

Ex-Plaintiff Investigator Warns California Small Businesses About Workplace Violence

Michael Corwin warns that written plans alone may not protect California small businesses from workplace violence and third-party liability.

PALM DESERT, CA, UNITED STATES, August 18, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A hidden financial threat is facing small California employers open to the public: the catastrophic cost of third-party civil lawsuits stemming from workplace violence.

While many small business owners mistakenly believe their size shields them from liability under California's [workplace violence prevention law](#) (SB 553), state mandates apply to any business accessible to the public, even with just one employee. A written plan sitting on a shelf offers zero legal or physical protection; instead, shielding a business from six-figure civil settlements requires operational strategies rooted in [situational awareness](#) and other strategies to avoid physical harm.



Mike Corwin - Help You Be Safe

THE SIX-FIGURE BLIND SPOT: THIRD-PARTY CIVIL LAWSUITS

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Michael Corwin

Most small business owners assume that if an act of violence occurs on their property, workers' compensation will absorb the fallout. However, this creates a massive legal vulnerability regarding third-party invitees—including customers, clients, patients, vendors, and guests.

“For 30 years I helped plaintiff attorneys build cases against employers when violence targeted invitees at their

locations,” says [Michael Corwin](#), a workplace safety expert. “Following these incidents, employers

tried to rely on check-the-box generic policies and plans. But those defenses fell because papers don't stop an attack. Training in situational awareness and other strategies to avoid physical harm does."

Civil Court Exposure: If a customer, client, or guest is harmed due to a lack of basic safety protocols, they can sue the business directly in civil court, bypassing standard workers' comp limits.

Catastrophic Financial Damage: Jury awards and civil settlements for negligent premises security frequently reach six or seven figures.

Insurance Gaps: Many standard commercial liability insurance policies explicitly exclude coverage for intentional acts of violence or battery, leaving the small business owner personally liable.

SHIFTING FOCUS: SITUATIONAL AWARENESS OVER DE-ESCALATION

Most attacks occur without warning. There's simply no time to de-escalate. And trying to follow a script under stress is virtually impossible. True harm reduction drops complex de-escalation tactics and scripts in favor of proactive, everyday habits:

- **Situational Awareness:** Staff must be trained to read the environment around them and the people within it. Early warning creates options and increases the likelihood of safety.
- **Communicating Safety Concerns:** Employees need to be able to communicate safety concerns, and to do so to people who can help.
- **Learn From Near Misses:** Sometimes violence could have occurred but didn't. Learn from those near misses and implement approaches based upon why the violence didn't happen.
- **The Buddy System:** There's safety in numbers. Implementing this approach, especially with parking lots, can keep a situation from turning violent.

WHY ONE EMPLOYEE IS ENOUGH TO MANDATE ACTION

**YOU DIDN'T BUILD YOUR BUSINESS
TO LOSE IT OVER ONE PREVENTABLE INCIDENT.**

PROTECT THE BUSINESS YOU'VE BUILT.

If your employees interact with customers, patients, clients, vendors, or the public, California workplace violence prevention requirements may apply.

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Protect your business with Help You Be Safe

Under California's workplace violence prevention law, the dividing line is not the number of employees; it's whether you're accessible to the public. And that includes invitees to your business.

A single worker facing the public is exposed to threats from third parties more than any other source type. And that's why California law applies even if you have just one employee.

Failing to document safety hazards specific to your employees and addressing those hazards, or preparing employees in strategies to avoid physical harm, invites immediate regulatory fines alongside devastating private litigation.

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