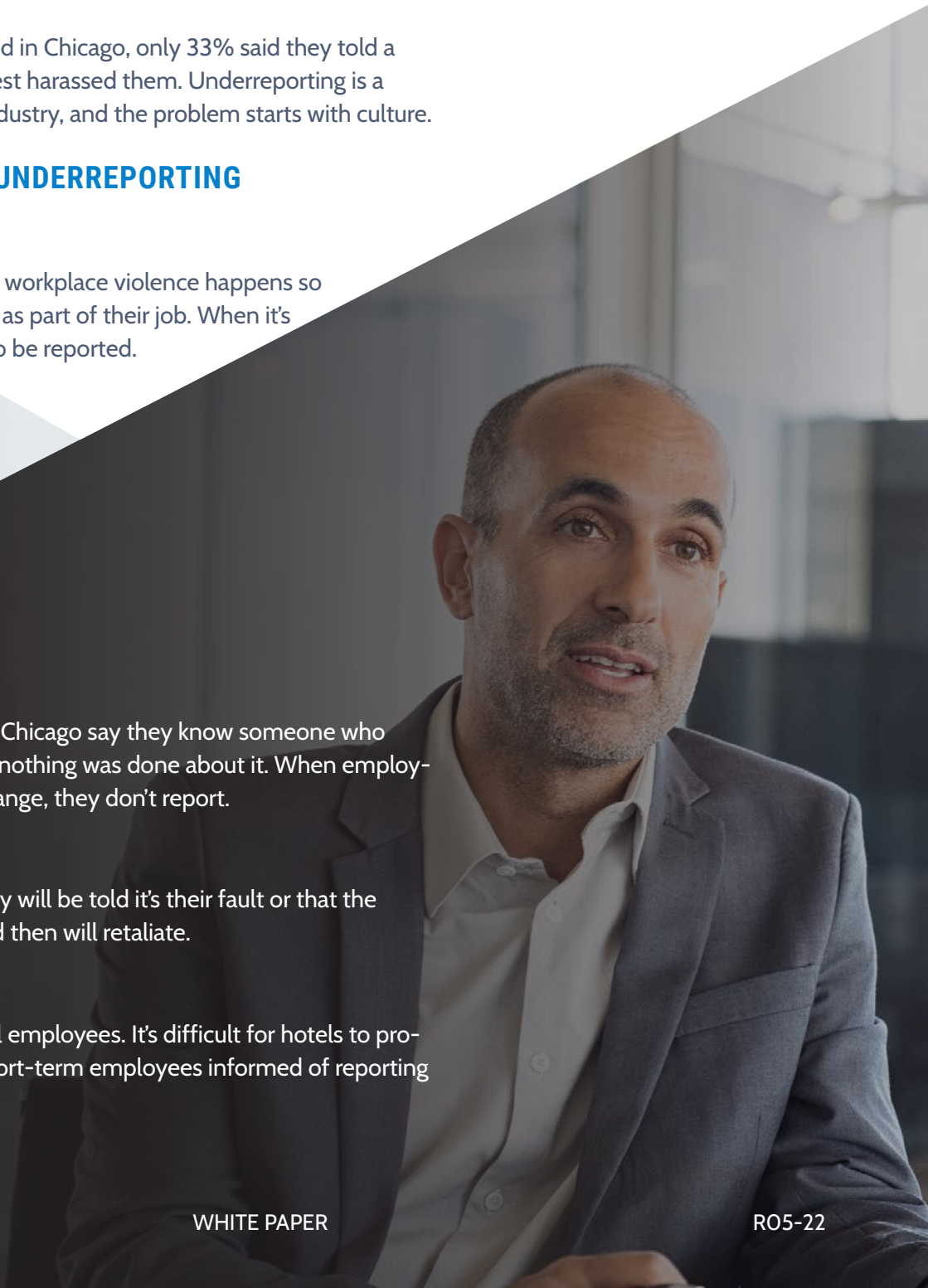
To overcome these obstacles and get the robust data your organization needs, it's important to cultivate a culture of reporting. Reporting should be encouraged, supported, and required.

You don't have to limit your reporting to what's required by OSHA. Establish a clear definition of what workplace violence is, including all forms of harassment and bullying. Make sure all hotel employees know exactly what offenses are reportable, and make reporting a requirement, not an option. The more complete your reporting is, the better picture you'll get of where your problems lie and what tailored solutions you can develop to solve them.

Creating a culture of reporting requires an organizational mindset change.

Consider the factors that lead to underreporting and what kind of cultural shifts need to happen to address them.

Acceptance
Communicate frequently to your employees that violence is not a part of the job; it's a problem you're committed to addressing.

Inefficacy
Follow up on all reports of violent incidents. Inform the victim of what your organization is doing to address the particular problem and help prevent the type of problem from happening in the future.

Fear
Make it clear that there will never be any blame or retribution for reporting. Everyone from the C-suite on down should be involved in communicating that your organization supports a culture of reporting so that you can all work together to ensure a safe environment for all employees.

Transience
Include all short-term employees in some form of workplace violence prevention training and ensure they're aware of reporting requirements. The safety of your guests and your entire workforce is worth the

FINALLY, COMMUNICATION IS KEY

The messages above must be communicated regularly – during daily huddles, in newsletters, on signs throughout your facilities, and in training,

However, communication isn't only about getting your message across. It's also about listening to every stakeholder in your organization and giving everyone a place at the table. Committees that analyze the data you gather, respond to reports, and develop workplace violence intervention plans should be multidisciplinary. There should always be both security professionals and other hotel employees at the table, ideally from multiple departments. Not only will you gain a more complete perspective of the problems and possible solutions, but you will also create a culture where everyone feels responsible for working together to create a safer community at work.

THE RIGHT TOOLS SIMPLIFY WORKPLACE VIOLENCE PREVENTION

Cultural change is important, but it's difficult to implement an effective workplace violence prevention program without the right tools in place.

Make it easy for hotel staff to report incidents by using a robust records management system (RMS) with customizable fields and mobile capabilities. Reporting can be fast and simple and can take place wherever there's a computer or mobile device.

Documenting workplace violence is only the first step, however. A good software solution will not only streamline reporting processes, but it will include easy and customizable report-generation capabilities that help your organization analyze and respond to the state of workplace violence on a regular basis. It can also be used to keep track of who has been trained and when the last training was so you can ensure your staff is always knowledgeable and prepared.

ABOUT OMNIGO

For more than 20 years, Omnigo software solutions have been the preferred choice for law enforcement, education, healthcare, gaming, hospitality, and corporate enterprises. Currently, Omnigo's solutions are used by over 2,000 customers in 20 different countries. At Omnigo, we're committed to helping customers secure their organizations' property, control operational costs, and ensure the safety of the general public.

We believe our customers deserve the best support available to protect their people, assets, and brand. We also understand how challenging it can be to protect the community without the proper resources. We're here to arm users with the best tools in the industry. With a team that includes former law enforcement, first responders, and other public safety professionals, we're uniquely qualified to understand exactly what our customers need to protect their community.

LEARN MORE OR REQUEST A LIVE DEMO

call: 866.421.2374
email: sales@omnigo.com

omnigo