



BUREAU OF OCEAN ENERGY MANAGEMENT
WORKFORCE ENVIRONMENT SURVEY
CORRECTIVE AND PREVENTATIVE ACTIONS

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

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Background

In 2016, the then-Director of the National Park Service (NPS), Department of the Interior (DOI or Department) admitted that he had violated his ethical responsibilities and the Inspector General identified pervasive examples of discrimination, retaliation, and a hostile work environment at the Grand Canyon National Park. One consequence of these actions was the initiation of a "prevalence survey" of the NPS. Shortly thereafter, the Department's Secretary determined that DOI would contract a self-survey to assist in identifying the scope of the harassment problem in DOI.

In August 2016, through the Federal Consulting Group (FCG), DOI engaged a contractor "to conduct an assessment of the prevalence and climate for sexual harassment within the DOI." This project was later broadened in scope to include all forms of harassment.

Between January 9, 2017, and March 5, 2017, DOI conducted a Work Environment Survey (WES) covering virtually all DOI personnel. The survey assessed workplace conditions that DOI employees experience, including the prevalence and context of all forms of harassment and discrimination, particularly sexual harassment; 28,203 DOI employees (approximately 46%) participated in the WES.

Within the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), 269 of 585 (also approximately 46%) participated. The results of the WES, as analyzed by the FCG and its contractor, were presented in a DOI-wide report (2017 WES Technical Report) and individual bureau-specific reports.¹

Based on the survey, employees at all levels of the organization were either directly (through their own personal experiences) or indirectly (through the witnessing or hearing about other employees' experiences) affected by harassing and/or assault situations both personally and professionally. The WES findings shed light on the dynamics that underlie these behaviors and affirm the need for comprehensive responses. As previously noted, there were 269 BOEM employees (of 585 on board) who completed the survey. The survey was weighted to reflect the characteristics of the workforce at the time of the survey, which resulted in an estimate that 197 of the 585 BOEM survey respondents (33.6% of BOEM employees) experienced one or more forms of harassment, discrimination and/or assault-related behaviors in the past 12 months. This was just below the DOI-wide result of 35%. Reported behavior included harassment or discrimination based on age, racial/ethnic background, religious beliefs, disabilities, sexual orientation, and gender as well as sexual assault and sexual assault related behaviors.

BOEM contracted with FCG to support the Bureau in activities related to the implementation of the BOEM Corrective and Preventive Action Plan (CAPA) that responds to the problems highlighted in the WES Technical Report. The contractor was tasked with the following:

Task 1: Reviewing and Analyzing Results in BOEM's Report on Harassment Conduct

- Review of 425-page report issued to BOEM entitled "Supplemental Statistical Report Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) Work Environment Survey, January-March 2017"
- Identify and recommend prioritization of critical issues from the WES to be addressed

Task 2: Developing Bureau Tactical Action Plans

- Identify and benchmark best practices in the public and private sectors with potential applicability to the Bureau

¹ Technical and supplemental statistical reports on the WES for DOI and individual bureaus are available at: <https://www.doi.gov/employees/anti-harassment/reports>

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- Through focus groups, interviews and other inputs, identify bureau-based best practices and areas for improvement, including identification of core anti-harassment activities at the bureau and region-specific levels
- Conduct a training needs assessment to identify gaps in existing training processes
- Evaluate investigative and response capacities
- Draft Bureau and Regional Tactical Action Plans, detailing step-by-step activities to address WES findings, to include:
 - Activity type categorization (i.e., leadership, accountability, communications, policy, investigative and response capacity, training, employee resources, general support, etc.)
 - Recommended implementation strategies, including communications and cultural change management activities (the use of online training should be minimized)
 - Policy statements and table of penalties
 - Leadership and accountability tools, materials, and processes
 - Identified resource gaps and strategies to address those gaps
 - Resource guides, support tools and other materials for managers, employees, and witnesses to harassment
 - Evaluation process with qualitative and quantitative measures to determine the effectiveness of the Plans

Task 3: Implementing Bureau and Regional Tactical Action Plans

- Provide services to implement BOEM approved activities from the Bureau and Regional Tactical Action Plans

Task 4: Follow-up Survey (optional)

- If determined to be necessary, a follow-on survey(s) with same dimensions as the original WES may be administered to help BOEM determine the effectiveness of the corrective actions.

