

Both employers and workers have an important role to play in addressing bullying and harassment on the construction site.

Constructing a workplace free from bullying and harassment

By Jesse Marchand

If someone at your worksite was being bullied would you know what to do? Speaking directly to workers and employers who have experienced bullying and harassment first hand, a series of videos and resources from WorkSafeBC titled *Bullying and Harassment in Construction: It's Personal* can help your workplace have a frank shop talk this summer.

"There's a culture in the construction industry that you've got to be tough with employees in the field, and that's not the case," says Robert Lashin, president and CEO of Houle Electric. Lashin states in the video that creating a workplace free from bullying starts with communication.

"You need to be caring. You need to be understanding. You have to understand where people are coming from, and you have to communicate."

So how do you change the culture at your worksite? Both employers and workers have a role.

"Employers have the responsibility to establish and maintain a safe and healthy workplace and to comply with the *Worker's Compensation Act* and the *Occupational Health and Safety Regulation*," says supervisor, Prevention Field Services, Stewart Babineau. "Employers must take all reasonable steps to prevent where possible, or otherwise minimize, bullying and harassment in the workplace.

"To start, employers must have a policy in place that states that bullying and harassment will not be tolerated. To support this policy, employers must establish procedures for workers to report incidents that they have witnessed or experienced.

"Next, employers need to respond to complaints by implementing their procedures for investigating reported incidents of bullying and harassment."

Workers also play a very important role in workplace health and safety, adds Babineau. “Workers have a responsibility to take reasonable care to protect the health and safety of themselves and others by not engaging in bullying and harassment, and reporting incidents to their employers by following the established procedures in place at their workplace.”


If you are a worker and you experience or see bullying at work, here are five steps to address the hazard:

- 1 Recognize bullying and harassment.** What is bullying and harassment? If someone at work is trying to humiliate or intimidate someone else through inappropriate conduct or comments, it's bullying and harassment. It can include calling someone derogatory names, vandalizing personal belongings, spreading malicious gossip or rumours, making aggressive gestures, or even socially isolating someone from the rest of the crew.
- 2 Don't be a bystander.** You may not be the one saying derogatory comments, but if you do nothing while they are happening, you are contributing to a negative work culture. Speak up if it's safe to do so.
- 3 Report bullying and harassment.** Make sure you are aware of your workplace's policies and procedures regarding bullying and harassment. These policies should include how to report incidents or complaints, as well as what to do if your supervisor is the alleged bully or harasser.
- 4 Participate in investigations.** Once you've reported the incident, you may be required to participate in an investigation. How investigations work should be clearly outlined in your workplace policy and include:
 - The roles and responsibilities of employers, supervisors, workers, and others
 - What will follow the investigation (description of corrective actions, timeframe, dealing with adverse symptoms, etc.)
 - Record-keeping requirements
- 5 Do not engage in bullying and harassment.** Don't be a contributor to a negative work culture. In the WorkSafeBC videos, Josh Towsley, business representative for local 115 of the International Union of Operating Engineers, speaks to the reality of being part of the problem: “When I was a young foreman, we had a really good young apprentice on

our crew. No matter what he did, he was picked on for it. He was nitpicked on by the crew. Nothing was ever good enough,” says Towsley. “I found myself saying stuff to the young apprentice that was said to me when I was a young apprentice. And it was when I heard myself saying that stuff when I realized that the culture had to change on our crew.” Towsley's message has one simple thread: Don't be a bully.

For more information

You can search for [bullying and harassment](#) on [worksafebc.com](#) and access the following resources:

- Fact sheets and FAQs in multiple languages
- The video and discussion guide series *Bullying and Harassment in Construction: It's Personal*
- The handbook for preventing and addressing workplace bullying and harassment *Toward a Respectful Workplace*
- The *Small Business Guide to Bullying and Harassment* 

Bullying and harassing behaviour can include:

- Verbal aggression or yelling
- Humiliating initiation practices or hazing
- Spreading malicious rumours
- Calling someone derogatory names

Bullying and harassing behaviour does not include:

- Expressing differences of opinion
- Offering constructive feedback, guidance, or advice about work-related behaviour
- Reasonable action taken by an employer or supervisor relating to the management and direction of workers or the place of employment (e.g. managing a worker's performance, taking reasonable disciplinary actions, assigning work)