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DOUGLAS H. DUERR QUOTED IN TODAY'S ATLANTA JOURNAL AND CONSTITUTION

Business security a balance of risk, cost

About 10% of workplace deaths are homicides, but trend is down

Tuesday, April 29, 2014

BY [MICHAEL KANELL](#) AND [KELLY YAMANOUCHE](#) - THE ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION

A typical corporate office is simply not ready for a determined, armed assault – and most companies do not want the kind of protection, said Darrell Mercer, owner of Mercer Protection Agency in Alpharetta.

Security could mean locked doors, metal detectors, electronic badges for employees, cameras and armed guards.

While many companies put a guard near the door or in the lobby, they are often unarmed, said Mercer, who also provides well as corporate and event security.

"You can take precautions and you can be alert. But things do happen, unfortunately," he said Tuesday, a few miles from Kennesaw.

"If somebody really intends on doing harm and they set their minds on it, you just can't stop it 100 percent," Mercer said.

While there are limits to the security provided by most guards, their use is rising. Metro Atlanta as of last year had more guards since 2005, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Guards make a median hourly wage of \$10.53 an hour, slightly less than eight years before.

Atlanta ranks seventh among metro regions in security guard employment. No. 1 is the New York metropolitan area, according to the BLS.

Workplaces have been the most common sites for mass shootings, according to a report last year from the Congressional Budget Office. The former employee was the shooter in about one-third of 78 mass shootings the report studied between 1983 and 2012.

The agency said there were 463 workplace homicides in workplaces in 2012, accounting for 10 percent of all killings were in Georgia, according to the BLS.

Yet the number of workplace homicides has decreased since the mid-1990s, said Dan Hartley, workplace violence expert at the Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

Moreover, the stereotype of the homicidal employee or bitter ex-worker is in the minority, said Dan Hartley, with the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. Three-quarters of workplace homicides involve theft or someone with a personal relationship to a worker, he said.

Employers have a financial as well as human interest in a secure workplace. From medical bills to attorney fees after a violent event in the workplace can be staggering," said Loretta L. Worters, vice president of the Insurance Institute for Workplace Violence.

"As a result, insurers offer employers workplace safety policies to cover such incidents," she said. "Premiums

The most common sites of workplace violence are service businesses, not factories, she said: Government facilities 15 percent, bars 15 percent, schools 15 percent and medical facilities 10 percent.

The insurance institute suggests a host of methods to prevent workplace violence, including guidelines for businesses.

Jeffrey Slotnick, chief security officer for OR3M who helped write the industry's workplace violence standard, said, "It's important to address workplace violence before it becomes a crisis."

Someone may behave differently, showing sadness, depression, threats, menacing or aggressive behavior, or when those behaviors come in clusters, it should be reported for the company's crisis management team to take action.

"That can go a long way toward prevention," Slotnick said. "When we get to the response side, in a way, it's too late. That's why they take their own lives."

Douglas Duerr, an Atlanta attorney specializing in labor and employment at Elarbee Thompson, also said that preventing workplace violence is a challenge.

"It would be great if you could have airport security at your work site, but that's simply not practical," Duerr said. "You can't be able to prevent every instance of somebody coming into the workplace who's heavily armed."

"The thing to do is to have training on what are the potential indicators of someone who might become violent."

FedEx has a workplace violence prevention program, aimed at increasing awareness of "developing situations."

Terri Howard, senior director at FEI Behavioral Health, a crisis management company that provides employee assistance programs to businesses and employees, said employers should consider what they would have done in FedEx's situation.

"At the end of the day we can't always prevent incidents from happening," Howard said. "Sometimes, these incidents spill into the workplace."

Duerr said high-volume, competitive situations, such as fast-moving work, can create a stressful environment.

"You've got to plan for how you are going to deal with stress," Duerr said. And, companies should also have procedures for dealing with cases of violence and where they should go.

"If a workplace violence incident occurs and you haven't prepared for it and haven't thought it through, then you're in a tough spot," Duerr said. If companies plan for their response, "then the way in which people react will be much less of a greater issue."

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