

Harassment Hurts

Safety Talk

Harassment in the workplace is a serious matter. Many lives have been badly affected by sexual harassment, bullying and other forms of harassment. Harassment is also a safety issue, because a distressed worker may be unable to concentrate on the job and stay alert to hazards. Harassment can also lead to workplace violence.

This kind of behavior is not tolerated in the workplace. If you ever find yourself a target of harassment, you do not have to put up with it. You have the law on your side to stop it. It is forbidden by company policies and union policies as well as by federal and state or provincial laws.

One type of workplace harassment is sexual harassment. Sometimes it is in the form of threats if the person does not go along with sexual advances, or promise of job rewards if the person does. Another type of sexual harassment is the creation of an intimidating or offensive work environment. Sexual pictures and offensive language are examples.

Sexual harassment can be physical and involve unwanted touching or physical assault. It can be verbal in the form of off-color jokes or non-verbal in the form of gestures. A male harassing a female is the common scenario, but females do harass males, and same-sex harassment also occurs.

Other kinds of harassment are also harmful. Hostility, teasing, ridiculing, humiliating or undermining another worker are all forms of harassment. When workers gang up on someone, it is known as mobbing. Victims of bullying and mobbing have been known to turn violently on their attackers and also to commit suicide.

Harassers have been known to pick on co-workers because of ethnic background, race, religion, physical ability, appearance, economic status and many other characteristics. The harasser may try to defend such behavior as friendly teasing and might actually

believe this to be true, but if the recipient objects to the behavior, he or she has every right to ask that it stop.

If you are the recipient of unwanted sexual attention or other forms of harassment, speak up. Tell the harasser you object to the behavior. You should make notes if incidents of harassment continue, including the times, places and witnesses. Report harassment to your supervisor or the person designated in your company to receive such complaints. Find out the company procedure for filing a complaint and for following it through until the problem is resolved. If the person doing the harassing is your supervisor, go to that person's boss.

If you observe harassment in your workplace, do something about it. Speak up and report the problem to someone in authority in your company. Countless cases of harassment have continued because bystanders did nothing about it.

Do not engage in harassment, and do not encourage it. Do not treat it as entertainment by laughing or gossiping at the victim's expense. Treat all of your co-workers with respect – and expect others to do so, too.

Workplaces are becoming increasingly diverse. Workers come from many backgrounds and all deserve the chance to do their jobs in peace and with dignity.