

PERSONAL WORKPLACE SAFETY

April 28th is Canada's National Day of Mourning for workers killed or injured on the job. These days, most people probably have a good general awareness of the value of protective clothing and equipment for workers in recognized dangerous occupations such as firefighting, healthcare and trades.

However, one area of workplace safety that isn't as readily recognized is women's personal safety from harassment, even though it, too, can result in occupational disease, injury and fatality.

Women need to practice personal safety measures while working, just as we do while walking down the street or any other activity. Many of the same precautions we routinely exercise out in the street and around our homes can be utilized in our workplaces.

Awareness of our environment, especially if we're required to work alone, is a good start. Incorporate some of your other safety training, such as for fire: Know your escape routes and learn the locations of emergency telephones, fire alarm pull stations and emergency response buttons. When possible, plan your travel routes in advance to include well-lit & populated areas.

If you are harassed, learn your options to minimize the damage. Find out if your employer has a Harassment Policy and if so, get a copy. If you are unionized, check your Collective Agreement. If your employer does not have an internal policy, depending on the type of harassment, you may be covered by either the Ontario or the Canadian Human Rights Code.

Many lawyers will provide an initial half-hour of advice for free, plus many free legal clinics offer advice about workplace harassment. There are also excellent online resources available for information, such as METRAC, CLEOnet and Bully Online.

You need not suffer alone or in silence. Local support services are available through the Sexual Assault Support Centre Ottawa and the Ottawa District Injured Workers' Group, as well as provincially through the 24-hour Assaulted Women's Helpline, 1-866-863-0511 (TTY 1-866-863-7868).

Women's Initiatives for Safer Environments (WISE) Ottawa is a registered charity specializing in community and workplace safety audits and personal safety workshops. For more information on our services or for more safety tips, please call 613-230-6700 or visit our website, www.wiseottawa.ca.