

## **MAJOR PROGRAM POINTS**

# **"HARASSMENT IN THE OFFICE"**

**Part of the "GENERAL SAFETY SERIES"**

**Quality Safety and Health Products, for Today...and Tomorrow**

# **Outline of Major Points Covered in the "Workplace Harassment in the Office" Course**

The following outline summarizes the major points of information presented in the course on "Workplace Harassment in the Office". The outline can be used to survey the course before taking it on a computer, as well as to review the course when a computer is not available.

- **By now we have all seen the headlines about the disgruntled employee bringing a gun to work.**
  - But the real story is..."Harassment in the Workplace".
- **In its various forms, harassment affects more people in the workplace than violence.**
  - Over 16 million U.S. workers are affected each year.
  - In fact, many highly publicized incidents of violence started with workplace harassment.
- **When we hear the word "harassment", we immediately think of sexual harassment.**
  - But there are many other types of harassment as well.
- **In general, harassment is any language or behavior that could be offensive or disturbing to someone... anyone.**
- **The subject of harassing remarks, gestures or actions varies, but can include:**
  - Race.
  - Religion.
  - National origin.
  - Age.
  - Sex.
  - Marital status.
  - Sexual orientation.
  - Handicap.

- **As you might guess, harassment and discrimination can be closely related.**
  - Whenever you find one, you may find the other.
- **Remarks such as "You can't teach an old dog new tricks" can be considered harassment.**
  - If this type of attitude influences decisions about employment... such as hiring, raises and promotions... then it is "age discrimination".
- **Racial slurs and ethnic jokes continue unfair stereotypes, which can also give rise to discrimination.**
  - They "single people out" on the basis of race or national origin.
  - They can influence important decisions in the workplace.
- **Some people try to dismiss things like verbal abuse and threatening behavior by saying "it's part of the job" or "it comes with the territory".**
  - Others think that victims of harassment are just being "too sensitive".
- **But any type of harassment can:**
  - Create a hostile work environment.
  - Lead to hurt feelings.
  - Cause physical injuries.
- **When harassment goes unreported and uninvestigated, violence can be the final outcome.**
  - So we need to put a stop to harassment before things go too far.
- **Teasing and jokes between coworkers often start with innocent intentions.**
  - Other times, verbal jabs are used to "test boundaries" or "push buttons".

- **Unfortunately, this kind of behavior can quickly cross the line into verbal abuse, such as:**
  - Mocking.
  - Bullying.
  - Intimidation.
- **When this behavior becomes hurtful or offensive, it can be considered harassment.**
- **Sometimes people don't realize that others find their behavior disturbing or offensive.**

It is important to let someone know when they "cross your line".

  - This will prevent any misunderstandings.
- **Remember, what may be amusing to one person could be taken very seriously by another.**
  - Ethnic jokes can be taken personally by members of the ethnic group that is the brunt of the joke.
  - Only one person needs to be offended for it to be considered harassment.
- **People do not usually mean any harm when they play practical jokes, but sometimes these "gags" can backfire.**
  - Hurt feelings... or even painful injuries... could be the end result.
  - If the practical joke was intended to single out or make an example of someone, it could be considered harassment.
- **Remember, it is important to tell someone when you find their behavior offensive.**
  - But if you ask them to stop and the harassment continues, do not get involved in a shouting match.
  - If an argument develops, stay calm.
  - Suggest getting a neutral person involved.
  - If all else fails, walk away from the situation.
- **Sometimes no matter what you do, you will not be able to end the problem. It may even grow worse.**
  - We need to take a look at what can happen when verbal harassment gets more intense... and what we can do to stop it.

- **Threats are the most common example of intense verbal harassment. They can be:**
  - Veiled.
  - Conditional.
  - Direct.
- **"Veiled" or "hidden" threats suggest that someone intends to do harm without actually spelling it out.**
- **"Conditional" threats are intended to scare people into doing something... or not doing something.**
- **"Direct" threats are clear statements of intention to do harm.**
- **The best way to put a stop to this behavior is to report it. So report all types of threats.**
  - In fact you should report any kind of verbal abuse, or any form of harassment that you receive or witness.
- **Sometimes people don't want to be a "tattle-tail" and get anyone in trouble by reporting incidents.**
  - Others just do not want to get involved.
  - But these types of problems rarely go away on their own.
  - Making a report is your best opportunity to stop the harassing behavior once and for all.
- **Making a report is also the best way to prevent the situation from developing into something more serious, such as:**
  - Violence.
  - Stalking.
  - Murder.
- **Report incidents of harassment to your:**
  - Supervisor.
  - Human Resource Department.
  - Company's security personnel.

- **Some companies even have an independent hot-line or Employee Assistance Program (EAP) that lets you make confidential reports.**
  - Local law enforcement agencies should also be notified of incidents involving threats of violence or physical assaults.
  
- **Since verbal abuse, threats and other forms of harassment can escalate, it's important to know how to handle situations involving violence. A typical scenario would be:**
  - Two coworkers having a disagreement.
  - Their difference of opinion grows into an argument.
  - The confrontation intensifies with insults, threats and challenges.
  
- **A serious act of violence could occur if the conflict is allowed to escalate into:**
  - Pushing.
  - Shoving.
  - Other physical contact.
  
