
Store Clerk Shot by Prison Guard in Wyoming

SUMMARY

A 26 year old female employee of a convenience store died of gunshot wounds incurred during an apparent homicide. The victim was talking on the phone when the shooting took place and the party on the phone heard the victim call a person's name, telling them "don't", and then heard the shots. A suspect was located shortly after the incident occurred and was taken into custody. The victim apparently died within a minute of the shooting and was pronounced dead by the coroner around 15 minutes after the incident occurred.

Employers may be able to minimize the potential for occurrence of this type of incident through the following precautions:

- **Since convenience stores are uniquely susceptible to workplace injury resulting from violent action, there should be a policy of double-staffing.**
- **Where a potential for violence is recognized that would place an employee in particular jeopardy, allowances should be made (within reason) to provide additional protection to that employee.**

INTRODUCTION

On the morning of Wednesday, March 3, 1993, a convenience clerk was on duty and was talking with a friend on the phone when an acquaintance apparently fired shots at her, striking her in the chin and upper chest.

INVESTIGATION

WY-FACE investigators were notified of this incident by media reports. Because of the sensitive nature of this investigation by law enforcement personnel, FACE investigators did not conduct an on-site investigation and reports from other sources were either limited or not provided since the incident involved criminal acts.

When law enforcement officers arrived at the scene some three minutes after the incident occurred, they found bullet casings on the floor and the body of the victim lying on the floor behind the counter. They soon apprehended a suspect and information gained from searches of his residence and automobile led officers to believe that the suspect had entered the building and shot the victim. The victim had apparently recognized the person who had come into the building, had called him by name, and asked him not to harm her.

CAUSE OF DEATH

The Medical Examiner listed the cause of death as lacerated heart, liver and left kidney resulting from gunshot wounds to chin and upper anterior chest.

RECOMMENDATIONS/DISCUSSION

With an increasingly high incidence of violent action being taken against people in the workplace, and particularly where the worker is relatively vulnerable such as working alone in a 24-hour convenience store, precautions should be taken to protect workers from such acts. At a minimum, workers should be instructed on how to protect themselves against potential robbers and to not take chances in violent acts involving guns or other weapons.

Where possible, convenience stores should double-staff for assurance that no employee will be on the premises alone as a guard against robbery or violent action. Particularly in areas where an employee is known to be in danger from a person with access to a weapon, the employee should be given as much protection as is reasonable.

Stores that are particularly susceptible to such violence should always have camera-monitors, and employees should be told that the purpose of the monitor is for protection, and instructed to warn would-be assailants that they are being monitored and any unlawful act they commit is being witnessed.

By definition, a homicide is an intentional, and therefore preventable death. While the victim could probably not have done anything more than she did to protect herself, the incident could have been prevented by the assailant's not taking violent action. However, the precautions suggested above might have helped the victim avoid the consequences.

FATAL ACCIDENT CIRCUMSTANCES AND EPIDEMIOLOGY (FACE) PROJECT

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), Division of Safety Research (DSR), performs Fatal Accident Circumstances and Epidemiology (FACE) investigations when a participating state reports an occupational fatality and requests technical assistance. The goal of these evaluations is to prevent fatal work injuries in the future by studying the working environment, the worker, the task the worker was performing, the tools the worker was using, the energy exchange resulting in fatal injury, and the role of management in controlling how these factors interact.

States participating in this study include: Kentucky, Maryland, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.

NIOSH Funded/State-based FACE Projects providing surveillance and intervention capabilities to show a measurable reduction in workplace fatalities include: Alaska, California, Colorado, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Minnesota, Missouri, Wisconsin and Wyoming.

Additional information regarding this report is available from:

Wyoming Occupational Fatality Analysis Program
522 Hathaway Building - 2300 Capitol Avenue
Cheyenne, WY 82002
(307) 777-5439

Please use information listed on the Contact Sheet on the NIOSH FACE web site to contact [In-house FACE program personnel](#) regarding In-house FACE reports and to gain assistance when State-FACE program personnel cannot be reached.