Domestic Violence in the Workplace Incidents Study

He said he would kill her if she left him and she had every reason to believe it.

So when she finally made the decision to leave,
she made sure that he could not find where she was living.

But she needed money to start her life over and for that she needed her job.

And that is how he knew exactly where and when he could find her.

The purpose of this study is to help guide the safety planning of employers, security personnel, human resources professionals and for the victims themselves. It analyses the factors and circumstance of 155 cases of domestic violence incidents that have occurred in the workplace. The trends may provide clues to determine the lethality of potential threats and provide suggestions on how to develop a safe and secure workplace for all employees.

John Lee
Peace at Work

www.peaceatwork.org

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HIGHLIGHTS OF FINDINGS

Out of 155 Cases-

- Less than half of the perpetrators tried to escape capture after the assault. 42% attempted or committed suicide and 11% either turned themselves over to the authorities or waited for arriving officers without resisting arrest.

- When the time and place of the assault was known, 31% occurred in the parking lot as the abuse victim was arriving for work. Over half occurred at the beginning of the shift.

- The vast majority of the perpetrators were male (94%).

    - However, 75% of the female perpetrators either hired a hit-man or conspired with their boyfriends who committed the actual act.

- In 77% of the cases where the abuse victim had obtained a TRO (Trespass Restriction Order) against the perpetrator, a firearm was used to commit the assault, despite a federal regulation banning gun ownership by the assailant.

- When it was know if the perpetrator had criminal record or not, almost half had prior domestic violence convictions.

- In 23% of the cases, there was either a recent, previous incident at the workplace or a direct warning from the abuse victim about the potential threat.

- In only 8% of the cases was it identified that the employer took any precautions prior to the assault.

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Acknowledgements

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The University of North Carolina Injury Prevention Research Center
Barry Nixon of the National Institute for the Prevention of Workplace Violence Inc.

It is crucial to remember that these "statistics" are real people. The numbers cannot reflect the pain and trauma of these crimes nor the sense of loss felt by the victim's loved ones. It is the intended purpose of this study and the illustrated examples to provide insight and knowledge to help prevent future violence.

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Relevant Statistics

In North Carolina from 1996 to 1998, 75% of the women killed at work from "dispute-related" incidents (non-robbery) were murdered by ex-partners. (*Killed on the Clock, American Journal of Industrial Medicine 37:629-636 2000*)

Nationally, there are an estimated 13,000 acts of violence against women at work each year by their partners. (*Violence and Theft in the Workplace, U.S. DOJ, July, 1994)*

Another estimate determined that there are 50,000 incidents of domestic violence committed in the workplace annually. *(Bureau of Labor Statistics, Dept of Justice, Domestic Violence survey, as published by the Charlotte Observer, April 22, 1999, p. 3C)*

Research Parameters

The cases for this study were all based on assaults that occurred in the workplace as a result of a domestic violence situation. The term domestic violence refers to an intimate relationship where abuse and/or violence is present. While abuse is a pattern of behavior meant to control a victim, these cases only include incidents where physical injury or the imminent threat of injury was involved.

The study refers to the "perpetrator" as the person who commits, or causes to occur, the violence. The term "abuse victim" indicates the person in the relationship who is the subject of the control or violence. Often, it is the person fleeing the abuse. However, it should be noted that in a number of cases there is a disparity. There may be more than one victim in the assault or it is another person aside from the "abuse victim" who is harmed. Also, the actual assailant may have been hired or conspired with the perpetrator to commit the crime. In most cases whereas the wife kills her husband, there was no apparent indication of a domestic violence relationship as commonly understood.

By the workplace, this refers to the location where the individuals conduct their jobs. On rare occasions, the assault occurred at the perpetrator's employment. It may be a single location such as a store or factory floor but often includes multiple areas, particularly the parking lot. In several incidents, the crime occurred at the workplace but outside of normal business hours.

Range of cases

The earliest case occurred in February of 1986 with the last incident in November 2004. 79% of the cases occurred since 2000.
The majority of the cases were in the United States of America with 12% occurring in other countries, most of those in the United Kingdom and Canada.

Database source

The majority of these cases were obtained through media reports with some further investigation through contacting local law enforcement, domestic violence shelters, and the news reporter. Other cases were gleaned from court cases and law enforcement reports.

