

Workplace terror watch

After Orlando, San Bernardino shootings, experts warn against complacency on LI

By ADINA GENN

When it comes to preparing against active shooters in the workplace, Long Island employers must rethink strategies – especially as attacks become more commonplace, experts are warning.

After the Orlando nightclub massacre, San Bernardino shootings, Paris attacks – or, closer to home, the arrest of two Mount Sinai brothers found with weapons, bomb-making instructions and neo-Nazi paraphernalia – violence can come in many forms. Threats span from the “lone wolf,” a disgruntled employee or a spouse, to deadly coordinated terrorist attacks.

“We’re better prepared than ever – but so is the enemy,” Rep. Peter King, R-Seafood, said at a recent Long Island Association symposium in Melville on terrorism and violence in the workplace.

Workplace violence, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports, accounted for 16 percent of all work-related fatal injuries in 2014, according to the most recent available data. And most of these incidents are “not crimes of passion committed by disgruntled coworkers and spouses, but rather result from robberies,” according to the BLS.

Still, after the attack in Orlando, workplace violence is once again a big concern for employers, experts said.

“Everyone’s talking about it, whether it’s terrorism, or why the FBI is talking to the father of the shooter,” said Michael Sapracione, president and founder of Squad Security, with offices in Uniondale.

Certainly Homeland Security is talking about terrorism and violence in the workplace.

There’s a “new profile” of those posing threats, and that includes those with “psychotic” tendencies, said King, a member of the Homeland Security Committee and chairman of the Sub-Committee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence.

“ISIS knows how to appeal to them,” he added. And while this kind of threat would not take down a nation, they might still result in “acts of terror that kill 30, 40 or 50 people.”

Experts agree that an established plan, drills, periodic refreshers and working with police can go a long way in protecting employees.



CAPTION: (From left) Rep. Peter King, Michael Sapracione, president of Squad Security, Nassau County Acting Police Commissioner Thomas Krumpster and Suffolk Police Commissioner Timothy Sini.

New technology

King praised police in Long Island, New York City and Westchester who work with members of the FBI’s Joint Terrorism Task Force and other agents in preventing attacks in the region.

Still, experts at the LIA symposium said these efforts are not enough.

“The private sector gets complacent,” Sapracione said.

Whether they realize it or not, employers and staff play a critical role in workplace safety.

“The biggest defense we have is the public and being aware,” said Suffolk County Police Commissioner Timothy Sini. “Listening to employees and colleagues – what they’re saying and how they’re behaving – is key.”

To assist, Suffolk is launching the SCPD Shield Program, which provides vulnerability assessments and training courses for the private sector.

Nassau County Acting Police Commissioner Thomas Krumpster said the county is partnering with schools, malls and other enterprises to leverage resources. Nassau Police have installed new panic alarms that bypass the 911 system to expedite response time.

“Cops can be on the scene in two to three minutes because of this technology,” Krumpster said.

Nassau also has a Police Information Network, which businesses can join to share information, crime trends and solutions.

“Intelligence is the way to stop at-

tacks,” Sapracione said. “Employees become the first responders.”

Listen to employees

Employers need to know how to help police, and be attuned to employees having a bad day.

“Talk to them,” Sapracione said. “It could be a potential situation.”

Protecting employees, Sapracione pointed out, “is not a cost – it’s an investment,” even if it doesn’t generate revenue.

Yet on Long Island, it’s the larger companies that have the budget to take security more seriously. And while a small firm may lack the means to retain a security guard, companies can still install cameras and access codes, and implement awareness training to minimize risk, Sapracione said.

That training can include bringing in an expert who runs through scenarios to determine the best way to handle an incident, as well as discuss any fears employees have about the workplace. For example, Sapracione pointed out that in some office buildings employees may have concerns about the restrooms; in these instances solutions can include installing restroom locks, or having a “buddy” system, where two people visit the restroom together. Others may want to offer tips, including redirecting an unfamiliar person in a hallway back to the building’s concierge – and then getting into a locked office and calling for help. Code words, too, can signal a need for

help without alerting the would-be attacker, Sapracione said.

Develop an escape plan

Knowing your surroundings and developing an escape plan is key. Understand where the exits are and what can be used as barricades in the event of an active shooter, Sapracione said. Make sure everyone understands the plan, including new hires, he said.

Employees, too, should let supervisors know if a co-worker seems stressed. For instance, if there is domestic violence in the home, the staffer may show up wearing sunglasses.

A supervisor can “ask the employee if everything is OK,” Sapracione said. “The person might open up or not. If you think there’s a problem, you may want to go the police” and indicate you have concerns regarding the safety at the office.

LIA President and CEO Kevin Law pointed out that while it’s “very important to take steps to protect employees and key assets,” the effort also plays a role in the economy.

“Long Island’s low crime rate plays a significant role in fostering a climate that allows our businesses to operate safely and successfully, and thus it is imperative that employers collaborate with local government and law enforcement to marshal the resources necessary to protect the workplace, educate employees and raise awareness,” he said.

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