

## Preventing Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

As a manager, you have a responsibility to maintain a workplace that is free of sexual harassment. This is your legal obligation, but it also makes good business sense. If you allow sexual harassment to flourish in your workplace, you will pay a high price in terms of poor morale, low productivity, and lawsuits.

The same laws that prohibit gender discrimination prohibit sexual harassment. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act is the main federal law that prohibits sexual harassment. In addition, each state has its own anti-sexual harassment law.

### What Is Sexual Harassment?

Sexual harassment is any unwelcome sexual advance or conduct on the job that creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment. Any conduct of a sexual nature that makes a worker uncomfortable has the potential to be sexual harassment.

Given this broad definition, it is not surprising that sexual harassment comes in many forms. The following are all examples of sexual harassment:

- A supervisor implies to a worker that the worker must sleep with him to keep a job.
- A sales clerk makes demeaning comments about female customers to his coworkers.
- An office manager in a law firm is made uncomfortable by lawyers who regularly tell sexually explicit jokes.
- A cashier at a store pinches and fondles a coworker against her will.
- A secretary's coworkers belittle her and refer to her by sexist or demeaning terms.
- Several workers post sexually explicit jokes on an office intranet bulletin board.
- A worker sends emails to other coworkers that contain sexually explicit language and jokes.

The harasser can be the victim's supervisor, manager, or coworker. A worker may even be liable for harassment by a non-worker (such as a vendor or customer), depending on the circumstances.

### Anyone Can Be Sexually Harassed

Sexual harassment is a gender-neutral offense, at least in theory: Men can sexually harass women, and women can sexually harass men. However, statistics show that the overwhelming majority of sexual harassment claims and charges are brought by women who claim that they were sexually harassed by men.

First Sun EAP has a dedicated Risk Management Team 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 in Greater Columbia, **803-376-2668**.

For more information on this topic as well as other risk management situations, please see our website at: [www.firstsuneap.com](http://www.firstsuneap.com).