

Washington state has sadly had its share of active shooter incidents in recent years. These receive lots of media attention and are just one potential type of workplace violence that can occur. Violence often occurs without warning, but there are steps you can take to reduce the risk before -- and even during -- an attack.

If there is any good news, it is that your chances of encountering an active shooter in workplace are low. According to Washington L&I, most acts of workplace violence are initiated by strangers, such as during a robbery. Attacks by co-workers or former employees are not as common as it may seem from news coverage.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) states that anyone caught in an active shooter situation should attempt to RUN, HIDE, or FIGHT, in that order. Running to safety is the best outcome, while those who cannot escape should hide, only fighting the attacker as a last resort.

DHS recommends that employers inspect their premises and job sites to ensure that at least two evacuation routes are present and then “post evacuation routes in conspicuous locations throughout your facility.” Remember to consider those with special needs and determine how you will alert individuals working in remote locations on your premises. These steps will help to ensure that as many individuals as possible are able to RUN from the shooter.

Along with physical security, it’s also crucial to look for changes in employee behaviors and consider the appropriate response.

Washington L&I identifies “**Five Warning Signs of Escalating Behavior**” as:

- Confusion
- Frustration
- Blame
- Anger
- Hostility

HR professionals should be made aware of employees demonstrating these behaviors, with the primary goal of helping them feel better and seek treatment, if necessary. DHS states that most employees do not just “snap” and that recognizing warning signs early on makes it easier to assist the employee before their behavior escalates.

Finally, plans and procedures are only effective if staff are informed and trained on the guidelines and expectations. Be sure to share your workplace violence and/or active shooter policies with your team so that everyone is on the same page.

**Prepare NOW**

If you see suspicious activity, let an authority know right away. Many places, such as houses of worship, workplaces, and schools, have plans in place to help you respond safely. Ask about these plans and get familiar with them. If you participate in an active shooter drill, talk with your family about what you learned and how to apply it to other locations. When you visit a building such as a shopping mall or healthcare facility, take time to identify two nearby exits. Get in the habit of doing this. Map out places to hide. In rooms without windows, behind solid doors with locks, under desks, or behind heavy furniture such as large filing cabinets can make good hiding places. Sign up for active shooter, first aid, and tourniquet training.

**DURING AN ACTIVE SHOOTER EVENT**

**RUN.** Getting away from the shooter or shooters is the top priority. Leave your things behind and run away. If safe to do so, warn others nearby.

**Call 911** when you are safe. Describe each shooter, their locations, and weapons.

**HIDE.** If you cannot get away safely, hide. Get out of the shooter’s view and stay quiet.

**Silence your electronic devices** and make sure they will not vibrate.

**Lock and block doors,** close blinds, and turn off the lights.

**Do not hide in groups**—spread out along walls or hide separately to make it more difficult for the shooter.

**Try to communicate with police silently**— such as through text messages or by putting a sign in an exterior window. Stay in place until law enforcement gives you notice that all immediate danger is clear.

**FIGHT.** Your last resort when you are in immediate danger is to defend yourself. Commit to your actions and act aggressively to stop the shooter. Ambushing the shooter together with makeshift weapons such as chairs, fire extinguishers, scissors, and books can distract and disarm the shooter. **Be Safe**

### **AFTER AN ACTIVE SHOOTER EVENT**

Keep hands visible and empty. Know that law enforcement’s first task is to end the incident. They may have to pass injured persons along the way. Follow law enforcement’s instructions and evacuate in the direction they tell you to. Consider seeking professional help for you and your family to cope with the long-term effects of trauma.

### **Workplace guides for preventing violence and active shooters**

- For more information on Active Shooter prevention and response, download [Active Shooter - How to Respond](#) from the Department of Homeland Security
- Guidelines for preventing other types of workplace violence are available from L&I in their brochure, [Workplace Violence - Awareness and Prevention for Employers and Employees](#)
- Here is a training video:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kti33RJ1ub8>