

10 Tips for Workplace Safety

Whether at your desk or on the go, know how to protect yourself.

by Susan Bartelstone

1. All work sites should have a yearly-reviewed written safety policy and periodic safety meetings where concerns are discussed and safety procedures are worked out. Have local police do a free-of-charge security check of the office premises to maximize safety within the building.

2. All work sites should have a written sexual harassment policy detailing how to file grievances. Document each incident of harassment or threats carefully. If complaints are ignored, the company may be subject to legal action. State laws vary widely, however, so legal advice is necessary. These cases can be frustrating and can take a long time to settle, so you must be very determined.

3. All work sites should have an Employee Assistance Program or a list of community resources available to help employees with problems like domestic violence, substance abuse, job or mental health counseling. An employee in distress increases the potential for violence in the workplace. Offer help, if appropriate, or report suspicions to a supervisor. This isn't paranoia; it's just common sense.

4. Be cautious when using your computer at work. Most companies have the legal right to access your e-mail and Internet usage. Even if meant as a joke, sending off-color, racial, gender-baiting or ethnically offensive material via e-mail can subject you to reprimand, discharge and/or legal charges.

5. Use extreme caution when giving out personal information, meeting people or purchasing goods over the Internet. There are a lot of predators in sheep's clothing out there, including identity thieves and cyber-stalkers.

6. Look for options other than taking public transportation alone if you work a late or early shift: car or subway pools, company vans, or full or partial reimbursement of cab fare by your company.

7. Minimize danger on subways by standing by token booths or near the surveillance camera on the platform. Sit in the car with the conductor. If you must wait for a bus at an isolated stop, get a canister of pepper spray (and know how to use it properly; see *Self Defense for Women*, Summer 2002). Sit up front near the driver. Always keep a cell phone charged and handy.

8. If you drive to work, make sure the company parking lot or street where you park is well lit and has no barriers an assailant can hide behind. Your company should cooperate in this regard; they may be legally liable for unsafe conditions. If there are no security personnel or other employees to escort you when going to your car late at night, get out that canister of pepper spray and stay alert. Try to move your car closer to the building after day-shift employees leave so there's a shorter walk.



9. If you make weekly bank deposits outside your office, vary routes and deposit times so you don't have an observable routine. Find something secure, but unusual, to carry the money in (a diaper bag, camera case). Give up the money without resistance if you're held up.

10. Stay alert and aware—on and off the job! ♦

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