Workplace Violence is Real. How Can You Mitigate Risk at Your Workplace?

By: Megan Roach on February 20, 2019 on graydon.law

In what has become an all-too-familiar sign of our times, the news was filled last week with reports of yet another workplace shooting. Five employees were killed and six police officers injured before the shooting ended. Companies are left wondering how to protect their employees.

While we can’t prevent all workplace shootings, there are steps employers can take to minimize the risk of violence when terminating an individual’s employment:

Always ask yourself if there are any security concerns with respect to this particular termination—do you have any reason to believe the employee may become violent? If so, take precautions. Have your security team on standby. Don’t have a security team? Consider contacting a private company or hiring an off-duty police officer. That person can escort the former employee off the property immediately after the termination meeting. Employers often alert the police prior to terminating a potentially violent employee. Police departments are sometimes able to have an officer stationed nearby at the time of the termination meeting to ensure a quick response in the event of a 911 call. You may even want to consider doing the termination at a neutral location off-site.

Another way to mitigate the risk of a potentially violent employee returning to the property is to suspend the employee after the terminable infraction pending the results of an investigation. This gives you time to consider all aspects of the decision and removes the employee from the premises. If the investigation confirms that termination is the appropriate decision, a termination letter can be mailed to the employee.

Whenever an employee is terminated, be sure that company security is aware. That way, they are on alert if an individual returns to the facility with the intent of committing violence. If your company does not have a security team and the risk of violence exists, it may be appropriate to hire a private security company for a period of time while the former employee cools off.

Finally, be compassionate. Remember, this is somebody’s livelihood you are dealing with. Yes, you need to make the appropriate business decisions for your company. But do your
best to preserve your soon-to-be-former employee’s dignity and treat them with the respect you would want for yourself.