

O.S.S.T.F. STATEMENT ON  
SEXUAL HARASSMENT

The problem of sexual harassment in the workplace has received a great deal of publicity in recent years, yet it remains a sensitive and difficult issue, and one which is little understood. The Women's Bureau of the Ontario Ministry of Labour pointed out in its August 1981 Newsletter that the difference between sexual harassment and "workplace romance or flirtation that is based on mutual consent" is the coercive nature of harassment, which is always both unwanted and offensive. In order to recognize the occurrence of sexual harassment, it is essential to make this distinction.

Both male and female employees can be victims of sexual harassment on the job and unless action is taken by the victim, it is very likely that such harassment will continue. Therefore, many employers have developed guidelines and procedures for the protection of employees, and many unions are successfully negotiating clauses defining sexual harassment and making it eligible for grievance.

**DEFINITION:**

Sexual harassment is defined as any sexually-oriented conduct or innuendo, whether verbal or physical, which causes discomfort, undermines performance on the job, or threatens the economic livelihood or status of an individual.

The following steps are ones which may be taken by any members of the OSSTF who believe they have been subject to sexual harassment.

**PROCEDURES WHICH A MEMBER MAY FOLLOW IN CASES WHERE SEXUAL HARASSMENT OCCURS**

1. Indicate with an immediate, clear, direct and firm response to the harasser that such behaviour is unacceptable. This response might include a warning that any repetition will be reported.
2. It is essential that a detailed written record be kept. Include the name, place, date, time and details of the offensive behaviour and whenever possible the names of any witnesses.
3. Where further action is deemed necessary, several options can be considered.

**A. WITHIN THE FEDERATION**

Report the incident to your Field Secretary, who will then advise you of the options open to you under:

- (1) By-law 6 - Counselling and Mediation Procedures for Dealing with Disputes Affecting the Professional Relationship between Members.

- (2) By-law 7 - Discipline of Members, or
- (3) Assistance available to you in cases where the alleged harasser is not a member.

**B. OTHER ASSISTANCE**

- (1) If your Board has an affirmative action or equal opportunity program, report the incident to its representative.
- (2) Contact the Women's Bureau of the Ontario Ministry of Labour (416-965-1537) for confidential counselling, or the Ontario Human Rights Commission (416-965-6481) for advice and assistance.
- (3) Consult a lawyer to discuss writing a letter of warning, or bringing charges under civil or criminal law.
4. It cannot be emphasized too strongly, no matter which course of action is chosen, that a full written record should be kept of all details by the individual making the complaint.
5. It must be noted that members have an obligation under 18 1(b) of the Teaching Profession Act in the event that they make an adverse report on another member.