



Workplace Violence on Temporary Job Sites

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OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this large loss claim review are to:

- Examine a near-miss incident affecting town staff on a temporary job site.
- Discuss elements of the claim that impacted the municipality's ability to mitigate loss severity.
- Develop a specific risk management action plan based on best practices to prevent or mitigate future losses for members.

INCIDENT BACKGROUND

The incident occurred during plowing operations following a severe winter snowstorm in Connecticut. At around 6:30 pm on a cold night in February, the municipality's Public Works team was hard at work clearing public roads, parking lots, and municipal sidewalks from the almost foot of snow that had fallen over the previous seven (7) hours. Upon driving through a residential neighborhood with the plow down, a Public Works employee accidentally struck a resident's mailbox. Immediately, the employee safely pulled over the vehicle following the department's standard operating procedures. In accordance with department policy and training, the employee began filling out the paperwork to provide the homeowner with an explanation of how the municipality would remedy the damaged property.

The employee then exited the vehicle to provide the paperwork to the homeowner. At the same time, the homeowner exited their residence and began shouting at the Public Works employee. The resident made comments about the employee's driving, mocked the employee's intelligence, used explicit language, and verbally threatened the employee. The employee apologized to the homeowner numerous times during this exchange and attempted to inform the homeowner of the municipality's protocol of providing some financial relief for the homeowner to replace the mailbox.

The homeowner became increasingly irate during the exchange with the Public Works employee. After a few minutes, the homeowner returned to their residence without taking the paperwork, prompting the Public Works employee to tape it to the home's front door. As the Public Works employee began walking back to their vehicle, the homeowner returned brandishing a shotgun while yelling expletives at the employee. The Public Works employee, frozen by the resident's display, pleaded with the homeowner to "put the gun down" and "go back inside." This continued for a few minutes before the homeowner calmed down enough to return

inside, at which point the Public Works employee returned to their vehicle and continued plowing. The Public Works employee did not notify a supervisor of the incident until the start of his next shift the following day.

INCIDENT INVESTIGATION

- Investigation into this incident revealed that the town's Public Works Department has policies, procedures, and action plans to be followed during an emergency.
 - It was discovered that such documentation was written concerning events that would occur on town property, such as at the Public Works Garage.
 - Emergency action plans were specific to evacuating during fire emergencies and locking down or securing buildings in response to internal or external threats.
 - Neither the department nor the town maintained any documentation on emergency procedures that should be followed while working at a temporary job site, such as the side of the road.
- It was noted that, while staff knew that emergency action plans existed, training associated with emergency procedures was provided to staff at hire within the onboarding and orientation process.
 - The Public Works employee involved in this incident had been employed by the municipality for eight (8) years and had not attended formal training on the town's emergency plans.
- The plow that the employee was driving was equipped with radio communication that was regularly monitored; however, the employee did not utilize the radio communication following the incident.
- Employees regularly carry their mobile phones while plowing; however, the town has many areas with spotty or no cell service. While the employee did not attempt to utilize the mobile phone in this incident, conversations following the incident revealed that the area in question does not have strong cell service.
- The employee was shaken by the incident on-site, but did not think to notify a supervisor until he returned home at the end of the shift. Upon returning to the office the following day, the employee notified his immediate supervisor; however, the supervisor did not document the incident.
 - Local law enforcement was never notified of the incident.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS/ACTION ITEMS

CIRMA Risk Management recommends the following best practices to help prevent these incidents from occurring:

- Review existing emergency action plans and procedures to determine whether they adequately address the site-specific and operational situations employees may encounter.
 - Consider ensuring that such plans represent work conducted by staff at temporary job sites.
- Regularly train staff on the employer's emergency action plans and consider regularly communicating aspects of the plans to employees.
- Consider taking an inventory of tools used in an emergency, such as radios, phones, vehicles, etc.
 - Develop a plan to test these tools to ensure they work regularly and are adequately maintained. Consider replacing as needed.
- Consider practicing the emergency action plan and conducting drills and exercises throughout the year. This will develop muscle memory, allowing you to manage stressful situations on-site.
- Consider ensuring that staff are familiar with reporting procedures, especially the need to notify a supervisor and local law enforcement of such incidents as soon as possible.
 - Staff should understand that being involved in a stressful incident can cause additional hazards, putting themselves and others at risk of injury or damage.
- Consider documenting all incidents (e.g., "near-miss," "medical only," "lost time," etc.) to develop an understanding of trends that may lead to injury or damage.