

Curbing Violence in Retail Workplaces

More than a thousand British Columbians become casualties of on-the-job violence in retail workplaces every year. Of particular concern are the unpredictable nature of such incidents and the psychological or emotional post-traumatic effects.

As with other safety issues, employers have specific obligations under the *Occupational Health and Safety Regulation*. They must assess the risk of workplace violence; and where a potential for risk occurs, employers must put in place policies and procedures to eliminate or minimize such risks. Employers must ensure that workers are aware of and trained to follow safe procedures.

Violence in the workplace is a particularly serious problem in British Columbia. About 10 per cent of all injuries due to workplace violence happen to workers in the retail sector. Beyond its high volume, on-the-job violence in the retail sector typically disrupts individual workplaces more than other types of injuries. It also adds to overall retail compensation expenditures. Affected workers need more time to recover, 50 per cent longer than other claimants. In small retail businesses, violence cases cost 20 per cent more on average than other claims; the cost is 60 per cent higher in medium-size and large retailers.

Overall, for the five years ending 2004, workplace violence in the retail sector led to nearly 30,000 days lost and generated claims costs exceeding \$4.2 million. It is not possible to quantify the considerable and devastating human toll of all this on injured employees and their families and co-workers.

Collaborating with WorkSafeBC, the retail sector is meeting the challenge head-on.

A partnership with Retail BC saw the creation of an education program on violence prevention for workers and employers. It is free, can be taken online, and leads to a certificate on completion. (For more details visit www.retailbc.com.)

A broader effort, involving trade associations and several employers, produced the booklet *Health and Safety Guide for New Retail Workers*. This resource helps increase awareness of basic health and safety issues and provides some specific safety tips for retail workers. (It can be downloaded at <http://smallbusiness.healthandsafetycentre.org>; click on "retail" under "resources.")

Now a more comprehensive, complementary retail publication is being developed to address the issue of violence prevention. Collaborating with WorkSafeBC is the Retail Council of Canada

(Western Canada), along with 7-Eleven, the BC Liquor Distribution Branch, Canada Safeway, Costco, H.Y. Louie Co., Home Depot, Kerrisdale Cameras, London Drugs, Mountain Equipment Co-Op, Overwaitea Foods, Rogers Video, RONA, Sears Canada, Staples, The Bay, and Thrifty Foods.

All have shared their best practices in this new publication because, as one corporate participant declared, "There are no trade secrets in safety." Tentatively titled *Preventing Retail Violence and Theft*, the new booklet is intended for both employers and workers. It will focus on:

- **Prevention:** Planning by employers and supervisors to make their employees and business less vulnerable to violence
- **Handling Violence:** Preparing workers to handle threatening situations: robberies, attacks, difficult customers, or simply suspicious persons
- **The Aftermath:** Advice for dealing with what follows violent incidents
- **Practical Tips:** Information to help individual workers and supervisors prevent violence and protect themselves if threats arise
- **Protection:** Tools to help improve security and service and curtail theft
- **Resources:** A sample security checklist for employers, a workers' security feedback form, and a violent incident report form.

Before finalizing the booklet for publication in early 2006, we are seeking input and comments from the retail community and others who may be interested. The draft can be obtained online from <http://smallbusiness.healthandsafetycentre.org> or by phoning 604-214-6912 or 1-888-621-7233. Feedback can be emailed until November 15, 2005, to smallbiz@worksafebc.com.

This initiative reflects one of the key principles behind all WorkSafeBC endeavours — that the greater good is served when solutions to health and safety problems flow from cooperation with industry stakeholders. We welcome all opportunities to do so.

MORE THAN RETAIL

No industry escapes the effects of workplace violence. So, WorkSafeBC has developed a general resource to help employers and workers address the problem. The 36-page booklet *Take Care: How to Develop and Implement a Workplace Violence Prevention Program* can be found at WorkSafeBC.com by searching the phrase "violence prevention program". Printed copies can be obtained by:

- Ordering online at worksafebcstore.com
- Downloading an order form there, and faxing it to 604-232-9703
- Emailing customer.service@worksafebc.com