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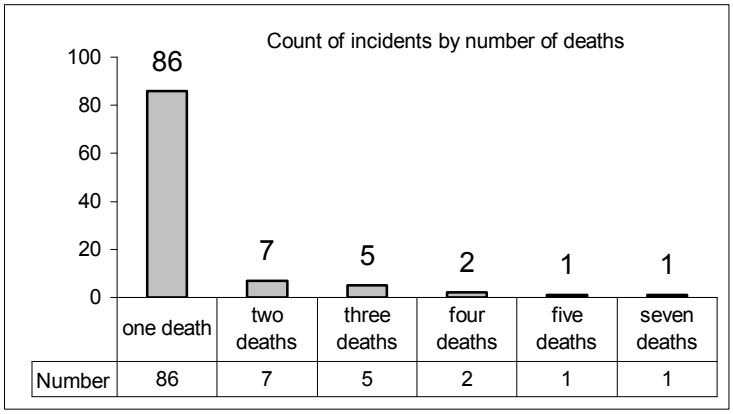
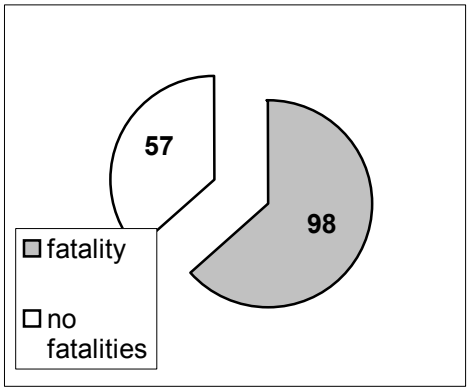
A total of 135 people were killed in domestic violence incidents in the workplace.

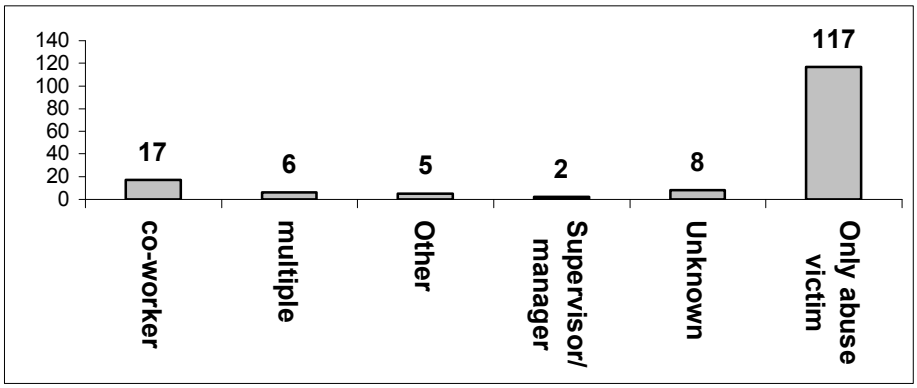




Count of victim(s) surviving	
Number of injured/survivors	**Number of incidents**
No injuries / No survivors	101
1 injured victim	47
2 injured victims	4
3 injured victims	1
4 injured victims	2

The majority of domestic violence assaults in the workplace are lethal with 63% ending in at least one homicide, usually the victim of abuse.

While there were a few hostage situations with no deaths or injuries, most of the cases resulted in death. Often, more than one person was a victim of the violence. "Injured" is defined by a person requiring medical attention.



In 75% of the cases, the victim of the abuse was the sole recipient of the violence. When there were other victims, the most often assaulted were co-workers. "Others" include family and friends of the victim who were at the scene of the violence.

