

## Workplace Health and Safety Queensland

## Takeaway food retailing industry - Workplace harassment

Workers in the takeaway food retailing industry can be exposed to workplace harassment. This can have a significant impact on both people and businesses. Workers exposed to harassment can become physically or mentally ill.

Work factors such as highly demanding work, workers having little or no influence over their work characteristics and poor support or workplace cultures can increase the risk of workplace harassment.

### How do I know if it is really workplace harassment?

A worker may be exposed to workplace harassment if they are exposed repeatedly to behaviour that:

- is unwelcome and unsolicited
- the worker considers to be offensive, intimidating, humiliating or threatening
- a reasonable person would consider to be offensive, humiliating, intimidating or threatening.

The source of workplace harassment may be an employer, employee, a co-worker or a group of co-workers. 'Workplace harassment' does not include reasonable management action taken in a reasonable way by the employer in connection with the employee's employment.

Harassment can range from subtle intimidation to aggressive tactics. Some examples of situations that may be workplace harassment include:

- abusing a person loudly, usually when others are present

- repeated threats of dismissal or other severe punishment for no reason
- constant ridicule and being put down
- leaving offensive messages on email or the telephone
- sabotaging a person's work, for example, by deliberately withholding or supplying incorrect information, hiding documents or equipment, not passing on messages
- deliberately getting a person into trouble
- humiliating a person through gestures, sarcasm, criticism and insults, often in front of customers, management or other workers
- spreading gossip or false malicious rumours about a person with an intent to cause the person harm.

### Possible solutions

- Be prepared for workplace harassment if it occurs. This should include:
  - being able to identify if the behaviour is workplace harassment
  - deciding on what you want to do to stop workplace harassment and how this is going to be done
  - Letting your workers know:
    - what workplace harassment is
    - that you will not permit workplace harassment
    - what action you will take if it occurs
    - how they should let you know if they feel they are being harassed
- Take prompt impartial action to resolve any situations which may be perceived as harassment and any reports of workplace harassment

- Provide access to external mediation when management may be perceived not to be impartial
- Provide training particularly for supervisors and managers
- Provide responsible, mature supervision of workers to ensure that inappropriate behaviour is not tolerated
- Look for other work characteristics that may increase the risk of workplace harassment for example:
  - highly demanding work
  - a culture that may encourage workplace harassment
  - a lack of support
  - workers not being clear about what their role is
  - poor workplace communication.

For more information on workplace harassment and workplace health and safety issues visit [www.worksafe.qld.gov.au](http://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au)

© *The State of Queensland (Department of Justice and Attorney-General) 2011*

Copyright protects this document. The State of Queensland has no objection to this material being reproduced, but asserts its right to be recognised as author of the original material and the right to have the material unaltered.

The material presented in this publication is distributed by the Queensland Government as an information source only. The State of Queensland makes no statements, representations, or warranties about the accuracy or completeness of the information contained in this publication, and the reader should not rely on it. The Queensland Government disclaims all responsibility and all liability (including, without limitation, liability in negligence) for all expenses, losses, damages and costs you might incur as a result of the information being inaccurate or incomplete in any way, and for any reason.