**Policy Item D4-21-2
RE: Employer Duties - Workplace Bullying and Harassment**

**BACKGROUND**

**1. Preamble**

An employer has a duty to ensure the health and safety of its workers, and as a result, employers must take all reasonable steps to prevent where possible, or otherwise minimize, workplace bullying and harassment. Workplace bullying and harassment can lead to injury, illness or death.

This Policy provides a consistent legal framework for stakeholders, WorkSafeBC Officers and decision-makers identifying what WorkSafeBC considers to be reasonable steps for an employer to prevent where possible, or otherwise minimize, workplace bullying and harassment.

WorkSafeBC Officers will review whether the elements in this Policy have been developed, implemented and periodically reviewed.

**2. Explanatory Notes**

Section 21 of the *Workers Compensation Act* ("*Act*") requires an employer to take all reasonable steps in the circumstances to ensure the health and safety of its workers.

Section 21 of the *Act* requires an employer to inform, instruct, train and supervise workers to ensure their safety and that of other workers.

This policy (D4-21-2), which flows from the above sections in the *Act*, discusses employer duties regarding bullying and harassment. It identifies what WorkSafeBC considers to be reasonable steps for an employer to take to address the hazards of workplace bullying and harassment.

There are two other related policies that address workplace bullying and harassment: [Policy D4-22-1, Worker duties](https://www.worksafebc.com/en/law-policy/occupational-health-safety/searchable-ohs-regulation/ohs-policies/policies-for-the-workers-compensation-act#SectionNumber:D3-116-1), and [Policy D4-23-2, Supervisor duties](https://www.worksafebc.com/en/law-policy/occupational-health-safety/searchable-ohs-regulation/ohs-policies/policies-for-the-workers-compensation-act#SectionNumber:D3-117-2).

**3. The *Act***

Section 21:

(1) Every employer must

(a) ensure the health and safety of

(i) all workers working for that employer, and

(ii) any other workers present at a workplace at which that employer's work is being carried out….

(2) Without limiting subsection (1), an employer must

(e) provide to the employer's workers the information, instruction, training and supervision necessary to ensure the health and safety of those workers in carrying out their work….

**POLICY**

**Definition**

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| "*bullying and harassment*" | (a) 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 (b) excludes any reasonable action taken by an employer or supervisor relating to the management and direction of workers or the place of employment. |

**Reasonable Steps to Address the Hazard**

WorkSafeBC considers that reasonable steps by an employer to prevent where possible, or otherwise minimize, workplace bullying and harassment include the following:

(a) developing a policy statement with respect to workplace bullying and harassment not being acceptable or tolerated;

(b) taking steps to prevent where possible, or otherwise minimize, workplace bullying and harassment;

(c) developing and implementing procedures for workers to report incidents or complaints of workplace bullying and harassment including how, when and to whom a worker should report incidents or complaints. Included must be procedures for a worker to report if the employer, supervisor or person acting on behalf of the employer, is the alleged bully and harasser;

(d) developing and implementing procedures for how the employer will deal with incidents or complaints of workplace bullying and harassment including:

i. how and when investigations will be conducted;

ii. what will be included in the investigation;

iii. roles and responsibilities of employers, supervisors, workers and others;

iv. follow-up to the investigation (description of corrective actions, timeframe, dealing with adverse symptoms, etc.); and

v. record keeping requirements;

(e) informing workers of the policy statement in (a) and the steps taken in (b);

(f) training supervisors and workers on:

i. recognizing the potential for bullying and harassment;

ii. responding to bullying and harassment; and

iii. procedures for reporting, and how the employer will deal with incidents or complaints of bullying and harassment in (c) and (d) respectively;

(g) annually reviewing (a), (b), (c), and (d);

(h) not engaging in bullying and harassment of workers and supervisors; and

(i) applying and complying with the employer's policies and procedures on bullying and harassment.

**PRACTICE**

The definition of 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.

A 'person' includes any individual, whether or not they are a workplace party. This means that a 'person' could be a workplace party such as an employer, supervisor, or co-worker, or a non- workplace party such as a member of the public, a client, or anyone a worker comes into contact with at the workplace.

In order to determine what is reasonable in the policy, a definition below is included for a 'reasonable person'.

*Black's Law Dictionary, Ninth Edition,* defines a reasonable person as follows:

"…a person who exercises the degree of attention, knowledge, intelligence, and judgment that society requires of its members for the protection of their own and of others' interests. The reasonable person acts sensibly, does things without serious delay, and takes proper but not excessive precautions…"

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