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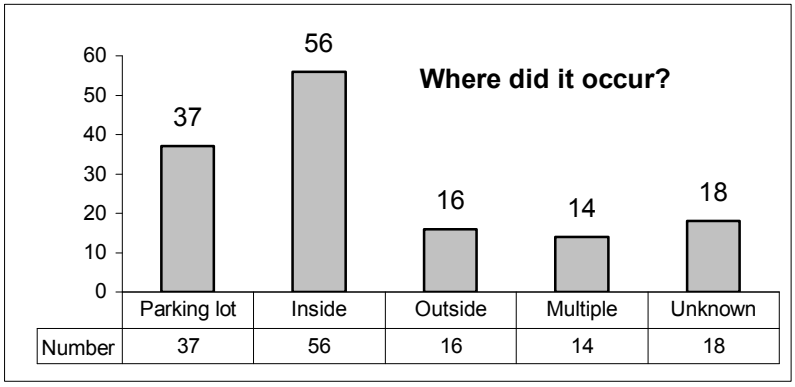
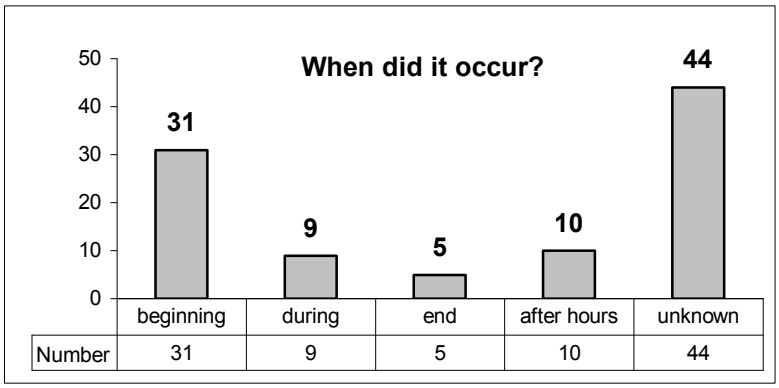


"Inside" refers to any place within the workplace including the factory floor, office, store or lobby.
"Multiple" locations indicate when the assault occurred in numerous places, both inside and out, most often with multiple victims. The parking lot was frequently the scene as the victim and abuser went outside for privacy to talk before the assault or when the abuser was waiting for the victim to arrive or leave work.



The beginning of the shift is defined as being with in a ½ hour of the time when the victim's shift started. When the assault occurred at the end of the shift, it was just as the victim was leaving work. When it was known when the assault occurred, over half occurred at the beginning of the shift.

Type of weapon used	
Firearm (type unknown)	47
Handgun	45
Rifle	6
Shotgun	9
Assault Rifle	2
Hands	8
Multiple	10
Knife	16
Other	8
Vehicle	4

The vast majority of assaults were committed by use of firearms with handguns being the most commonly identified type.
"Other" weapons included lighter fluid, poison and stun guns.
Despite a US federal law banning gun possession, in 30 out of 39 cases where the victim obtained a TRO (77%), the perpetrator used a firearm to assault their victim(s).

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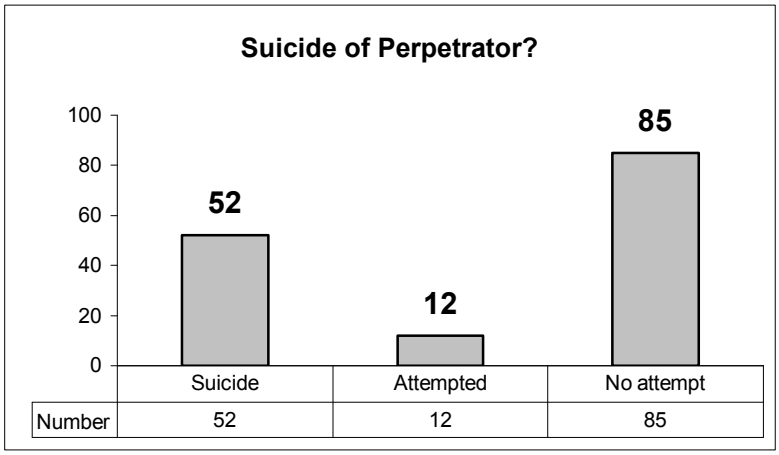


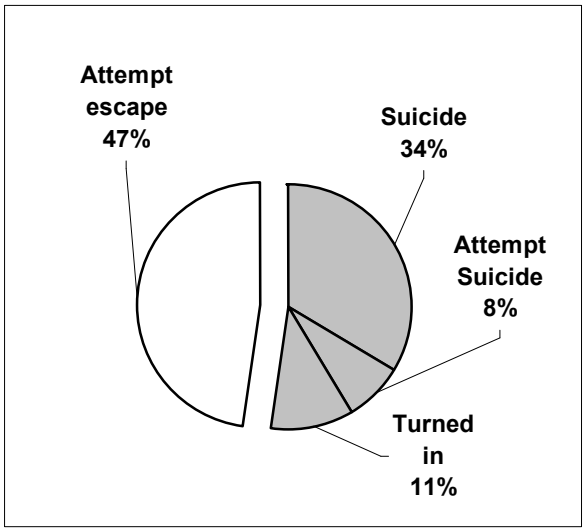
As with the co-worker type of violence, many of the assailants (41%) attempted or committed suicide after their rampage. Frequently, they commit the act immediately after killing their victim though a few fled the scene to later shoot themselves. On two occasions, it was clear that they intended to die in a shoot out with police- "suicide by cop".

