

# Occupational health and safety hazard

## Workplace bullying and harassment

The *Workers Compensation Act* explains the rights and responsibilities of employers and workers as they relate to workplace health and safety. These obligations include preventing and addressing workplace bullying and harassment, as outlined in WorkSafeBC's Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) policies [D3-115-2](#), [D3-116-1](#), [D3-117-2](#).

Workplace bullying and harassment is a health and safety issue that can compromise the mental and physical health and safety of workers. Employers must recognize these hazards, put prevention measures in place, and address incidents if they occur.

### Effects of bullying and harassment on the target

People react differently to bullying and harassment. Reactions may include one or any combination of the following:

- impaired concentration or ability to make decisions, which could lead to safety hazards (such as a lack of attention when working with dangerous equipment)
- distress, anxiety, sleep disturbance, substance abuse, and/or suicidal thoughts or actions
- physical illness
- reduced work performance

### Effects on the workplace

Effects on the overall workplace might include the following:

- reduced efficiency and productivity, due to poor staff morale
- increased stress and tensions between workers
- high absenteeism rates
- higher turnover, resulting in higher recruitment costs
- higher levels of client dissatisfaction

A study of nurses in more than 40 health units in western Canada examined the relationship between being a direct target of bullying and working in a bullying environment. Not surprisingly, workers who were targets of bullying were found to experience negative effects as a result. The study also showed that working in an environment where others were being bullied can have negative consequences – even for those who are not the targets. This can significantly affect workers' choices about staying in or leaving their jobs. These results are consistent with other research (Houshmand et al. 2012).

## Legal obligations

Employers, workers, and supervisors have legal obligations to prevent and address workplace bullying and harassment. For example:

- Employers must develop a policy statement and procedures for workers to report incidents of bullying and harassment and for how employers will deal with incidents and complaints.

- Workers and supervisors must not bully and harass others in the workplace.
- Supervisors and workers must be trained to recognize the potential for bullying and harassment.

For more information about these and other legal duties, as well as practical tips and information about workplace bullying and harassment, visit [www.worksafebc.com/bullying](http://www.worksafebc.com/bullying).

## Resources and additional information

**WorkSafeBC prevention information line**  
1.888.621.7233

**Employers' Advisers Office**  
[www.labour.gov.bc.ca/eao/](http://www.labour.gov.bc.ca/eao/)

**Workers' Advisers Office**  
[www.labour.gov.bc.ca/wab/](http://www.labour.gov.bc.ca/wab/)

WorkSafeBC has created a package of tools and resources to help workplace parties prevent and address workplace bullying and harassment. Access the online tool kit and OHS policies at [www.worksafebc.com/bullying](http://www.worksafebc.com/bullying).