

Developing and implementing effective harassment and sexual harassment policies



Alberta Human Rights
and Citizenship Commission

INFORMATION SHEET

Developing and implementing an effective workplace policy is key in preventing harassment. Education is also important. People have to **know** there is a policy and what it says. The employer's position on harassment should be contained in a clear policy statement, distributed to all employees, posted on bulletin boards and provided to all managers, supervisors and new employees.

Leadership is critical to any effective harassment policy. With a well developed policy, senior management has a chance to demonstrate a proud corporate commitment to fair and equal treatment of all employees.

Managers must take a lead role in reminding staff (in newsletters, annual reports, at meetings, etc.) that harassment is against company policy and the law.


Policies that work do these things:

- **Encourage employees** to come forward with complaints. How a policy sounds and is structured is important. Management has to demonstrate its commitment to eliminating all forms of harassment.
- **Ensure acceptance** by all staff, unions and employee associations. This can only be developed through consultation, input and feedback. Time taken here will be more than repaid down the road.

- **Provide a clear definition of harassment**, as outlined in the *Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act*.
- **Include guidelines** for individuals seeking advice about making a sexual or other type of harassment complaint.
- **Maintain confidentiality** of complaints and protect employees from retaliation.
- **Designate a person or persons** to hear complaints. These individual(s) should be viewed by other employees as neutral but as having the authority to act. If possible, have more than one person assigned to this important, sometimes emotionally taxing job.
- **Lay out the steps:** Effective harassment policies provide a step-by-step description of what happens in the company when a complaint of harassment is made. To encourage prevention, also spell out the disciplinary consequences of harassment of any employee.
- **Guarantee a fair and prompt reaction** to anyone with a complaint of harassment.

(See Information Sheet titled *Sample harassment policy*.)

Education and prevention

Education is important in preventing sexual and other types of harassment. Everyone must know about the policy and management must ensure staff at all levels are aware of the ongoing commitment to that policy. A sensitive policy also can serve to foster an understanding of the true nature of harassment and its destructive consequences. **Remember: prevention is better than cure**, and a policy prohibiting harassment can provide the basis for prevention. 

Contact the Commission

For more information, please contact the **Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission**. We are an independent commission of the Government of Alberta. Our mandate is to foster equality and reduce discrimination. We provide public information and education programs, and help Albertans resolve human rights complaints.

Northern Regional Office

800 Standard Life Centre
10405 Jasper Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta T5J 4R7
(780) 427-7661 Confidential Inquiry Line
(780) 427-6013 Fax

Southern Regional Office

Suite 310, 525 – 11 Avenue SW
Calgary, Alberta T2R 0C9
(403) 297-6571 Confidential Inquiry Line
(403) 297-6567 Fax

To call toll-free within Alberta, dial 310-0000 and then enter the area code and phone number.

For province-wide free access from a cellular phone, enter *310 (for Rogers-AT&T) or #310 (for Telus).

TTY service for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing

(780) 427-1597 Edmonton
(403) 297-5639 Calgary
1-800-232-7215 Toll-free within Alberta

E-mail humanrights@gov.ab.ca

Web site www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca

Please note: A complaint must be made to the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission within one year after the alleged incident.

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