Description

This report addresses findings covering the gray-shaded items noted in Tasks 1 and 2 above.

WES Report Analysis

One of the tasks outlined in the statement of work is to review the 425-page report issued to BOEM on the results of the WES, to identify critical issues and to categorize potential steps for action by the Department, the bureau, and the region. The top findings in the WES are reported in DOI and BOEM documents and reports².

There were 269 BOEM employees (of 585 on board) who completed the survey. The demographic questions asked allowed for data reporting and analysis at the individual bureau level as well as DOI-wide, but did not identify respondents by organization or geographical area (i.e., region).

The survey was weighted to reflect the characteristics of the workforce at the time of the survey, which resulted in an estimate that 197 of the 585 BOEM survey respondents (33.6% of BOEM employees) experienced one or more forms of harassment, discrimination and/or assault related behaviors in the past 12 months. This was just below the DOI-wide result of 35%. More specifically, results weighted to estimate the population in BOEM showed that:

- 18.9% experienced harassing behaviors based on their age
- 6.1% experienced harassing behaviors based on their racial or ethnic background
- 6.6% experienced harassing behaviors based on their religious beliefs
- 3.9% experienced harassing behaviors based on a perceived or actual disability
- 3.1% experienced harassing behaviors based on their sexual orientation
- 17.5% experienced harassing behaviors based on their gender
- 8.5% experienced sexual harassment
- 1.89% experienced sexual assault related behaviors

The LDSS analysis identified the following issues:

1. There is confusion over what rises to the level of harassing and offensive behavior.

The survey results indicate that about 1/3 of BOEM employees reported experiencing some form of harassment, discrimination and/or assault-related behaviors in the 12 months preceding the survey. While some acts of harassing, offensive and assault-related behaviors clearly are intentional, other unintentional acts may be perceived in a manner not intended. Ensuring that all employees are fully aware of what constitutes inappropriate behaviors in the workplace is essential to everyone having a common understanding. Best practice literature addresses the need for common acceptance throughout the workplace of acceptable and unacceptable behavior.

2. BOEM needs thorough, clear, and easily accessible Departmental and Bureau policies, information, and resources.

The survey results show that there is room for improvement when it comes to effective use of DOI resources to report and respond to a complaint, grievance, or report. Employees who responded to the survey reported that available resources were only somewhat or moderately helpful, and they were generally dissatisfied with the availability of information, the treatment received by personnel, actions

²See footnote 1 for links to reports

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and time required to resolve issues, and information about the status of the complaint, grievance, or report.

3. Improved training and education is needed for the entire workforce regarding harassing, assaulting and offensive behavior.

The communication of policies, procedures, and resources is critical to the success of the program and a reflection of management's commitment to anti-harassment and assault behaviors. Best practice literature (including reports from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the National Academy of Sciences)³ speaks to the importance of training the workforce. Training should include not only policy, process, and procedures but also the importance of being sensitive to and understanding the impacts and outcomes of harassment on thoughts, perceptions, and feelings.

4. BOEM should assess organizational commitment, organizational trust and management, and individual, supervisory and organizational accountability.

The DOI survey results revealed that employees who chose not to make a complaint, file a grievance, or report harassment felt discouraged to report the offending behavior because they believed it would be dismissed, discounted and downplayed. The BOEM report revealed that 50% of employees who did not report an incident did so because they thought that nothing would be done to address the situation. Unfortunately, necessary steps to ensure that fact-finding and decisions are thorough, that required due process is provided, and that statutory privacy protections are followed can add to the perception that "nothing is happening." They are, however, both mandatory and important. Best practice literature speaks to the importance of having a top down commitment that is practiced in word and in deed. Employee confidence in the credibility of the policy, procedures and resources is tied to management's actions in developing, implementing and supporting the integrity of the program.

