

Backgrounder

Workplace bullying and harassment

WorkSafeBC's Board of Directors has approved three Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) policies under Sections 115, 116, and 117 of the *Workers Compensation Act*, dealing with workplace bullying and harassment. The policies define bullying and harassment and explain the duties of employers, workers, and supervisors to prevent and address workplace bullying and harassment. These duties apply to the approximately 215,000 employers and 2.2 million workers currently served by WorkSafeBC.

What is the definition of workplace bullying and harassment according to WorkSafeBC's policies?

Bullying and harassment includes any inappropriate conduct or comment by a person towards a worker that the person knew or reasonably ought to have known would cause that worker to be humiliated or intimidated, but excludes any reasonable action taken by an employer or supervisor relating to the management and direction of workers or the place of employment.

What do these policies mean?

The *Workers Compensation Act* sets out the general duties of employers, workers, and supervisors to ensure or protect the health and safety of workplace parties.

The OHS policies identify the steps that WorkSafeBC considers reasonable for workplace parties to take to prevent and address workplace bullying and harassment.

When do these policies take effect?

The bullying and harassment policies become effective November 1, 2013.

What do I need to do as an employer?

Understand your duties as an employer to prevent and address workplace bullying and harassment. Your duties include the following:

- not engaging in bullying and harassment of workers and supervisors
- developing a policy statement for your workplace
- taking steps to prevent or minimize bullying and harassment
- developing and implementing procedures for workers to report incidents and complaints of bullying and harassment
- developing and implementing procedures for dealing with incidents and complaints
- informing and training workers and supervisors
- annually reviewing the policy statement and procedures for reporting and dealing with incidents and complaints

What do I need to do as a supervisor?

A supervisor's duties include:

- not engaging in bullying and harassment of other workers, supervisors, or the employer
- applying and complying with the employer's policies and procedures on bullying and harassment

What do I need to do as a worker?

A worker's duties include:

- not engaging in bullying and harassment of other workers, supervisors, or the employer
- reporting bullying and harassment observed or experienced in the workplace
- applying and complying with the employer's policies and procedures on bullying and harassment

Why are these policies important to the workplace?

There are negative effects of bullying and harassment on workers and workplaces. Not only can bullying and harassment impair work performance and lead to increased absenteeism, it can lead to depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. It not only affects workers subjected to this behaviour, but can negatively affect witnesses and bystanders as well.

What is WorkSafeBC's role in the enforcement of these policies?

There is no planned "enforcement blitz." WorkSafeBC prevention officers will respond to enquiries and concerns about bullying and harassment in the workplace through existing inspection practices. Prevention officers will engage in inspection, consultation, and education activities with respect to workplace bullying and harassment as they would for any occupational health and safety requirement.

Resources and additional information

WorkSafeBC prevention information line
1.888.621.7233

Employers' Advisers Office
www.labour.gov.bc.ca/eao/

Workers' Advisers Office
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.