



Registrant Resources - Information Overload

Issue 38, October 2005

Welcome:

Welcome to this month's edition of IEA's registrant resources e-zine "Information Overload". I would just like to welcome our new subscribers and registrants to the Registrant Resources E-zine, I would also like to say thank you in advance for forwarding this edition onto friends and colleagues, your thoughtfulness is most appreciated.

This month we have a look at a common hazard in our workplaces, but one that is perhaps the least understood. We are talking about bullying and harassment, and why it is important that it is discussed and dealt with. We hope you find the information of interest and use.

If there are any other topics you would like to see us cover we would love to hear from you, just send me an email to training@iea.com.au - names will be changed to protect the innocent! Don't forget that all back issues of this edition, and our main newsletter can be read and/or downloaded from our web site – <http://www.iea.com.au>.

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In this issue we will look at:

- The Importance of Occupational Health & Safety in the Workplace
- What is a hazard?
- Types of conflict
- Everyday sources of conflict
- Violence at work is not unusual
- What you can do
- What happens next?
- A Thought to ponder

The Importance of Occupational Health & Safety in the Workplace

We all have a responsibility for ensuring workplace safety. However, it is the duty of care of the employer to:

- Provide a safe workplace and safe systems of work;
- Provide mechanisms to address safety & health hazards; and
- Identify potential hazards in your workplace;

What is a hazard?

A hazard is anything that may cause injury or harm to a person. Common hazards include: Slips, trips & Falls; Electricity; Manual handling – over-exertion or repetitive movement; Extremes in temperature; Machinery or equipment – being hit, hitting objects or being caught in between eg., compactus; Hazardous substances including glue, toner & acids; Radiation; Microwaves; Biological agents such as anthrax and Psychological Stress which includes all forms of bullying, conflict and harassment.

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Types of Conflict

There are many types of conflicts that can and do occur in a working environment. No matter how big the size of the organisation, there will be conflict on a day-to-day basis. Even people who work alone will find conflict affects their working day, either through unrealistic demands by themselves (taking on too much work), their life partners (working too many hours), their children (but mummy/daddy promised) or customers.

Everyday sources of conflict:

Power struggles:

This can be typically categorised between a person in a senior position and a subordinate, but can also be between a parent and a child. This type of conflict usually occurs because of feelings of domination or repression between two parties.

Personality clashes:

These are very common within work forces, social groups and families, and are extremely difficult to resolve, as it is hard to isolate the actual problem and is often put down to not liking "something" about another person, or "managerial style." When dealing with this type of behaviour it is important to discuss specific behaviours that cause offence or conflict rather than generalisations.

Expectations:

Unmet or unmanaged expectations are another type of conflict that often causes considerable conflict. Included in this are those people who have been "acting" in a role for a substantial period of time, and are not promoted when the position becomes available. Misunderstandings with regards to delegation of work, for example timelines and importance are not expressed clearly. It is important to ensure open lines of communication are available between all parties, and any misunderstandings cleared up quickly to avoid problems being compounded.

Performance Management:

Can be a large cause of conflict in a work environment. Negative comments and reactions to feedback, or a lack of adequate feedback throughout the year can cause shocks and disappointment when the appraisal takes place.

Inequity:

Of treatment, opportunities and/or remuneration that one person receives in relation to another. Parents, managers, teachers and other persons in authority or seniority may be accused of having "favourites". This can include both ends of the spectrum, for example the "star" may be offered better opportunities, whilst those who are considered less talented, hardworking and less competent are given an "easy ride."

Harassment:

Can take many forms, and occurs throughout the entire fabric of society. Typical forms of harassment include Sexual, Racial and Bullying. This type of action can be classified as repeated, unreasonable behaviour directed towards another person that creates a risk to health and safety. It is usually defined as aggressive behaviour that intimidates, humiliates and/or undermines a person or group. The behaviour of the aggressor usually includes yelling and screaming, threatening behaviour that is designed to belittle or humiliate, abusive

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language, isolating or ignoring someone, repeated failure to give credit where due and/or constant criticism. It also includes sabotaging of someone or their work or their ability to do the job properly by not providing them with vital information and resources.

How do you know if your workplace suffers from some or all of the above? One of the most obvious is a high absenteeism rate through ill health, or stress related sickness. In extreme cases there will also be a high staff turnover rate, especially if nothing has been seen to be done to solve the problems, or if the person feels that they cannot bring the attention to the notice of management, because the person(s) who are causing the problems **are** senior management.

Violence at work is not unusual

According to a survey conducted by the Office of Women's Policy 61% of women have been subjected to abuse, threats and other violent behaviour over the last 5 years. A survey of 1,000 women across several industries found only 59% reported the incidents to their employers, while 11% took sick leave because of the problem.

Source – Human Resources, 4 October 2005 p30

What you can do

Where possible inform your supervisor of the problem(s) that you are experiencing. If however, you feel that you are unable to tell your supervisor (usually because this person is the cause of your concern) then it is important to inform senior management and/or Human Resources of the issues you are facing. Problems can only be addressed if they are known.

If you are working on contract through Information Enterprises or another employment agency then it is vital that you inform them as soon as the situation occurs. As your employer whilst you are on contract it is the employment agencies responsibility to ensure that the issues are resolved.

What happens next?

Once an issue has been raised it is up to all parties to ensure that the situation is resolved satisfactorily. This can include:

- Fostering a more open dialogue between parties – the person who tells racially or sexually based jokes may not realise they are offending anyone, especially if they are not told.
- Monitoring of the situation by senior management and/or HR to ensure that the situation does not happen again.
- Do not rush into doing anything that you do not want to do. Take time to work through your options, and speak to your employer and/or employment agency. They should have people who are trained to deal with this kind of behaviour who would be able to help you. Or speak to your health care provider (eg., doctor), or trusted family members or friends.
- Getting another job – this may seem like an extreme case of running away from the problem. However, you have to realise that you are not stuck in the job that you are doing, and there are other jobs available to you. It is up to you whether or not to exercise this option.

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- Changing departments – this is a less extreme option than the one listed above, but one that can work. Removing yourself from the situation/place/person who are causing your concerns may immediately alleviate the problem. However, if the problem “follows you” then it is important that you report this.

Just remember you are not on your own.

A Thought to Ponder

“Make the most of the best and the least of the worst”

Robert Louis Stevenson, 1850-1894

Scottish Writer and Poet

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If you would also like to receive the main edition of EA’s Information Overload, please send an email to training@iea.com.au with subscribe client newsletter in the subject line, we have covered a wide variety of topics from record keeping to search engine optimisation of your web site – back issues can be found on our web site – <http://www.iea.com.au>.

If you have any suggestions as to what should be included in future editions, then please send an email to training@iea.com.au.

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