

Bullying is not anything that is new to the workplace. In fact, it sometimes starts in our schoolyards and in many cases, just continues in the workplace.

The question is, and it's a good one, what exactly is bullying?

I live and work in British Columbia (Canada). In B.C., new legislation has recently passed and will come into effect on July 2, 2012; that will allow employees who have been the target of bullying or harassment to have a potential worker's compensation claim.

We are joining the ranks of Quebec, Ontario, Saskatchewan for example, that already have language about bullying in their legislation.

What does this legislation mean for employers? Well, it means that they must create policies that speak to what bullying and harassment are and they must also educate all employees at all levels of their organization, on how to deal with bullying in the workplace.

Supervisors and managers will need to know how to recognize if bullying is happening in the workplace and employees will need to know what avenues are open to them in terms of making a complaint and what the process will be once a complaint has been made.

As an employer, you will want to be sure that

- Complaints are taken seriously and appropriate investigations are done when needed.
- You will want to ensure that those responsible for handling the complaints are trained on how to deal with an investigation.
- You may also want to consider utilizing the services of an external investigator - and in the case of a serious complaint, or one in which there is more than one complainant - it is recommended that you consider an external source.
- You will want to be sure that documentation is in order to support whatever decisions are made as a result of your complaints or investigations.
- You will want to ensure that you communicate what the outcomes are to both the complainant and the accused party.

Within your policies, you will want to be clear about the definition of bullying and as a general guideline, it is recommended that you look at how harassment is defined in your human rights code.

In Canada, of those provinces that previously passed legislation, bullying has been described as

*“act of intentionally causing harm to others, through verbal harassment, physical assault or other more subtle methods of coercion such as manipulation, including ignoring and isolating the person”*

Sometimes bullying is referred to as psychological harassment or personal harassment.

So, let me ask you. Do you think that bullying is really a problem in the workplace, or are people just whining about nothing and should they go along to get along?



To respond to this question, we look a look at the Province of Quebec since they were one of the first to pass this legislation. It was learned that one year following the coming into force of the new law, the Labour Standards Commission reported that it had received 2,500 complaints of psychological harassment, and that less than 1 per cent of these complaints were considered frivolous.

Bullying is, according to this information, alive and well in the workplace and there is a definite need for the new legislation here in B.C. We are now the fourth province to make an attempt at addressing this problem.

You may want to learn more about how to address bullying in your workplace as well. Be proactive if you are not yet in a position where legislation is passed. Create healthy work environments and reap the benefits of doing so.

No, bullying is not new to the work place; it's very much alive and well. Hopefully we are beginning to realize that successful businesses are those who work hard to eliminate it and have the policies and practices in place to do so.

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