

## **MAJOR PROGRAM POINTS**

# **"PREVENTING SEXUAL HARASSMENT: FOR EMPLOYEES"**

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

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

# Outline of Major Points Covered in the "Preventing Sexual Harassment... For Employees" Course

The following outline summarizes the major points of information presented in the course on "Preventing Sexual Harassment... for Employees". 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.

- **When many people hear the words "sexual harassment," they picture a male supervisor cornering a female employee to make unwanted sexual advances. But sexual harassment goes far beyond that:**
  - Anyone can find themselves a victim of sexual harassment.
  - Someone might even find your behavior to be sexually harassing, even though you may not think that you have done anything wrong.
- **Sexual harassment is against the law. But in some ways our society encourages these behaviors. For instance:**
  - Sexually-oriented advertising on billboards and in magazines is considered okay.
  - But displaying a sexy advertising poster in a work environment is inappropriate, and may even be sexually harassing to someone.
- **To make matters worse, sitcoms on television often show people in business situations sexually harassing one another.**
  - However, what might be funny on TV can be a nightmare in the real world.
- **Any form of sexual conduct in the workplace is inappropriate.**
  - It may constitute sexual harassment if the victim finds the actions or comments unwanted or threatening.

- **"Blatant" sexual acts only need to occur one time to be considered sexual harassment. Examples of blatant sexual harassment include:**
  - Sexual assaults.
  - Touching someone with sexual intent
  - Requiring someone to engage in a sexual act to retain their job or advance their career.
  
- **Less blatant forms of sexual conduct usually have to occur repeatedly to be regarded as being sexual harassment. These include:**
  - Talking about sex.
  - Making obscene gestures.
  - Displaying sexually "suggestive" pictures or objects.
  - Writing sexually explicit graffiti.
  - Sexist remarks.
  - Looking at someone in an "inappropriate" manner.
  - Commenting on a coworker's physical appearance.
  
- **Often sexual harassment starts out with what appears to be innocent remarks or jokes.**
  - It then slowly escalates, as the harasser "tests" the victim's boundaries.
  - Although this conduct or language might initially appear to be mild, constantly being exposed to these actions can be devastating to a victim.
  
- **Relentless but subtle sexual harassment can slowly tear down a victim's self respect.**
  - This can leave them feeling powerless to do anything about it.
  
- **Often sexual harassment victims are afraid that no one will understand them.**
  - They may even think that they are somehow responsible for the harassment.
  
- **When a harasser targets a victim, they rely on them being afraid to report the harassment.**
  - So showing a willingness to go to management will often put an early end to the situation.

- **Sexual harassment rarely goes away on its own.**
  - If you choose to ignore it, or try to "laugh it off", you may unwittingly encourage further incidents.
  
- **Even if the sexual harassment is from a valued customer or someone else important to your company's business, you should report it to a supervisor or your company's Human Resource Department.**
  
- **Although most reported cases of sexual harassment involve males harassing females... many of the unreported incidents include:**
  - Men who are sexually harassed by women.
  - Men and women who are sexually harassed by people of their own gender.
  
- **Just because language or conduct may not be offensive to most people, doesn't make it okay.**
  - Each of us is the judge of what we find disturbing.
  
- **A sexual harassment victim is not always the harasser's intended "target".**
  - They could be anyone who doesn't want to be exposed to the statements or actions.
  
- **What is considered to be sexual harassment is rarely "cut and dried," since so much is based on the perception of the victim.**
  - As a result, people are sometimes unaware that their actions or comments are sexually harassing to others.
  - For instance, a salesman who flirts with a friendly waitress in his favorite restaurant may be surprised to find himself being accused of sexual harassment by a secretary that he has been "eyeing."
  - The difference is not in the salesman's actions, but in the fact that his attention is unwanted by the secretary, but accepted by the waitress.

- **What is considered appropriate behavior in one situation may, in fact, be sexual harassment in another. For example:**
  - It's a hairdresser's job to touch their clients' hair and tell them how good they look.
  - But an automobile salesman would be sexually harassing a customer if he did the same thing.
  
- **Since what constitutes sexual harassment can vary, most companies have a written sexual harassment policy to define appropriate dress, language and behavior for their specific work environments.**
  - If you don't know what your company's policy is on sexual harassment, you should ask your supervisor to review the rules with you.
  
- **Be aware that it's impossible for any sexual harassment policy to be all inclusive.**
  - So just because an action is not listed as being inappropriate, that doesn't mean it's okay.
  
- **Obviously, anything pornographic should be kept out of the workplace, including:**
  - Posters.
  - Pictures.
  - Magazines.
  - Books.
  
- **You should realize that there is no truly "personal" space when you are at work.**
  - Other people can be exposed to things that you think are hidden in your locker, office or work area.
  
- **Conversations that you have, telephone calls that you make, websites that you visit and emails that you send are never really private either.**
  - Anything that you say, write or look at could be seen by your fellow employees.
  - So always be mindful of your actions and think before you speak.
  - You don't want to offend or harass anyone... knowingly or unknowingly.

