

Officers: Violence occurring more frequently in workplaces

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
Friday, 01 March 2013 15:38 -

Langley, Kostrunek say businesses, industries need a plan

Adam Lanza was bullied, isolated and played thousands of violent video games.

Lanza, the 20-year-old who killed children and adults at a Connecticut elementary school last December, was a prime candidate for committing the crime, according to Dawson County Sheriff Office Sgt. Tim Kostrunek.

“Violent TV and video games desensitize people to what is real,” Kostrunek said. “They feel a power they’ve never felt before.”

Both Kostrunek and Gothenburg police department Sgt. Matt Langley said they regretted having to talk about workplace violence but said the societal problem is becoming worse.

The law enforcement officers presented “Violence in the Workplace” Feb. 20 at the Gothenburg Public Library.

Local business owners and employees numbering 89 attended one of two seminar sessions hosted by the Gothenburg Chamber of Commerce’s professional development and education committee.

Kostrunek said once a person reaches a boiling point, whether it’s from watching violent TV, playing violent video games or going through a nasty divorce or financial disaster, signs often appear.

“That person may start showing up at a bar or making strange comments at work or other things,” he said. “Don’t discount it because you don’t know when the breaking point is coming.”

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Kostrunek said it's better to lose a friend than have something horrific happen.

"Find out what's going on and try to get that person help," he said.

Having a plan in place to keep employees as safe as possible is also important, they said.

Langley suggested the plan include:

awareness by employees of the nearest exits

knowledge by employees of how to secure doors to offices that might include barricades like furniture.

"Shut off the light and get out of sight," Kostrunek said.

realization of what can be used for a weapon if the intruder gets close.

"Grab anything you can use," Langley said, noting that intruders are not likely to encounter people trying to stop them. "Scissors, chairs, wrenches—use anything."

If someone with a gun or other weapon enters a business, the scene will be chaotic.

"People will be screaming, running and you need to decide what you're going to do to stay alive," Kostrunek said.

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Because of the highly stressful situation, he said the body shuts down and tunnel vision often occurs.

“You can’t remember things.”

As a result, the officers said it’s important to have scripts near phones throughout the workplace that include such information as the business address, the phone number, names of employees and more.

Including that information, plus a master key to get into locked rooms and a business floor plan, in a “go” bag would also be helpful, they said.

Once such a call is dispatched, Langley said at least two officers must arrive on the scene and it might take a few minutes for officers to respond.

Langley told the group to not be offended if officers walk by a bleeding person or shove people out of the way.

“That’s what we have to do to stop the threat,” he said.

Employees might also be asked to put their hands in the air and could be handcuffed.

“But don’t take it personal,” Langley said.

Some businesses have a person certified to carry and conceal a weapon in case of a threat.

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“I would encourage that someone is designated to do that,” Kostrunek said, noting that certification involves special training. “You’re putting the firearm in the hands of someone who knows how to use it.”

Owners and employees might also think about an evacuation place outside the building where employees could meet and be accounted for, Langley said.

“The less people we have inside the building, the better,” he said.

Faced at close range by a shooter with a gun or other weapon, Langley said talking and listening is the most important tool.

And eye contact.

“It’s usually harder for a suspect to look you in the eye and kill you,” Kostrunek said.

Moving targets challenging

If the shooter is farther away, Langley said running erratically while trying to escape could be helpful.

He reminded the audience of ADD—avoid danger if possible, deny the intruder from entering an office by barricading the door and, if necessary, defend yourself with anything you can find.

Other potentially helpful tools, suggested by those in attendance, include installing a panic button locked into a security system or having pepper spray.

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“Any tool you can take to survive the moment,” Kostrunek said.

The officers said they would be willing to look over the safety plans of businesses.

“If you wait for an incident to come to you, bad things will happen,” Kostrunek said.

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