In 11% of the cases, the abuser either made no attempt to escape nor resisted arrest, often waiting for the police to arrive. A several occasions, they even notified authorities themselves after the act.

Turned themselves in or made no attempt to escape	
Yes	**No**
17	138

In August of 2004, Carl Yetman of Montana killed his much younger wife as she arrived early in the morning at a diner where she served food. He then drove to the county courthouse and waited at the front steps till they opened to turn himself over to law enforcement.

In only 74 of the cases did the abuser try to evade capture. Compared to the number of cases where they either attempted or committed suicide or allowed themselves to be captured, this is actually the minority by a slim margin. Some of those that escaped from authorities turned themselves in after contacting family members and/or an attorney. Often, they made no attempt to prevent their identification from witnesses who could easily recognize them.



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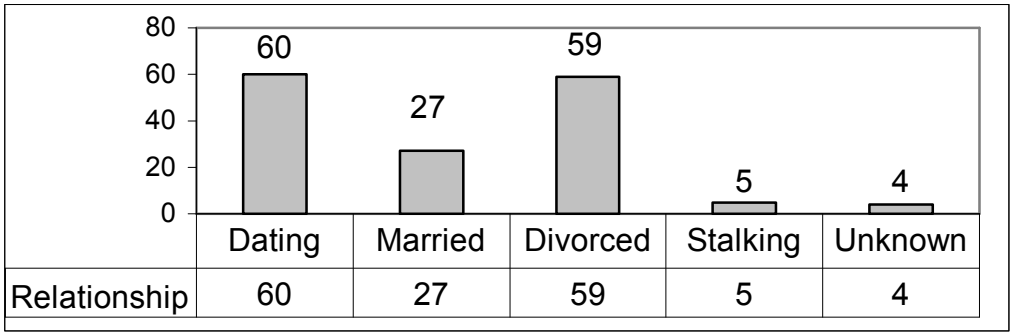
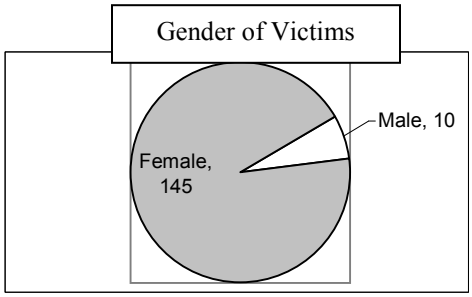
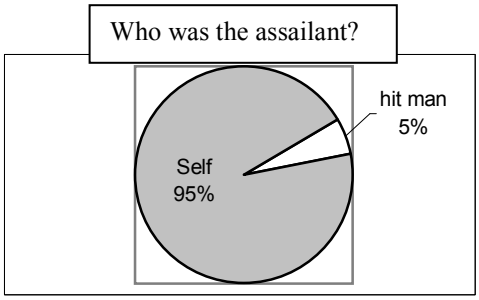


Most the cases involved people who were currently or previously married. Separated couples included those that were divorced. Dating refers to couples that were romantically involved and/or living together but were not legally married. The few incidents of stalking involved the assailant and victim never being in an intimate relationship but the same dynamics of control, obsession and intimidation tactics that are present in domestic violence cases, existed in these cases.





Similar to domestic violence rates in other studies, the vast majority of abuse victims (94%) were female with the perpetrator male. This study did not contain any incidents with a homosexual relationship.

In 8 cases, the perpetrator did not commit the assault themselves but hired, persuaded or conspired with another to carry out the crime. In all of these cases, the perpetrator attempted to evade arrest.

Use of "Other" Assailant

	Female Perpetrator	Male Perpetrator
"Boyfriend"	4	0
"Hit-man"	2	2

Perpetrator refers to the person who is in the relationship but is trying to or succeeds in killing their partner (or ex-partner); they may not be the actual assailant who commits the act. Three quarters (75%) of the female perpetrators hired a hit-man (25%) or conspired with their boyfriend (50%) who made the assault. In these cases, there was not the typical domestic violence situation of threats and control; there was no apparent indication of violence or that the victim had any reason to suspect harm.

