



Safety Hot Topic: Workplace Bullying

What is workplace bullying?

Bullying is usually seen as acts or verbal comments that could ‘mentally’ hurt or isolate a person in the workplace. Sometimes, bullying can involve negative physical contact as well. Bullying usually involves repeated incidents or a pattern of behaviour that is intended to intimidate, offend, degrade or humiliate a particular person or a group of people. It has also been described as the assertion of power through aggression.

How can bullying affect the workplace?

Bullying is not just an interaction between individuals; there are organizational factors at work which can facilitate it. Among these are:

- An extremely competitive environment
- Fear of redundancy, cuts or reorganization
- Little participation in decision making
- Poor training
- De-skilling
- No clear policies or codes of conduct
- Poor procedures for resolving grievances and problems
- Indifferent attitude of higher management towards behavior by front-line managers

Bullying affects the overall ‘health’ of an organization. An ‘unhealthy’ workplace can have many ‘unhealthy’ effects.

In general these include:

- Decreased moral
- Increased risk for accidents/incidents
- Increased absenteeism, turnover, and stress
- Increased costs for employee assistance programs (EFAP), recruitment and retention
- Decreased motivation and productivity

Bullying at work is a health and safety and a union issue. It causes job insecurity and adverse health effects and often arises out of an imbalance of power in the workplace which your union can address.

Are You Bullied at Work?

Bullying at work is any form of behavior which is offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting or is an abuse or misuse of power intended to undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure individuals or groups.

Bullying leads to **stress** and then to illness if prolonged. Very high proportions of people subjected to bullying change their job as a result and suffer negative consequences.

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Bullying is widespread at work. In several studies and surveys done on this topic, the bully was often a manager or supervisor. In almost all cases (even worker to worker) the upper management knew what was going on and/or did nothing about it.

Bullying can take many forms:

- Direct verbal and physical abuse
- Unfair use of disciplinary and assessment procedures
- Blocking access to promotion, training, overtime, etc.
- Setting impossible deadlines and targets
- Withholding information essential to do the job properly
- Excessively tight supervision
- Public humiliation including being shouted at
- Persistent and undue criticism including inaccurate accusations about quality of work
- Undermining responsibility
- Abuse references to age, sex, race, disability, or other personal characteristics
- Spreading malicious rumours
- Physical isolation from others

If you, or someone you know, are being bullied get in touch with your Unit Executive to help you address the issue or call our Member Resource Centre at 1-888-999-7348.

What can you do?

If you feel you are being bullied, discriminated against, victimized or subjected to any form of harassment:

- If possible, tell the person that his or her behaviour is not acceptable to you and ask them to stop. You may have someone with you if you like.
- Keep a factual journal or diary of daily events which includes:
 - The date, time, and a description of what happened in as much detail as possible
 - The names of any witnesses
 - The outcome of the event e.g.; felt intimidated, embarrassed, sick, threatened, etc.
- Remember, it is not always just the nature of the incident(s), it may be a one time incident however often it is a number, keeping track of the frequency, and especially the pattern can establish whether it is bullying or harassment.
- Keep copies of any letters, memos, e-mails, faxes, etc. received from the person.
- **Report the harassment to the person identified in your workplace policy, your supervisor, or a designated manager.** If your concerns are minimized, proceed to the next level of management.

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