

Latest workplace shooting in US

Seven dead in Chicago warehouse killings

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July and August 2003 have proven to be particularly bloody months in US workplaces. In the most recent tragedy 36-year-old Salvador Tapia shot and killed six people in an auto parts warehouse on the South Side of Chicago Wednesday morning, before being shot to death by members of the Chicago police department's Hostage Barricade and Terrorist (HBT) team.

Tapia had lost his job six months earlier at Windy City Core Supply, which refurbishes used auto parts and sells them to mechanics and auto dealers. According to Police Superintendent Philip Cline, he was fired for "being a poor employee—late, not showing up at work, causing trouble at work." Tapia had allegedly been making threatening phone calls to one of the owners.

Two of the owners, Alan Weiner, 50, and his brother, Howard Weiner (the individual who fired Tapia), 59, were killed in the shooting spree, along with Howard Weiner's son, Daniel Weiner, 30, Calvin Ramsey, 44, Robert Taylor, 53, and Juan Valles, 34. The third owner, Robert Bruggeman, was late for work and escaped harm. The other surviving warehouse employee, Eduardo Sanchez, was tied up by Tapia, but managed to escape and alert police.

Police said they discovered a Greyhound bus ticket on Tapia's body and a note, in Spanish, vaguely threatening his girlfriends. Two girlfriends were located unharmed by authorities.

Tapia apparently entered his old place of employment—in an industrial area near the former Comiskey Park—around 8:30 am, armed with a Walther .380-caliber semiautomatic pistol. The gun's magazine holds eight bullets. The gunman apparently carried an extra magazine. A Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives spokesman told the press, "They are smaller and more easily concealable and have more round capacity than a revolver." The weapon is designed for plainclothes policemen.

The building, police explained, has only one entrance or exit. "Once he's inside and by that front door, he's got them covered," Cline explained. Tapia reportedly hunted down his victims in the warehouse, a labyrinth of engine parts, crates and 55-gallon drums. "From the scene, it appears he went throughout the supply warehouse shooting them," Cline reported. When police arrived, Tapia fired at them, pinning them down behind their vehicles. An eyewitness told the *Associated Press*, "We saw a guy shooting at police officers outside the building and saw people running around like crazy. We came and saw all the cops running, hiding behind cars."

The HBT unit was then "ordered to make an assault on the building." Police claim they found Tapia hiding behind stored auto parts. "He got up. He had the gun. They ordered him to drop the gun. He refused to drop the gun, and that's where the officer shot him," Cline said.

Tapia, a native of Mexico, had an extensive police record, although he had never served time in prison. He was charged five different times with firearms offenses. The *Chicago Tribune* reports that "the 5-foot-5-inch, 140-pound Tapia" threatened "his sister, brother-in-law and girlfriend with a blue-steel semiautomatic pistol during an argument in May 1997. ... Twice he waved a handgun and threatened to kill someone, and three times police charged him with illegally carrying guns, according to records."

Former girlfriend Julia Camacho, whom he often struck during an eight-year relationship, told the *Tribune*, "I knew he was going to snap. He had anger. I don't know where it was coming from. He was angry at the world. I knew if it wasn't me it would be someone else. I kind of knew it [would happen] because a long time ago, he said that he was going to be dead before the age of 36."

Tapia was charged twice with aggravated assault and four times with domestic battery. Camacho and family members declined to cooperate with police, and the charges were dropped in each case. Camacho left Tapia last year. "I told him to leave and I left with my things and I went into hiding [in northwest Indiana]. He never knew where I was. This man had no hope."

Tapia's mother tearfully told the *Chicago Sun-Times*, that her son was a "'loner,' who would drift in and out of Chicago from jobs in St. Louis and as far away as California [where he apparently had a brother]."

The *Sun-Times* continued, "'Everyone knew Sal had a little temper; you let the bosses deal with that,' said Fred Ramsey, a mechanic who frequently bought parts at Windy City and is the brother of one of Tapia's victims, Calvin Ramsey. Tapia sometimes talked about feeling pressure to provide for his family, who had moved to Chicago from Mexico, Camacho said."

"Deadliest since July 8"

It is a measure of the level of tension and violence in American life that both the CBS News and MSNBC News Web sites used the same revealing phrase in regard to the Windy City Core Supply killings—"It was the nation's deadliest workplace shooting since July 8," when Lockheed Martin aircraft worker Doug Williams

opened fire on co-workers in Meridian, Mississippi, killing six and wounding eight others.