5. BOEM should acknowledge the existence of (and monitor for) retaliatory behavior, both passive and active.

The DOI report⁴ revealed that from 15 to 33%⁵ of the individuals who said they filed a complaint, grievance or report of harassing and offensive behavior believed they suffered negative consequences as a result of a complaint/grievance/report, including:

- The person engaging in the harassing behavior took action against them for complaining;
- Their coworker(s) treated them worse, avoided them or blamed them for the problem;
- Leadership punished them for bringing the experience up; and/or
- They were threatened with loss of employment.

6. BOEM will need to hold all individuals (no matter who they are) accountable for harassing and offensive behavior– to include appropriate discipline even for expert or "star" employees who engage in harassment, and for managers who fail to act or fail to follow up if action is ineffective.

The DOI survey results reveal that after reporting harassing and offensive behavior, 21.3% of employees said the behavior stopped while 59.8% reported that the person did not stop the behavior.⁶

³ See the BOEM WES Best Practice Research Report for more information and references.

⁴ See footnote 1 for links to reports

⁵ Technical Report DOI WES p. 66 https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/uploads/doi_wes_technical_report.pdf

⁶ Technical Report DOI WES p. 64 https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/uploads/doi_wes_technical_report.pdf

Individual Interview Universal Themes Summary

The LDSS team conducted individual interviews and focus group meetings at the BOEM offices in Camarillo CA, Anchorage AK, New Orleans LA, Sterling VA and Washington DC in May and June 2018. Approximately 124 BOEM employees participated (22% of the 568 employees onboard) in the 60 voluntary individual and group sessions held.

Interviews and focus groups were conducted exclusively by the external consulting firm. In order to encourage openness, ensure anonymity, and provide objective third party interpretation, supervisory and non-supervisory interviews were firewalled from each other and BOEM representatives did not attend or participate in sessions. In fact, only the number of employees attending was recorded for each session; employee names were not retained.

At the beginning of every session, a standard disclosure statement was read. The information:

- Advised employees of the purpose for the session;
- Ensured employees that information discussed would not be attributed to individuals and would be kept confidential; and,
- Noted that information discussed within these sessions would not meet the burden of reporting offenses as described in DOI Personnel Bulletin 18-01.

NOTE: It is critical to note that, to protect and ensure anonymity and confidentiality while still capturing discussion concepts, interview/focus group feedback was not tabulated or calculated into counts or totals, but instead was summarized thematically. Efforts have been made to reflect the relative volume of various responses to show where there was consensus or strong agreement versus cases where there may have been isolated or more specific responses.

A standard list of questions was used to trigger discussion, but discussions were allowed to flow, to the extent possible, based on participant input. Questions were structured around five topic areas:

- Culture
- Accountability
- Policies and Communication
- Training and Training Needs
- Best Practices

It is important to note that, in multiple instances, participants in focus groups and interviews noted that the workforce was already beginning to fatigue from discussions on harassment. The danger here is that this could further entrench issues surfaced in the WES and in the focus groups. In some cases, employees who may be contributing to the negative work environment are likely to “tune out” and resist adaptation of new attitudes or approaches to mitigate workforce issues. In other cases, employees may adopt a “this too shall pass” attitude and simply ignore efforts by BOEM to improve the workplace. As a result, employees experiencing harassment or discrimination may essentially throw up their hands and avoid reporting instances of inappropriate office conduct or behavior. Over-riding this fatigue are the (at times) emotional exchanges from targets of inappropriate behavior in focus groups who made impassioned pleas for action to deal with persons or activities which create and sustain negative relationships and interactions. These are the real victims who become the percentages in the survey. These are the employees for whom this work is performed. And while it may be easy or convenient to simply dial back attention to this topic, these will be the people who continue to suffer from the results. Accordingly, BOEM will need to carefully manage balanced

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messaging to avoid “issue burn out,” while still keeping a full-court effort engaged to press for positive changes in the workforce.

