

SEXUAL HARASSMENT OF WOMEN
IN MALE-DOMINATED FIELDS

DATE

WHY I AM GIVING YOU THIS

I am disclosing to you, my employer, that I believe I am being sexually harassed. In this case, the harassment is not desire-based but hostility-based. It takes the form of being treated as if I don't belong in this workplace because I am a woman in a male-dominated field.

I am giving you this document because I want your help. I need you to recognize this kind of harassment for what it is, and to understand that it makes it difficult for me to do my job safely and effectively, and it damages my career.

A WHAT I NEED FROM YOU - MY PRIVACY PREFERENCES

- ☐ Protect my confidentiality.
- ☐ At this time I do not want my complaint investigated, so I am not naming specific people.

B WHAT I WANT YOU TO UNDERSTAND

- ☐ This kind of harassment makes it difficult for me to do my job safely and effectively, and it damages my career.
- ☐ I would like to talk with you further and explain more about what is happening.

C WHAT I WANT YOU TO DO

- ☐ Acknowledge this as workplace harassment.
- ☐ Make clear to all staff that core job duties (training, code review, backup, information-sharing) apply equally to women.
- ☐ Ensure I am not excluded, mocked, or disadvantaged for objecting.
- ☐ Take steps to restore opportunities I may have lost because colleagues withheld support.
- ☐ I'm not sure yet — I would like to talk about options.

Thank you for reading this request and taking it seriously.

This handout was created by Aftermetoo, a Canadian charity that helps people who are experiencing workplace sexual harassment. Its goal is to make it easier for workers and employers to talk about these situations — to help workers explain what's wrong, and to help employers understand and respond in ways that make things better.

THE CONTEXT

Male-dominated fields include industries as varied as software development, policing, the trades, mining, engineering, and many others. The common denominator is that women are in the minority, and harassment often comes from peers or groups rather than a single individual.

This type of harassment is not about sexual pursuit. It is about sending the message that women are unsuited to the work. It often looks like:

- ◆ Being asked to prove competence again and again.
- ◆ Having work double-checked or dismissed while men's work is accepted at face value.
- ◆ Sabotage or “pranks” — broken equipment, wrong instructions, unsafe setups.
- ◆ Refusal to provide training, mentoring, or backup in the field.
- ◆ Exclusion from conversations, opportunities, or networks.
- ◆ Derogatory jokes or constant reminders that women don't belong.

THE IMPACT ON WORKERS

1. **Safety risks:** In policing, mining, or the trades, withholding backup or giving faulty equipment creates real danger.
2. **Blocked careers:** Refusing to review code, train, or sponsor women deprives them of the same opportunities men receive as a matter of course.
3. **Constant extra burden:** Women must continually prove themselves while men are given the benefit of the doubt.
4. **Reputation damage:** Bias spreads by word of mouth. Even when women perform well, group dynamics may paint them as "not strong" or "not a team player."
5. **False consensus:** Sometimes just one vocal sexist person sets the tone. Others go along or stay quiet, creating the appearance of group agreement. Employers who take that consensus at face value end up codifying prejudice into performance reviews and advancement decisions.

The result is that women’s careers are derailed not by lack of ability, but by colleagues failing to treat them with basic professional fairness.

WHY EMPLOYERS SOMETIMES GET THIS WRONG

- ◆ **They misread harassment as a personality conflict.** When one worker is repeatedly excluded or undermined, managers may assume she is the problem rather than recognizing that others are failing to do their jobs professionally.
- ◆ **They rely too heavily on group consensus.** In male-dominated environments, consensus is often biased. Even one openly sexist colleague can spark a bandwagon effect, creating a false consensus that a woman is weak or difficult. Employers who trust that consensus risk enshrining bias in reviews and promotions.
- ◆ **They underestimate the damage.** Delayed reviews, lack of training, sabotage, or withholding backup are treated as minor issues — but they cause real harm to safety, productivity, and long-term careers.

WHAT EMPLOYERS SHOULD DO

1. **Set clear professional expectations:** Remind employees that core duties — reviewing code, training recruits, backing up partners, sharing information — are not optional. They must be done fairly for everyone.
2. **Treat harassment as performance failure:** When staff refuse to support or train women, it isn’t a personality clash — it’s a breach of their job responsibilities.
3. **Be skeptical of consensus in biased groups:** Don’t accept at face value that “the whole team thinks she’s not very good.” Check the actual evidence of performance. Look at whether she is being denied mentoring, backup, or fair evaluations.
4. **Act early and consistently:** Don’t wait until a pattern escalates. Make it clear that exclusion, sabotage, or unsafe pranks will be treated as misconduct.
5. **Protect opportunities:** Ensure women get the same access to mentoring, projects, and career-building as men.
6. **Repair where possible:** If opportunities have been lost, ask what the worker feels she's missed and do your best to provide it.
7. **Protect confidentiality:** Handle complaints discreetly so that speaking up doesn't lead to further exclusion.

CLOSING NOTE

Harassment in male-dominated fields often doesn't look like pursuit. It looks like exclusion, sabotage, and constant questioning of competence. These behaviours are not "personality conflicts" — they are failures of professionalism. Your responsibility is to make sure everyone is doing their job fully and fairly, and to guard against group bias being mistaken for objective fact.