Earlier in July, a 25-year-old worker, Jonathon Russell, had shot three co-workers to death in a Jefferson City, Missouri manufacturing plant, before turning the gun on himself. The day after Williams' mad act in Meridian, a Verizon Wireless employee, Rodney James Moncke, 50, in San Angelo, Texas, killed his supervisor and himself.

In the Detroit suburb of Livonia, Michigan on July 21 a six-hour standoff between police and a young man who had threatened to kill a co-worker ended peacefully. The 20-year-old employee had come to work with a gun, asking to speak with a supervisor. When he pulled out the weapon, the other employees fled, and the man barricaded himself in the plant, Iron Mountain Secured Shredding, before eventually surrendering.

On July 23, a Century 21 real estate employee, Ron Thomas, opened fired in his office in San Antonio, Texas, killing two female co-workers and wounding another. After fleeing the scene in his Ford Explorer, Thomas was spotted by a trucker who reported him to police. "When police began following, they observed a gun flash from the cab of the vehicle, and the Explorer swerved and crashed," according to WOAI News. Thomas was found dead in the vehicle.

A shooting spree took place July 28 inside a Boynton Beach, Florida garden center when Andres Casarrubias, 44, shot his estranged wife, Catalina, whom he accused of having an affair with an ex-worker, with a handgun. He also shot and killed a landscaper who was standing near his wife and wounded another man.

Tragedy struck at the Andover Industries Plant in Andover, Ohio, 80 miles north-east of Cleveland, on August 19, when a 32-year-old factory worker killed a colleague and himself. Ricky Shadle had filled out a form incorrectly in July and been denied a two-week holiday as a result. Shadle's mother said her son had a learning disability and always needed assistance filling out forms.

Rosalie Shadle also told the press that her son had recently found out he had cancer and might need to have his right leg amputated. "He told me he would shoot himself first before he would have that leg amputated," his mother said. Shadle brought four handguns to work and killed Theodora Mosley, 61, and wounded two others before shooting himself in the head. The plant, which makes plastic car parts, is the largest employer in the village of 1,220 people.

Shadle's mother said her son "never spoke unless [he was] spoken to." Shadle's parents also told the press that Ricky had never missed a day of work, collected guns and liked to shoot targets behind their house.

Handgun-Free America, an organization advocating the banning of handguns, reports that it has recorded more than 100 workplace shootings since it began researching the issue in 1985. It states: "Typically workplace shootings are carried out by a former employee who was fired from their job. Other motives include disputes with coworkers or supervisors, suspensions, or a personal feud, such as a coworker refusing the flirtatious advances of another coworker.

"More than 95 percent of the perpetrators are male. Furthermore,

more than 80 percent of them are white. The majority of workplace killers are middle aged, in their forties or early fifties. According to our findings thus far, almost half (42 percent) of the perpetrators take their own lives as well, pulling the trigger once again, only this time aimed at themselves. ... The weapon of choice for these perpetrators is almost always a firearm."

Officials in Chicago, whose Melrose Park suburb was the scene of another workplace tragedy in which five people died at a Navistar International engine plant in February 2001, responded to the Windy City warehouse killings by calling for a tightening of laws governing handguns.

"The problem here is easy access to a firearm. Here is someone who never should have had a gun that had a gun," Superintendent Cline commented. In a statement, Democratic Mayor Richard M. Daley declared: "This is a terrible example of what can happen when guns end up in the hands of people who should never be allowed to have them. Our hearts go out to the innocent victims of this senseless crime, as well as their families. In their memory, we should resolve to work even harder for meaningful handgun regulations." The Chicago establishment's response predictably combines pragmatic shortsightedness, hypocrisy and evasiveness.

The atrocity on the South Side, whatever its specific features, coming on the heels of a rash of other tragic episodes, is an eruption to the surface of the extraordinary tension and violence seething beneath the surface of American society.

What are the principal features of social and political life in the US at present? An administration in Washington that rules by fraud and criminality at home and abroad; growing social polarization and the impoverishment of wide layers of the population; the media's pretense that "all is well" in America, and that anyone not doing well is essentially a "loser," when devastating social problems afflict the country; the political disenfranchisement of the vast majority, who confront two major parties dominated by the same fabulously wealthy elite; and an absence in general of any official outlet for popular expressions of discontent and frustration, which only deepens widely-felt bitterness and resentment.

Add to that volatile mix the presence of approximately 200 million firearms in the United States, including roughly 70 million handguns, and terrible incidents like the Windy City killings are almost inevitable.



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