

TOOLBOX TALK #5

WORKPLACE BULLYING

According to the Canadian Center for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS), workplace bullying generally involves repeated incidents intended to “intimidate, offend, degrade or humiliate a particular person or group of people”. CCOHS notes that although a fine line exists between strong management and constructive criticism and bullying, workplace bullying exists and can lead to a number of issues.

The agency provides a number of examples of workplace bullying. Those include:

- Spreading malicious, untrue rumors
- Socially isolating someone
- Purposefully hindering someone’s work
- Physically injuring someone or threatening abuse
- Taking away a worker’s responsibility without justification
- Yelling or swearing
- Not assigning enough work or assigning an unreasonable amount of work
- Setting impossible-to-meet deadlines in an effort to make the worker fail
- Blocking a worker’s request for leave, training or a promotion

Bullying can have serious repercussions. Victims of bullying may feel angry or helpless and experience a loss of confidence. Additionally, bullying can cause physical side effects, including an inability to sleep, loss of appetite, headaches, or panic attacks. According to CCOHS, organizations with a culture of bullying may experience many unfavorable side effects, including increased turnover and absenteeism, increased stress among workers, and decreased moral.

CCOHS states that the most important thing management can do to express a commitment to preventing workplace bullying is to have a comprehensive written policy:

- Involve both management and employees in the creation of the policy.
- Be very clear in your definition of workplace bullying. Provide examples of what is and is not acceptable behavior.
- Clearly state the consequences of bullying.
- Encourage workers to report bullying behavior by making the reporting process completely confidential. Let workers know they will not be punished in any way for reporting bullying.
- If your workplace or union has an Employee Assistance Program, encourage workers to use it.
- Regularly interview the policy and update it as needed.

