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What Role does the Director General Play in Handling Harassment Complaints?

Directors general (DGs) play an important role in harassment complaints—one that is fundamental to maintaining a healthy, harassment-free workplace. As the employer's representatives, DGs have crucial responsibilities in ensuring that workplace harassment and violence prevention policies are rigorously applied. What's more, in addition to dealing diligently with harassment complaints, they must ensure that the rights of all members of their organizations are protected.

Legal framework

The legal framework for dealing with workplace harassment is based primarily on the principles set out in the *Act respecting labour standards*, which states that employees are entitled to a harassment-free workplace. This provision applies to all employees (whether or not they are unionized), as well as to managers, including the director general. The law extends to all places where employees do their work: in the municipal offices, in the field, at conventions, and even at social events organized by the employer.

Harassment in the workplace can take many forms: psychological, sexual, or discriminatory. It can include repeated, hostile behaviour that undermines an employee's dignity or physical or psychological integrity.

Roles and responsibilities of the director general

Directors general play a pivotal role when a formal harassment complaint is lodged. They are the ones responsible for determining whether the complaint is valid. DGs are also responsible for carrying out the investigation, unless they decide to entrust it to another representative of the employer—or even to an external expert—in order to avoid any appearance of a conflict of interest.

Additionally, DGs determine whether temporary measures need to be put in place to protect any of the parties, particularly if the complaint poses a risk to an employee's health or safety. They must act impartially and guarantee that the investigation is carried out rigorously, respecting both the accuser's and the accused's rights to privacy.

Handling complaints

Harassment complaints can be handled formally or informally. An informal process allows the situation to be handled quickly, under the supervision of a neutral party, to resolve the situation without resorting to a formal complaint. Meanwhile, the formal process requires that a complaint be filed in writing and that a thorough investigation be carried out by the DG or a designated person, including meetings with the parties and any witnesses. Information gathered during either process must be kept strictly confidential to protect all of the parties involved.

Special cases

Directors general can sometimes be faced with complex situations, for example when they are personally targeted or when an elected municipal official is involved. In these cases, it is best to entrust the investigation to an external entity, such as a law firm that specializes in harassment investigations, to avoid conflicts of interest. This helps the process remain impartial by ensuring it is led by a neutral party. Meanwhile, if a complaint concerns an elected official, ethical breaches must be investigated to ensure that the official has followed the strict ethical standards to which all elected municipal officials are held.

DGs also need to intervene when the harassment comes from someone who is not employed by the municipality, such as a citizen. Furthermore, if an employee experiences harassment outside of working hours, but the harasser turns up at the workplace, DGs have a duty to act to ensure the employee is protected at work.

Conclusion

Directors general play a central role in handling harassment complaints. They ensure that all complaints are dealt with impartially, diligently, and respectfully to ensure a safe working environment. Whether by conducting an internal investigation or calling on the services of external experts, they remain responsible for protecting employees' rights and keeping the workplace healthy. By following formal procedures, keeping information confidential, and acting quickly, DGs help to prevent and resolve conflicts while promoting a culture of respect and civility.