



Oklahoma Conservation Commission

District Directors' Responsibilities:

A 10-Minute Guide Series

This is one in a continuing series of informational/discussion topics designed to help conservation district directors become more informed and knowledgeable about their responsibilities. It is suggested that board members review these guides before a board meeting, and then have a 10 minute discussion on them at a meeting.

Guide No. 5 Sexual Harassment

Conservation district boards can not allow sexual harassment or any other misconduct to occur in the district office. All board members and employees should have a good understanding of what constitutes sexual harassment and know how to deal with such situations.

What is Sexual Harassment?

Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitutes sexual harassment when submission to or rejection of this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects an individual's employment, unreasonably interferes with an individual's work performance or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment.

Sexual harassment can occur in a variety of circumstances, including but not limited to the following:

- ◆ The victim as well as the harasser may be a woman or a man. The victim does not have to be of the opposite sex.
- ◆ The harasser can be the victim's supervisor, an agent of the employer, a supervisor in another area, a co-worker, or a non-employee.
- ◆ The victim does not have to be the person harassed but could be anyone affected by the offensive conduct.
- ◆ The harasser's conduct must be unwelcome.

It is helpful for the victim to directly inform the harasser that the conduct is unwelcome and must stop.

What District Boards Need to Do to Ensure Sexual Harassment Does Not Occur:

1. Discuss in a board meeting what constitutes sexual harassment. Consider having someone knowledgeable of the subject at a future meeting if needed to answer questions.
2. Establish a zero-tolerance policy on sexual harassment and ensure board members, employees, and other agency personnel are aware of the policy.
3. Ensure employees know how to deal with and report incidents of sexual harassment.
3. Consider training on the subject for employees and board members.

If Allegations of Sexual Harassment Are Made:

1. Intervene in a timely and effective manner and monitor the situation.
2. Get professional assistance.
3. Maintain confidentiality to the extent permitted by law.
4. Never retaliate.

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Examples of Sexual Harassment

While it is not possible to list all the circumstances that may constitute sexual harassment, the following are some examples of conduct which if unwelcome, may constitute sexual harassment depending upon the totality of the circumstances including the severity of the conduct and its pervasiveness.

- ◆ Unwelcome sexual advances - whether they involve physical touching or not.
- ◆ Sexual epithets, jokes, written or oral references to sexual conduct, gossip regarding one's sex life, comments on an individual's body, or comments about an individual's sexual activity.
- ◆ Displaying sexually suggestive objects, pictures, or cartoons.
- ◆ Unwelcome leering, whistling, brushing against the body, sexual gestures, suggestive or insulting comments.
- ◆ Inquiring into one's sexual experiences.

Sample Sexual Harassment Policy:

The _____ Conservation District believes that employees have the right to work in an environment free of sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is a form of misconduct that undermines the employment relationship.

No employee, either male or female, should be subjected verbally or physically to unsolicited and unwelcome sexual overtures or conduct.

Anyone engaging in harassing conduct will be subject to discipline, ranging from a warning to termination.