- **If you find yourself faced with an abusive or threatening person:**
  - Try to stay at least five feet away from them. Avoid any physical contact.
  - Assume a non-threatening posture, with your arms held low.
  - Stay calm.
  
- **Other things that you can do to help to diffuse the situation include:**
  - Don't argue, disagree or be judgmental.
  - Let the person know that you "understand".
  - If their behavior continues, try to change the subject.
  - If they shove, grab or corner you, try to get away or call out for help.
  
- **If someone attempts to cause you bodily harm, or even makes a threatening gesture, it could be considered "Assault".**
  - Assault is a crime.

- **Even if you are not the one who started it, fighting can have serious consequences. You could get:**
  - Injured.
  - Suspended.
  - Fired.
  - Arrested.
  - Sued by the other person.
  
- **If someone challenges you to a fight, turn them down.**
  - If they push you, don't even shove back... it will likely just escalate the confrontation.
  - Refuse to fight.
  - Just walk away.
  
- **Never fight back unless your life is in danger.**
  - If someone assaults you, try to get away.
  - You can also call out (help is usually nearby).
  
- **Remember, assault is a crime and should be reported to local law enforcement agencies and to your employer.**
  
- **Now let's discuss "sexual harassment". You may automatically picture a male supervisor propositioning a female employee.**
  - However, there are a number of other situations that qualify as sexual harassment as well.
  
- **The harasser could also be a:**
  - Coworker.
  - Employee.
  - Customer or client.
  - Vendor.
  
- **Men are not the only perpetrators. Women can also harass men.**
  - The harasser can even be of the same sex as the victim.
  - In fact, the situation does not have to involve a "proposition" at all.

- **"Sexual harassment" is any behavior that is sexually oriented or based on gender which creates an offensive or hostile work environment.**
  - And just because a behavior isn't offensive to most people, doesn't mean it's okay.
  - Each individual is the judge of what they find offensive.
  
- **Furthermore, sexual harassment affects more than just the person targeted by the behavior:**
  - It can create a hostile work environment for anyone who witnesses it.
  - Everyone becomes a potential "victim".
  
- **Sexual harassment can take the form of:**
  - Sexist as well as sexual remarks.
  - Sexual advances.
  - Unwanted physical contact.
  - Assigning menial or demeaning tasks based on gender.
  
- **It can also include:**
  - Sexually suggestive objects or pictures.
  - Practical jokes based on gender.
  - Pressure to be "one of the guys" or "one of the girls".
  
- **Remember, each and every individual decides what language and behavior they find offensive.**
  - If someone's behavior makes you uncomfortable, it is important to let them know about it.
  - This is the best way to prevent future incidents.
  - Without making accusations, be clear and concise about the types of behavior that you consider unacceptable.
  
- **It is also important to record each incident that occurs.**
  - If the behavior continues even after you've expressed your concerns, report it to your company.
  - Having a written record of examples will help them understand the situation.

- **Ignoring sexual harassment and hoping it will just go away can have serious consequences. Harassing behavior that goes unreported or uninvestigated can lead to:**
  - Assault.
  - Rape.
  - Violence.
  - Even murder.
  
- **A behavior that is closely related to sexual harassment is "stalking".**
  - Although it has traditionally been defined as "following without proper authority", stalking can pose much greater threats than sexual harassment alone.
  
- **While most people who express a romantic interest in someone will stop pursuing them if those feelings are not returned, a stalker will become obsessed.**
  - This can turn into repeated, unwanted attention.
  - It can include following the victim and other invasions of privacy.
  
- **Often, a stalker will leave disturbing gifts, notes or telephone messages for their victim.**
  - If the target of their affections does not respond, they may intensify their efforts, escalating to threats or acts of violence.
  
- **Some facilities respond to stalking by:**
  - Relocating the victim's workstation.
  - Changing the victim's work schedule.
  - (Either could discourage the stalker and make them lose interest).
  
- **In extreme cases, a company might:**
  - Install a silent alarm or security camera at the victim's workstation.
  - Post a security guard nearby.
  
- **Never confront a stalker or return gifts that they give you.**
  - These may encourage the stalker to continue, or provoke an act of violence.
  - However, document each incident in case you need to take legal action later.

- **If unwanted attention continues, you may want to file for a "Protection Order", a legal document forbidding the stalker from pursuing you.**
  - If you have any reason to believe your life is in danger, contact the police immediately.

### **\*\*\* SUMMARY \*\*\***

- **As you can see, harassment can quickly create a hostile working environment.**
  - It can make daily life on the job unbearable... and it can lead to incidents of violence.
- **Verbal abuse has no place at work. This includes:**
  - Teasing.
  - Ethnic slurs.
  - Practical jokes.
- **Report all threats.**
  - Every one won't lead to violence, but any of them could.
- **Never get involved in a fight... no matter who starts it.**
  - Assault is a crime.
- **Don't tolerate sexual harassment.**
  - Let people know when their behavior makes you feel uncomfortable.
- **Never confront a stalker or return their gifts.**
  - You can't predict how they will react.
- **Report any offensive behavior... and make sure it gets documented.**
- **Harassment should never be considered "part of the job".**
- **Treat others as you would want to be treated... and ask them to do the same!**