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Tribune Exclusive

Harassment charges investigated

TRACY KIBBLE
 Staff Reporter

The Human Rights Commission is investigating sexual harassment allegations on behalf of an employee at the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville, *The Tribune* has learned.

Several inside sources have come forward this week to support a female employee in a Human Rights complaint against a senior Town official and the corporation.

The Tribune has chosen not to

reveal the identities of sources and those involved to protect their right to privacy.

The complainant declined to comment on the matter. The Human Rights complaint was filed last fall after an employee allegedly received no support or help from senior administration to alleviate the problem, sources maintain.

And although there is a policy in place to protect employees against sexual harassment at the workplace, sources say they

fear reprisal from management if they complain. Each source told *The Tribune* that their experiences have been similar to the complainant's, but because of fear for their jobs, have not been in contact with Human Rights or Town administration.

Sources told *The Tribune* that women employees are often subjected to "poking, touching and verbal harassment" by the official in question while doing their daily tasks.

When contacted about the issue, Mayor Fran Sainsbury said she was aware of the prob-

lem last year but thought the matter had been resolved since she had heard of no further complaints. She also said she was unaware there is a harassment problem within the town's offices. "If a complainant or complainants do not come forward, the town can not take proper action," the mayor said, in response to employees coming forward to the press.

In a prepared statement she responded; "The Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville is under an obligation to ensure that its workplaces are free of sexual

harassment. There are channels for appropriate complaints to be lodged and dealt with. The town had last-year been subject of a complaint before the Human Rights Commission and the matters are being dealt with appropriately."

The mayor said the issue was more of a "personality conflict" between the senior official and the complainant, and refused to acknowledge sexual harassment allegations.

She added the wave of support from sources is likely a "school-girl chum thing."

The Town's sexual harassment policy

The Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville's harassment policy has been in place since June, 1992. The definitions and procedures for filing a complaint with the town outlined in the policy follow:

POLICY STATEMENT

As part of the Town's Employment Equity Policy and in accordance with federal and provincial legislation, the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville is committed to providing a work environment free of sexual harassment.

While it is not the purpose of this policy to regulate an employee's personal morality, harassment is considered an act of misconduct and may subject an individual to disciplinary action and possibly dismissal.

DEFINITION

Sexual harassment is defined as engaging in a course of vexatious comment or conduct that is known or ought reasonably to be known to be unwelcome.

Sexual harassment may be verbal, physical, intended, deliberate, unintended, unsolicited.

Sexual harassment has occurred when:

- a) submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment;
- b) submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as a basis for an employment decision affecting that individual;
- c) such conduct has the effect - intentionally or unintentionally of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive working environment.

Examples of sexual harassment in the workplace may include but are not limited to:

- unwelcome remarks concerning a person's body, attire or sex;
- practical jokes of a sexual nature which cause awkwardness or embarrassment;

- displaying of pornographic pictures or other offensive material;
- unnecessary physical contact;
- physical assault.

TOWN'S PROCEDURES TO TAKE IF HARASSMENT OCCURS

Step 1 - Ask the harasser to stop. Inform the harasser that his/her behaviour is unwelcome. An individual may not realize that he/she is being offensive. If the person refuses to discontinue the behaviour remind him/her that such behaviour is against Town policy.

Step 2 - Keep a record of the harassment including dates, times, location, what happened, were there any witnesses, what was your response?

Step 3 - Lodge a complaint. If the harassment continues a formal complaint may be submitted to your Department Head. Upon receipt the Department Head will initiate an investigation.

If you are a member of CUPE Local 3619 and choose to grieve, you should immediately inform the union of the problem.

Step 4 - The investigation will include interviewing of the complainant, the alleged harasser and any other persons who may provide information. Information will be received in strict confidence and will be documented.

If there is evidence of harassment and disciplinary action is warranted, the Town will take immediate, appropriate corrective action which may include suspension or termination.

If the complaint is found to be not supported, NO documentation of the complaint will be placed with the employee file of the alleged harasser.



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