The following subsections identify the issues most commonly raised in the focus groups and interviews across all BOEM locations organized by thematic/topic areas.

Culture

This series of questions focused on:

- The overall culture of the workplace environment prior to and after the survey;
- Management’s behaviors and attitudes related to fostering a respectful, safe and inclusive work environment; and
- Management actions taken to support strong and comprehensive harassment policies.

Reactions to survey results varied. Virtually all managers expressed some form of surprise, shock and/or dismay with the results, especially with regard to sexual assault. A few managers (and a larger share of employees) said that they were not surprised by the results, stating that they had seen or experienced harassment in some form during their tenure with BOEM.

A large majority of participants raised concerns with the seemingly high percentage of employees reporting recent harassment activity. And for the most part, this observation was repeatedly linked to a concern that the survey questions could result in the same event being reported multiple times, inflating results and painting a much more dire picture in BOEM and DOI than actually exists.

There was frequent mention of the perceived conflict between the WES results and the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey, which ranked BOEM in a more positive manner.

Nearly every employee, supervisor, and manager expressed concern that the definition of harassment in the workplace in DOI’s policy (and in the survey) is unclear and extremely broad. While they recognize there is a “legal” definition and that some examples are obvious (assaults, racial slurs, unwanted sexual attention, etc.), subtle situations (or even tone of voice) with nuances and gray areas need to be addressed and harassment differentiated from:

- The appropriate exercise of supervisory authority and discretion;
- Professional disagreements;
- Personal compliments;
- Personality clashes; and
- Performance or conduct issues.

BOEM staff felt that they were steered (via survey questions) to report behavior which was more appropriately defined as solely being “personality clashes,” or “part of dealing with difficult employees.” Interpersonal interactions appear to be negatively affected by a number of factors, including:

- Professional differences and jealousies;
- Job pressures and deadlines;

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- Disagreements or personality clashes;
- Occupational tendency to attract people who are more comfortable with science, animals, and plants than with personal interactions;
- Cultural differences;
- Challenges of recruiting a diverse workforce for scientific occupations;
- Generational differences;
- Weak interpersonal skills and inability to grasp how others perceive a remark or situation; and
- Anxiety over potential future reorganization and changes in agency mission and programs.

In a number of cases, these factors, over time, lead to actions/reactions which create perceptions (rightly or wrongly) that the negative interaction is driven by some form of bias. As an example, some female employees reported that male employees tend to harshly critique their work. In an isolated case, this may simply be nothing more than a negative critique, but when negative critiques are repeated and recurring, the female employees sense that it is being driven by a pro-male, anti-female professional bias, leading to accusations of gender bias or harassing behavior. While the underlying actions and intent may not be intended to be harassing or hostile, the perception over time becomes more entrenched.

BOEM staff frequently noted the inherent challenge of effectively moving from a technical position to a supervisory/leadership role without extensive leadership experience. Many described the process and criteria for selecting and training supervisors as ineffective. Lack of self-awareness was mentioned frequently. Some supervisors were described as tending to “wear blinders”; not likely to take action unless a situation were specifically brought to their attention. Even then, employees expressed that some supervisors prefer to keep problems from going to a higher level, outside of the immediate office, for fear of having this reflect negatively on their leadership. The tendency is to contain problems internally, sweep them under the carpet, or downplay their significance.

There are differences among locations, program offices and employment category (supervisors, managers and non-supervisory employees) as to whether the workplace environment is considered respectful, safe and inclusive. Post-survey, the Bureau is seen by most as actively trying to make improvements but many employees characterized this as mostly talk, no action.

Regional Directors (RDs) were generally viewed as supporting a positive workplace environment. However, there were variations, with at least some employees in every location expressing a more negative view. The RDs stated that they had an open-door policy for all employees within the office, creating an atmosphere where employees are free to raise issues with them directly. However, some employees expressed a reluctance or discomfort in bringing issues to the RD's attention or skepticism that the stated open door policy is genuine.