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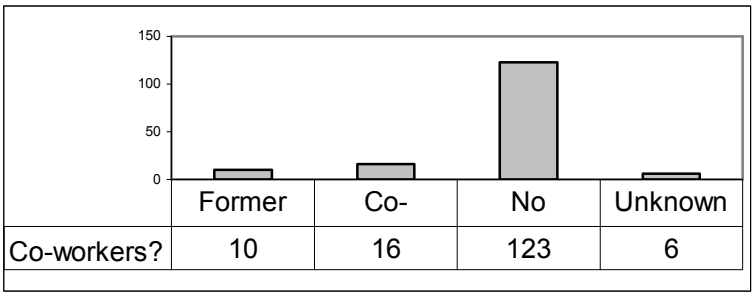
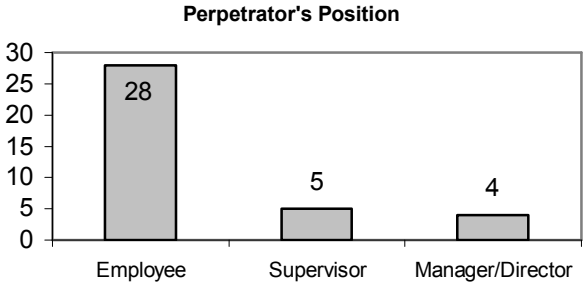
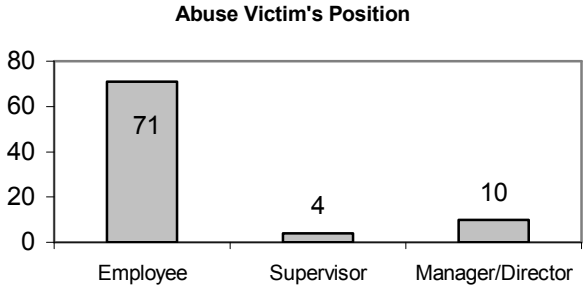


In the majority of the cases, the victim and perpetrator did not work together (79%). In the cases where they were former co-workers, in several incidents the perpetrator was fired due to the abusive behavior. In 3 cases, the abuse victim had a TRO taken out against the perpetrator despite the fact that they currently worked together.

> In July of 2001, Marilyn Oxford was shot and killed at work by her ex-boyfriend, Joseph Alexander, a co-worker at a textile plant in Aberdeen, NC. She had taken a restraining order out on him but the workplace was not included. He reportedly stated in court that it would not keep him from her.





In only 23% of cases was the perpetrator's employment level known; more often the victim's position was identified (55%). Similar to the other rates indicating the socio-economic status of abuse victims, domestic violence occurs among professionals and those in administrative positions. As for the perpetrators, often they were not "seasoned criminals" but well educated with advanced careers.

> John Harrison, a former FBI agent, recently became a Vice President in the fraud unit of a leading insurance company in New York City. Early one morning in September of 2002, he called two employees, a man and a woman, into his office. He used two semi-automatic handguns to kill both of them and then committed suicide. He allegedly had an affair with his female employee who tried to end the relationship.

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The chart does not include when the history was unknown. In only 41 of the cases (27%) was it known if the perpetrator had a criminal history or a prior record with law enforcement (police reports). Of those cases, almost half had prior domestic violence assault convictions. This does not include those that had a Trespass Restriction Order against them (below).

The average of the perpetrator was 35 with the youngest being 20 years old and the oldest being 69 years old at the time of the assault.

When it was known if there was or was not a TRO issued against the perpetrator, in 45% of the cases, the civil order was disregarded and the assault occurred at the workplace. In 14 (9%) of the cases, the abuse victims had previously obtained a TRO but it either expired without being renewed or they requested the order to be dropped themselves. Not listed here were cases where as the perpetrator had a TRO issued against them by another abuse victim but not by the one included in this workplace assaults database.

> Chitrabathy Narayanasamy of Singapore had taken a TRO against her husband Krishnasamy Naidu but he still assaulted her with a knife in April of 2004. After a brief stay in a psychiatric hospital, he was ordered to stand trail and then released on bail. Ten days later, he at waited outside her workplace with a parang (short, heavy knife) and killed her.

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Safety Precautions taken by Employer						
Law Enforcement	Hired Security	Protected Victim	Warn Staff	Multiple	Other	Unknown
1	1	1	2	1	6	143

Rarely was information provided as to what precautions the employer was able to put into place before the assault. Law Enforcement refers to contacting their local agency. The one case where the abuse victim was 'protected', her work location was changed. "Other" precautions include offers to transfer position and having 2 co-workers with the victim at all times,
The low record of cases whereas safety precautions were taken may also indicate that when safety measures are used, the likelihood of an assault diminishes.

