

## Sexual Harassment – Strategies for Prevention

There are a number of steps that your company can take to reduce the risk of sexual harassment occurring in the workplace. Although you may not be able to take all of the steps listed below, it is important to take as many of them as possible.

- **Adopt a clear sexual harassment policy.** In the workers' handbook, have a policy devoted to sexual harassment. That policy should:
  - define sexual harassment
  - state in no uncertain terms that sexual harassment will not be tolerated
  - set out a clear procedure for filing sexual harassment complaints
  - state that all complaints will be investigated fully, and
  - state that retaliation against anyone who files a complaint is prohibited.
- **Train workers.** At least once a year, conduct training sessions for workers. These sessions should teach workers what sexual harassment is, explain that workers have a right to a workplace free of sexual harassment, review the reporting procedure, and encourage workers to use it.
- **Train supervisors and managers.** At least once a year, conduct training sessions for supervisors and managers that are separate from the worker sessions. The sessions should educate managers and supervisors about sexual harassment and explain how to deal with complaints.
- **Monitor the workplace.** Get out among workers periodically. Talk to them about the work environment. Ask for their input. Look around the workplace itself. Do you see any offensive posters or notes? Talk to supervisors and managers about what is going on. Keep the lines of communication open.
- **Take all complaints seriously.** If someone complains about sexual harassment, act immediately to investigate the complaint. If the complaint turns out to be valid, the response should be swift and effective.

### Sexual Harassment Training May Reduce Liability

Your organization may uphold affirmative defense to avoid liability for sexual harassment related to a hostile work environment when no adverse employment action has been suffered by the worker. The affirmative defense may help when you have exercised reasonable care to prevent and promptly correct any harassing behavior, and the harassed worker unreasonably failed to take advantage of any preventive opportunities provided by you. The EEOC has set guidelines for the employer exercising reasonable care to reduce liability, including training. The guideline specifies:

*Effective, periodic and interactive training of all workers on the harassment policy and what behavior is prohibited, how to report, along with the assurance of no retaliation. A recommendation for training that includes role playing of examples of prohibited behaviors. Periodic is defined as preferably annually, but at least every 24 months.*

First Sun EAP has a dedicated team of Consultants available to assist you with these issues. You can call any time for a free confidential consultation to discuss these or any workplace issues that affect the performance of your associates. Call toll free at **800-968-8143** or **803-376-2668** in the Greater Columbia area.