- **Sometimes even things people do naturally can create problems.**
  - For instance, the old saying... "There is no harm in looking"... is not necessarily true.
  - Staring at someone can be intimidating, especially when there appears to be a sexual motive behind it.
  - If the "gazing becomes hazing" it's considered to be sexual harassment.
  
- **Another innocent behavior to avoid is physical contact, such as placing your hand on a coworker's shoulder to get their attention.**
  - Even if you didn't mean anything sexual by touching someone, they may not see it that way.
  - The best policy is to avoid any unnecessary physical contact with other employees, even those who are good friends.
  
- **If you date a coworker you should:**
  - Make sure that you don't hug, kiss or display other signs of affection at work.
  - This conduct might offend someone, and if it happens often enough it could be considered sexual harassment.
  
- **Another problem with employees dating is that it can be difficult to determine if someone is being coerced into the relationship against their will.**
  - This is an important issue, because sex must not be used as a "condition of employment."
  - An employee is being sexually harassed when they must endure unwanted sexual advances for fear of not being promoted, not getting pay raises, facing some kind of disciplinary action or losing their job.
  
- **Since it's not always easy to distinguish between relationships that are consensual, and those that are sexually harassing, many employers discourage or even forbid their employees from dating coworkers.**

- **Sometimes it can be difficult to tell whether someone's comments or actions are sexually motivated.**
  - What may appear to be sexual harassment could be nothing more than a misunderstanding, miscommunication or misread social cue.
- **So what should you do if an incident occurs that bothers you, but you are unsure if the other person meant to harass you? First write down the facts as soon as possible, including:**
  - The date and time the incident occurred.
  - Who was involved.
  - The names of any witnesses to the incident.
  - A full description of what happened and what was said.
  - An explanation of why the actions or comments were sexually harassing to you.
- **If you are not used to writing things down, find someone who you trust to help you.**
- **It is generally a good idea to let people know when their actions or comments bother you.**
  - Their reaction will often help you to determine their true intentions.
  - Unless you are sure that the person was out to harass you, don't accuse them of sexual harassment right off the bat.
  - Instead, tell them that they have "crossed your line", and that you find their behavior/actions unwelcome.
- **In many instances, people don't realize that their conduct was unacceptable.**
  - If you are satisfied that it was a misunderstanding, you don't need to take any further action.
  - But you should keep your written description of the incident in case you need it for future reference.
- **If you are not completely satisfied with the person's reaction, or if another incident occurs, you need to go to management or your company's Human Resource Department and report the situation.**

- **Deciding to report a sexual harassment incident can be a difficult thing to do.**
  - It's easy to be embarrassed by the events.
  - You may be fearful that no one will believe you.
- **You could be afraid that you will be punished for stepping forward.**
  - You might even be concerned that the person you are accusing will seek some type of revenge.
  - Or you could be overwhelmed by a combination of these feelings.
- **But coming forward is always the right thing to do.**
  - It is the only way that your company can identify and deal with sexual harassment that might otherwise go unnoticed.
  - In fact, companies will sometimes discipline employees for not speaking up about sexual harassment incidents that they have witnessed.
- **When reporting sexual harassment, be prepared to provide management with a copy of your written incident description.**
  - This will make sure that they know what you feel happened.
- **After reading your statement, a manager will interview you to ask you questions.**
  - Be sure to answer all of the questions as honestly and accurately as possible.
- **At the end of the interview you may be asked to sign a statement.**
  - Read it carefully to confirm that everything is correct.
  - Point out anything that you feel isn't accurate, and ask that revisions be made.
- **Your company will interview the person that you have accused of sexual harassment, to:**
  - Inform them of the allegations
  - Ask them questions about their involvement.

- **The alleged harasser will also be told about the seriousness of the situation, and notified that they must not do anything to further harass you.**
  - Your employer may take measures to protect you from any reprisals, such as shifting work schedules so that you don't have to be around the alleged harasser.
- **Management will always try to keep sexual harassment incidents confidential.**
  - But when necessary, they will interview other people who might have witnessed the events.
- **Sexual harassment is never dealt with lightly... and will not be tolerated by your employer.**
  - The penalty will often depend on the type of incident and how often it occurred.
  - At the very least the harasser will receive a stern warning to "cease and desist" or face disciplinary action.

**\* \* \* SUMMARY \* \* \***

- **Sexual harassment is something that many of us don't feel comfortable talking about. But talking is often the best way to prevent these incidents. Let's look at things that you can say and do to keep your work environment free from sexual harassment.**
- **Become familiar with your company's sexual harassment policy.**
- **Know where your coworkers draw the line on actions and comments... and don't cross it.**
- **Think about your own conduct... and avoid anything that might be considered sexual harassment.**
- **Tell people if their actions make you feel uncomfortable.**

- **Be sure to write down the facts about a sexual harassment incident.**
- **Never ignore sexual harassment... it rarely goes away on its own.**
- **Don't be afraid to report sexual harassment to management.**
- **Knowing what may offend your coworkers...taking a firm position on what you find unacceptable... treating others with respect, and insisting that they do the same for you... will go a long way in heading sexual harassment off at the "pass"!**