

What Supervisors Should Do When They Receive a Discrimination or Harassment Complaint

Below are guidelines to follow if an employee comes to you with a complaint involving discrimination or harassment.

Guidelines To Follow

First, consult with your Equal Rights Officer (ERO) on site or call the Office of Equal Rights (OER) at 202-646-3535. Based upon their advice, you may be requested to:

- 4 Meet in private with the person who has a complaint to clarify the issue and determine what exactly happened. Questions you may ask include:
 - What exactly happened? What was specifically done or said that leads you to believe you were harassed/discriminated against?
 - Where did it happen (in the field office, at lunch, in the field, after office hours, off the work site)?
 - When did it happen (date and times)?
 - Has it occurred more than once? If yes, when and where? How long has this been going on?
 - Were other people present when the incident(s) occurred? Were there any witnesses?
 - Have you shown or told the person that the behavior is unwelcome?
 - Whom did you talk with about what happened?
- 4 Take notes and assure the employee that you will be looking into and dealing with the matter promptly. Read back your notes to insure you understood properly.
- 4 Ask the person complaining what they would like to see happen (i.e., what action are they seeking in order to resolve the matter)?

Guidelines To Follow (Continued)

- 4 As soon as possible (no more than 3 to 5 days), talk to the person who has been accused of the harassment/discrimination. Find out his or her perspective on what happened. Your objective is not to reprimand the person at this point. It is simply to gather information/facts. Begin the conversation by saying, "the purpose of this meeting is to discuss an allegation of harassment/discrimination." Ask if the specific behavior(s) in question took place. Involve the alleged person's supervisor, if necessary. Keep all information confidential and insist that other supervisors and managers involved follow this important rule.
- 4 Once you have collected the information, discuss what you have learned with the ERO or with the OER (If there is no ERO on site). Discuss ways to resolve the issue.
- 4 If the issue cannot be resolved, or if it results in the need to take disciplinary action, involve OER prior to taking such action.
- 4 Once you work with OER to determine the appropriate course of action, close the loop. That is, meet again with the person with the complaint to let him or her know what you have done in response to the complaint.

BOTTOM LINE:

Involve the ERO early on and touch base with the ERO frequently!