



Workplace Bullying Guidelines Released

A high-level review of the Workplace Bullying Guidelines by Tony McKone, Director McKone Consultancy Ltd, 21 February 2014

WorkSafe NZ, New Zealand's health and safety regulator has released its guidelines on workplace bullying.

WorkSafe NZ says that workplace bullying is a significant hazard in New Zealand. Not only does it affect people physically and mentally, it can disrupt workplaces and reduce productivity. Employers who don't deal with it risk breaching legislation, such as the Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992, the Employment Relations Act 2000 and the Human Rights Act 1993.

WorkSafe NZ's guidelines were developed with the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment and have a focus on both employees and employers responding early before a situation gets out of hand and focusing first of all on workplace based solutions. The guidelines provide a clear definition of bullying – a first for New Zealand.

Advice for employees ranges from how to assess if you are being bullied to recording instances of bullying behaviour to a range of low-key solutions.

Advice for employers ranges from how to best respond to reports or allegations of bullying to promoting a healthy and respectful work environment. The guidelines can be downloaded direct from WorkSafe NZ's website.

The guideline is a substantial 69 page document that is divided into eight sections.

Section One describes workplace bullying and its impact on both individuals and the organisation. This section will be useful in helping both organisations and individuals identify whether or not behaviour in the workplace constitutes bullying and hopefully help stem claims of alleged bullying that are raised in response to a reasonable and lawful instruction by a manager/employer to an employee.

Section Two provides some advice to employees, giving easy to follow flowcharts and some guidance on how to handle situations if the employee thinks they are being bullied. This section is particularly useful as it gives examples of how to go about resolving situations at a low level through to making a formal complaint.

Section Three covers preventing bullying in the workplace. This section talks about why bullying is the employers business and how having the right culture and having clear and easy to understand processes and procedures is good business sense.

Section Four provides guidance on how to measure bullying in the workplace. This guidance covers off indicators of bullying, gathering information to ensure that the employer has a good understanding of what is and isn't happening in their workplace. Having good information will make a difference between being able to recognise potential symptoms of bullying and being able to get onto addressing these before the situation gets out of hand.

Section Five provides advice to employers on how to deal with reports on bullying. Employers will find this section useful. It contains helpful process flowcharts and information to help make sure staff know how to report bullying.

Section Six gets down to explaining the roles and responsibilities for preventing and managing bullying.

Section Seven provides a bunch of useful templates and tools to help put the guidance from the earlier sections into practice.

Section Eight provides some case studies to help show some of the features of workplace bullying. These are real life case studies though names have been changed to protect confidentiality.

This guideline should become essential reading for all employers and their managers. Having the guideline alone however will not address workplace bullying. Employers and managers putting the guidelines into day to day practice is what will help address workplace bullying in New Zealand.

Ensure that you get this guideline on the compulsory reading list of all your managers today.