

Harassment in the workplace means bullying, or any other objectionable conduct or inappropriate comment, that occurs in a workplace or is work-related, that a person knows or ought reasonably to know, is likely unwelcome, and that adversely affects a worker's physical or psychological well-being or constitutes a threat to a worker's health and safety. This includes bullying, inappropriate comments or objectionable conduct that relates to or is motivated by a worker's sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. (See *Occupational Health and Safety Regulations*, Part 1 - General, section 1.02.) Harassment can cause physical and psychological injuries.

What's the hazard?

A hazard is something that may expose a person to a risk of injury. Harassment is a hazard. Some hazards are more obvious than others. Below are some examples of harassment hazards that could lead to injury. Which could occur in your workplace? Are there any others that may be relevant in your workplace?

Forms of harassment may include:

- threats, intimidation or verbal abuse
- unwelcome remarks or jokes about race, religion, disability or age
- displaying sexist, racist or other offensive pictures or posters
- sexually suggestive remarks or gestures
- unnecessary physical contact, such as touching, patting, pinching or punching
- bullying behaviours
- any behaviour that demeans, embarrasses or humiliates a person

What are possible effects?

The effects of harassment will vary and may be influenced by the duration and severity of the harassment, but people generally react by exhibiting symptoms of increasing distress.

For individuals experiencing harassment, the effects can include:

- minor or serious physical and psychological injuries
- temporary or permanent physical disability
- increased stress
- psychological trauma
- disbelief
- anger
- loss of confidence

Talk leader instructions:

- This is background information ONLY.
- Be sure to customize to your organization.
- Consider printing copies of this sheet for yourself and each participant.
- Lead a discussion with your workers about the materials on this sheet.
- Be sure to give real life examples whenever possible. Be open to questions.
- Conclude with a brief review of the main points or a summary based on the discussion.
- Fill in the name of your organization, location and the date on your sheet. Have each worker sign your sheet to confirm their attendance.
- File your sheet in your worker records to document the Safety Talk.

- isolation, withdrawal, illness, depression
- loss of sleep or appetite
- headaches, stomach aches or other illnesses
- anxiety or panic attacks
- feeling demoralized or humiliated
- fear of coming to work
- inability to concentrate
- outbursts of misplaced anger
- increased absenteeism and sick leave

For organizations, the effects can include:

- low morale
- increased job stress
- loss of productivity
- increased absenteeism and turnover
- reduced trust of management and co-workers
- a hostile working environment
- union grievance and arbitration costs
- human rights complaints
- financial costs of investigations

What can be done to prevent harassment in the workplace?

Required by law:

- employers must do hazard assessments to identify what kinds of harassment hazards are in their workplaces
- workplaces must have a violence and harassment prevention policy and procedures in place
- employers must train workers on their violence and harassment prevention policy and procedures
- procedures must explain how to make a complaint, investigate a complaint and share investigation results
- reporting procedures must say how to make a complaint of harassment to someone other than the employer, if a worker has a complaint against their employer
- workers must take all necessary precautions to ensure their own health and safety and that of everyone else in the workplace, including preventing workplace harassment
- workers must report immediately to their supervisor any situation they have reason to believe would present a hazard, including harassment hazards
- workers must report any accident or injury that results from their work
- employers must take measures to eliminate or control the risks of hazards, including harassment hazards, identified in their workplace
- employers must have procedures in place to let affected workers know what supports are available, for example employee assistance programs, peer support programs, or community resources like counselling or mental health services

Additional controls:

Specific actions may be considered based on the hazard assessment in your workplace. For example:

- set up a record-keeping procedure to collect, use and store personal information
- set up a conflict management procedure to help workers deal with unreasonable behaviour before it escalates

- set up systems to support workers who are at greater risk of being victims of harassment or of showing harassing behaviours

If you believe you are being harassed in your workplace:

- follow your organization's emergency plan if immediate assistance is required
- if possible, describe your concerns to the person who is making you feel harassed
- follow the organization's incident reporting procedures
- report and record all incidents
- report to your supervisor
- if the complaint is against your employer, report the complaint to the alternate person who must be identified in the workplace harassment prevention procedure

Discussion questions:

1. What can we do to prevent workplace harassment?
2. Who would you talk to if you are experiencing harassment?

More information:

If you have more questions or concerns about preventing workplace harassment, please contact:

- Yukon Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board, 667-5450 or 1-800- 661-0443 or work.safe@gov.yk.ca
- Yukon Human Rights Commission, 867-667-6226

Safety Talk record:

Print and complete this page or fill in electronically, then save as a record of your Safety Talk.

Comments/suggestions

Organization name

Safety Talk leader

Date

Safety Talk participants

print name

signature