Pre Indications to Incident		
Previous Incident	**Warning by victim**	**Unknown**
15	19	120

Previous incident refers to cases whereas the perpetrator had made threats, had a confrontation, stalked the victim or otherwise caused a disturbance at the place of employment prior to the final assault. "Warnings by victim" describe cases when the abuse victim informed their employer about their endangerment. Again, in the majority of cases (77%), it was unknown if there were any pre-indications that an assault may occur at the workplace.

In September of 1995, Mildred Harris of Alabama was brutally assaulted by her husband at home. The next day, she warned her supervisor at a fast-food restaurant that she was afraid of him and to call the police if he arrived. When he did appear and threatened her, the police were called to escort him out.
The following day, Harris called the manager and asked to be excused from coming to work that day. The manager allegedly convinced her to come in and that they would again contact the police if he came. She went to work and was assigned to the front counter where her husband later shot and killed her.

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Type of Industry	
Education	5
Financial	7
Government	17
Health-Care	15
Hi-Tech	5
Manufacturing	20
Restaurant	5
Retail	21
Service	30
Other	9
Unknown	21

Finally, the type of industry included a range of private, governmental and non-profit sectors. “Service” included resorts, printers, repair shops and real estate. “Other” included transportation and entertainment production. The range of industry was wide and diverse. Similarly, both large companies and small businesses were impacted. Essentially, where ever there are employees, the occurrence of domestic violence spilling over into the workplace can exist.

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Conclusion

One of the clear findings of this report is the recognized need for further investigation. Many of the cases are missing key factors that leave large "unknown" percentages in the various fields. Additional resources and effort can be applied to identify these missing details, further outlining the circumstance and factors surrounding domestic violence in the workplace. Additionally, there are undoubtedly cases which were not included. A comprehensive, scientific based study would encompass a more complete incident pool.

The implications of the findings do provide some suggestions for security planning. The following is a brief outline of potential learning points from these records. They are not meant to act as advice or consultation for any specific, identified threat or hazard. Every risk should be properly evaluated by informed and competent personnel with the assistance of outside professionals such as law enforcement, security consultants and domestic violence advocates.

- Request local law enforcement to patrol the workplace at the beginning and end of the abuse victim's shift, if not available all day.
- Reliance on monitoring and detection devices such as extra lighting, CCTV and surveillance equipment would not deter most perpetrators but may provide immediate warning. It should not be relied upon to deter the assault.
- Though fear of being killed or injured may lead supervisors or business owners to fire the targeted employee, in the majority of cases, only the abuse victim was assaulted. Also, this would discourage other potential victims and co-workers from disclosing warning due to fear of termination.
- A criminal background check and for civil TRO's against a perpetrator may determine the likelihood of a potential assault. The fact that a TRO bans the abusers from firearm possession should not be considered a safety precaution. Rarely are perpetrators forced to relinquish their weapons and they typically ignore such prohibition.

Organizational Prevention:

It is not the purpose of this report to describe how agencies could develop an effective prevention and management plan for addressing domestic violence in the workplace. The resources listed at the end of the report can provide assistance. However, in brief, an employer can help prevent such occurrences by

- Developing a policy and response program
- Provide support and protection for abuse victims
- Hold abusers accountable for their behavior
- Train personnel to recognize and respond to warning signs
- Connect with community agencies combating domestic violence and
- Most importantly, develop a healthy, respectful workplace.

To meet this last component, please consider joining *Employers for Violence Prevention*, a coalition of employers taking a stand against violence. For membership benefits, please contact Peace at Work.

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Resources and Links

The following are list of programs and organizations that provide service and information on the prevention and management of domestic violence in the workplace.

- **Peace@Work**

  www.peaceatwork.org

- **Corporate Alliance to End Partner Violence**

  www.caepv.org

- **Family Violence Prevention Fund**

  www.endabuse.org
  Follow workplace link under programs

- **DV Initiative, Inc.**

  www.dvinitiative.com

- **Colorado Bar Association**

  www.makeityourbusiness.org

- **Legal Momentum**

  www.legalmomentum.org
  Follow the link under Issues for "workplace"

- **Safe at Work Coalition**

  www.safeatworkcoalition.org

- **National Domestic Violence Hotline and Referral Service**

  1.800.799.SAFE (7233)

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