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PRESS RELEASE

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SEXUAL HARASSMENT

It happens in agricultural settings too.

Sexual harassment – of both men and women – can be a serious issue in agricultural settings, especially in large scale farming operations. In Washington State, where large scale operations are common, a groundswell of concern about identifying sexual harassment, giving victims resources for resolving the behavior, and providing training tools for employers so they can recognize and confront sexual harassment in their workplace led to development of that state’s “!BASTA! Prevent Sexual Harassment in Agriculture.” More than 60 agribusinesses and multiple governmental agencies supported and contributed to development of the training manual.

The manual is meant to accompany the video with the same title: <https://deohs.washington.edu/pnash/sexual-harassment>. The guide is divided into five segments to accompany the video and provide activities and discussion prompts to enhance dialogue and active learning. At this same link, there is also an electronic toolkit which includes supplemental materials in English and in Spanish, such as: Powerpoint slides, workplace posters, handouts, and additional video and audio files.

The 62-page document, available online at <https://deohs.washington.edu/pnash/toolkit>, provides tips for training facilitators, training agendas, a preparation checklist, learning objectives, and more. Marcy Harrington, Pacific Northwest Agricultural Safety and Health Center (PNASH) Program Manager, Co-Evaluation Lead, says her state leaders recognize that sexual harassment, left unchecked, tends to go to pretty severe threats, such as blackmailing, etc.

“Sexual harassment has to do with hierarchy,” Harrington says. “This type of issue is also seen in our military. In either of these workplaces, if harassment is coming from your supervisory, you really have no one else to go to. It’s generally not considered acceptable to go

to authorities who are over your supervisor. One way to combat this in any workplace is to have a policy structure that gives all workers a place where they can voice their concerns.”

“Facts About Sexual Harassment in Agriculture” is one of the resources contained in the Washington State document. The information notes that “sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination that violates the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Other facts note that sexual harassment

- includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.
- Is a form of sexual violence, usually more about power and control than the sex.
- Everyone, regardless of documentation status, has the right to be safe and to work in an environment that does not support sexual harassment of any kind.
- Most harassment occurs from men in a position of authority, who behave in sexually inappropriate ways on the job and who often assume they are entitled to sexual favors.
- Sexual harassment can have negative physical and mental effects on the person being harassed.
- A victim of sexual harassment does not have to be the person harassed, but could also be anyone affected by the offensive conduct.
- Sexual harassment creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment.
- The actual prevalence of sexual harassment is difficult to determine because many incidents go unreported. However, published reports suggest it is higher in agriculture than in other sectors.
- Men and people of all gender identities are sexually harassed in agriculture.
- Retaliation of an employee before or after filing a discrimination charge, testifying, or participating in any way in an investigation, proceeding, or litigation involving sexual harassment is against the law and a violation of Title VII of the Civil Right Act of 1964.
- Everyone should know there is a company policy on sexual harassment and be familiar with what it says. The policy should be made available in English, Spanish, or the language employees can understand.

The training manual reviews how to support a healthy work environment, understanding sexual harassment, acting as a bystander and ally, reporting sexual harassment, and preventing sexual harassment.

Other topics addressed in the document include knowing your Equal Employment Opportunity Commission rights, responsibilities and accountability for employers (EEOC), and a sample of a sexual harassment policy.

“It’s important for participants of this training to understand the root causes of sexual harassment involve multiple factors that go beyond the individual,” the document states. “Therefore, this curriculum utilizes a multi-level public health prevention framework to address the numerous precipitating, enabling, and reinforcing factors that cut across multiple levels of influence.

“The core message is to show respect for others. Promoting the dignity and the rights of others is essential to creating and maintaining a positive, healthy, and productive workplace. We applied a grass-roots, community-engaged approach in the development of this video and curriculum, involving multiple stakeholders across the agricultural sector in its development.

“While no training alone will put an end to sexual harassment or violence in the workplace, training and education still plays a powerful role in reducing the probability of it, helping to foster a safer, healthier workplace.”

Facilitators who desire to utilize the manual will find a thorough list of recommendations for organizing a training session, such as hosting separate training sessions for employees, supervisors, and employers so employees feel more comfortable with participating in the training conversations.

Other content addresses how to identify a hostile workplace, how to confront sexual harassment, and what it means to act as a bystander and ally.

“We all need to hear these messages and play a role in addressing and reducing sexual harassment in the agricultural work environment,” Harrington says.

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