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MEDIA RELEASE

Employers still lax in controlling workplace bullying

Close to one third (28%) of Australian workers say they have been bullied in the workforce, while 42 per cent of employees report having witnessed their colleagues being bullied or discriminated against at work, a national survey of over 5,100 employees has found.

The 2011 Workplace Pulse Quarterly survey, conducted by employment screening solution provider, WorkPro, revealed bullying and discrimination remain prominent features of the Australian workplace. One quarter of employees (23%) say that they have been a victim of bullying or discrimination in the workplace in the last two years, while 12 per cent report that it has happened multiple times.

The findings come as the Victorian state government sent a clear signal to workplace bullies last week with bullying now considered a criminal offence in Victoria. Changes to the *Crimes Amendment (Bullying) Bill 2011* mean Victorian workplace bullies could now face up to 10 years jail.

Tania Evans, Manager of WorkPro, said that employers need to realise that bullying and unfair treatment in the workplace are more common than they think, and they must put strategies in place to help tackle the problem.

"These are issues that over 40 per cent of employees say they have witnessed which seriously affects workplace culture and could put employers at risk of liability from OHS claims," Ms Evans said.

"Last week's amendment to the Crimes Act in Victoria makes it clear that threats and abusive words or acts which amount to bullying will incur serious consequences for anyone who engages in this type of behaviour," Ms Evans said.

However, when compared to WorkPro's previous survey, the 2011 results are very similar to those seen in 2008, indicating that many employers are still not addressing these issues.

"Employers need to be proactive about making sure employees get the information they need to understand their rights and responsibilities at work. They also need to ensure employees feel they can report inappropriate behaviour," Ms Evans said.

"Establishing awareness in the workplace is clearly a factor here so that employees understand their rights from the get go and the consequences for breaching workplace codes of conduct," she said.

The research found nearly three quarters (68%) per cent of employees worry about offending colleagues in a discriminatory way, and 23 per cent of employees are unsure about when their own rights are being violated.

"The fact that employees are uncertain about their own workplace rights indicates a need for further education and awareness," Ms Evans says.



Ms Evans emphasised that education needs to involve a clear reporting line for bullying and discrimination. She says that individuals working in temp placements are most confused about these reporting lines, with 47 per cent unsure of whether they report to the recruitment agency or the host employer.

“Both the on hire and host employer are responsible for providing a safe working environment for their employees. The most important thing is for those employees to know what the process is for reporting incidents,” Ms Evans said.

In addition, 75 per cent of employees starting a new role indicated they would value information on what is considered acceptable and unacceptable workplace behaviour, what to do if they are bullied or discriminated against at work, what their own workplace rights are, and who to report violations to.

Ms Evans suggests some tips for employers:

1. Ensure that employee inductions include adequate OHS and EEO training and specifically outline the company’s workplace bullying procedure.
2. Continue training throughout employment, not just at the start of a new role.
3. Establish a process for reporting incidents, ensuring that the reports are documented and understood.

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About WorkPro:

WorkPro is a web-based employment screening solution.

The solution represents recruitment industry best-practice in the mitigation of workplace risk, with services including a broad library of workplace health and Equal Opportunity training and induction modules, a national criminal check service and the option for companies to tailor and customise the solution to represent their brand and the workplace risks associated with their industry.

The system was designed to ensure candidates are employment-ready by storing their employment history and training information in one central location, making it easy to share that information with any potential employer and streamlining the hiring process for candidates, contractors and employers.

WorkPro was launched in early 2007. It has since been adopted by over 350 recruiters across Australia and New Zealand, and more than 200,000 individuals have registered and completed induction training on the system to-date.

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