



Workplace Bullying

organising and health & safety

What is bullying?

Workplace bullying is repeated, unreasonable behaviour directed towards an employee or group of employees that creates a risk to their health and safety.

The most common forms of bullying in Australian workplaces are bossing people around, intimidating, threatening or keeping them under pressure.

Workers may also be harassed by clients, customers, contractors or others from outside the workplace, and bullying can happen between co-workers, but more workers are bullied by employers and managers than by fellow workers.

What is the responsibility of employers?

Under OHS laws, employers must

- consult with employees and OHS representatives
- provide adequate and appropriate information, training, instruction and supervision
- identify, assess and control hazards, including organisational structures and behaviours that may lead to bullying
- provide an appropriate physical and organisational environment
- provide healthy and safe workplaces and work systems, including a working environment where the risk of bullying is eliminated or minimised.

Some forms of bullying are outlawed by equal opportunity or anti-discrimination legislation.

Organising to prevent bullying

Workers should

- meet to discuss causes, effects and possible solutions to bullying – see the ACTU’s Being Bossed Around Is Bad for Your Health campaign materials at http://www.actu.asn.au/public/ohs/bullying/1063694361_23162.html
- collectively determine how to achieve a healthy and safe workplace.

Your health and safety representative and committee, or your union delegate, should be involved.

Health and safety representatives and union delegates should

- ensure that all workers know that they have the right to refuse work likely to endanger them
- collect evidence of the problem – for example, talk to workers, do a survey, keep records of incidents
- meet with the employer
- seek control of hazards at source
- develop a prevention policy in consultation with workers and management
- include bullying in enterprise agreements
- contact the union or OHS inspectors if necessary.

Workers and their representatives should be consulted by employers on policies and procedures to prevent bullying that

- acknowledge that bullying is a health and safety issue that should be prevented
- identify the factors that contribute to bullying at work
- outline simple, clear procedures that enable workers to raise concerns, without fear of intimidation or discrimination
- include processes for ongoing review and evaluation.

If an employer will not act on these issues, in some states and territories health and safety representatives may issue provisional improvement notices (PINs). These are official notices to an employer that a health and safety issue exists and needs to be fixed.

Health and safety inspectors can direct employers to fix problems in the workplace and may issue prohibition or improvement notices.

Do people in your workplace experience

- intimidation
- unreasonable demands or impossible targets
- restrictive and petty work rules

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- compulsory overtime, unfair rostering or allocation of work
- constant, intrusive surveillance or monitoring
- no say in how their job is done
- interference with personal belongings or sabotage of work
- shouting
- abusive language
- open or implied threat of the sack or demotion?

What are the health and safety effects of bullying?

Does bullying in your workplace result in

- serious physical illness
- alcohol and drug use
- depression or suicidal thoughts
- headaches
- sleep difficulties
- high blood pressure
- digestive problems
- tearfulness
- anxiety
- nausea
- anger
- irritability
- loss of motivation, concentration, self-confidence and morale?

Bullying also places pressure on family and friends.