

# Avoid Workplace Violence due to Layoffs

Some safety experts expect violent incidents in the workplace to increase due to the increased number of layoffs expected. These are proactive steps that an organization can take to limit their exposure.

1. Have a plan and an established method for releasing people. Have a planning meeting, and have a strategy already in place to handle layoffs.
2. Give as much warning as possible of an impending layoff. If not, people feel taken aback and believe the employer has acted irresponsibly. Share with employees the company's financial situation and warn them if it becomes necessary at some point to layoff employees.
3. Be sure to give employees the reasons for the layoffs, making it clear that individuals are not being singled out. Recognize them for their contributions to the company and praise them for their efforts.
4. Treat employees with the same professional dignity and respect, but also be empathetic and sympathetic.
5. Laid-off employees should be accompanied by a manager back to their desks to collect any personal belongings. You may want to schedule layoffs for the lunch hour, or when other employees are not around.
6. Give laid-off employees as much help as possible—including, for instance, outplacement services. Explain issues such as severance and unemployment face to face when workers are being laid off. Also give them a letter outlining those issues, recognizing people often do not really hear what is being said when they are upset.
7. Be alert to what line supervisors and managers say about particular employees to identify those who may become violent. Then take appropriate security measures. If somebody is a known hothead, "then typically you'll have a security presence" to deal with the situation.
8. Never, ever, put your key people together in a meeting, with employees being terminated. It puts you in a position of negotiating something that's already happened.
9. There also should be security measures in place after the layoff. Ramp up the security during the week after a layoff. Hire additional security guards and change access codes. If you identify any particular individual that you think is prone to violence, have security pay particular attention to that person's movements, including knowing the make and model of his or her car and calling for reinforcement if he or she shows up in the parking lot.

10. Workers should be warned against lending their building access badges to laid-off workers, or inviting them back into the workplace. If they do come back, they are subject to the same security measures as other visitors.

11. Some experts recommend that employers refuse requests for meetings after an employee has been laid off, because there is little to be gained, and it could put employees at risk.

12. Workplace safety begins in the hiring process—with careful background checks.