Some noted that it was their expectation that harassment would be a rare event in BOEM given that staff is made up largely of highly educated professionals (who should know better).

The culture was repeatedly described (by both male and female staff) as being male-dominated, mostly because of the perceived nature of the scientific work performed related to oil rigs and deep sea exploration platforms, potentially affecting women negatively.

Many BOEM employees felt that a small number of BOEM staff (supervisory and non-supervisory) were the focal point for most negative activity and behavior. Several senior managers, supervisors, and long-tenured senior technical staff (some of whom no longer work at BOEM) were identified as having been significant contributors to an offensive, difficult workplace environment. While some are no longer with BOEM, the toxic environment they reportedly created has lingered – though there was

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some sentiment expressed that their absence may allow for more improvements going forward. Some employees and managers were able to isolate a very small number of specific staff who tend to be the focal point for most of the activity which leads to a negative work environment. There was a pervasive sense that dealing with a fairly limited pool of toxic or corrosive personalities would resolve a significant proportion of the issues identified in the WES.

Accountability

This series of questions addressed:

- Management and supervisory role in addressing and preventing harassment;
- Senior leadership support of supervisors/managers addressing harassment; and
- Confidence in management's actions response to workplace harassment.

Most supervisors and managers believed management would hold them accountable for and support them in dealing with a situation or issue in their chain of command. Employees were less convinced.

Non-supervisory employees stated management should be consistent and held accountable for poor behavior. It would be reasonable to expect to see some correlation between holding poor performers accountable and holding individuals who exhibit poor behavior accountable.

Many individuals stated that the privacy issues that prevent individuals from knowing what, if any, management action is taken result in the general population not knowing whether management has taken action or not. Some employees expressed a desire to see an accounting or summary of actions taken, without violating privacy regulations. The lack of a feedback loop has resulted in some employees not reporting situations since they do not believe any action will be taken.

Supervisory responsibilities and performance expectations in responding to harassment are generally covered under a broad supervisory element in performance plans covering other supervisory behaviors as well. Most BOEM staff (management and non-management) felt that it falls well short of being effective, as it covers a multitude of management requirements, rendering any particular focus on anti-harassment or discrimination moot.

Supervisors may not raise issues to higher levels because they are concerned about how it will reflect on their effectiveness. Risk aversion and a "don't rock the boat" mentality were noted. Management talk about accountability is seen by employees as mostly talk. "Some in senior management feel they are above the rules." There was also some doubt that information was reliably trickling down to lower levels in the organization.

Employees stated that supervisors address problems brought to them by calling in an entire group for a meeting, rather than addressing the alleged harasser directly. This minimizes or deflects the concern, and the person identified as responsible fails to recognize their potential culpability.

While a few instances of decisive action (e.g., removal of a probationary employee) were cited, the more common sentiment was that BOEM tends to be lenient and no real action is taken to deal with poor performers and conduct issues. Employees see a correlation with management's handling of harassment, especially harassment by supervisors or managers. "They are just reassigned or promoted to another unit."

Policies and Communication

This series of questions addressed whether policies are:

- Clearly articulated;
- Available to staff;

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- Make sense;
- Discourage employees from reporting harassing behavior; and
- Are adequate to protect an individual's identity.

Supervisors, managers and employees understood the zero-tolerance policy regarding harassment, but many feel the emphasis now placed on the subject has resulted in:

- Employees and supervisors "walking on eggshells" for fear of offending someone with unintended comments or actions;
- Supervisors receiving complaints for taking actions which are within the legitimate scope of management prerogative;
- Oversensitivity-- seeing harassment where it may not really exist;
- A presumption of guilt until proven innocent; and
- Failure to use judgment and account for differences of degree and intention; punishment for an extreme violation is the same as for a minor infraction.

Generally, employees indicated awareness of the recently issued policy, Department of the Interior Personnel Bulletin 18-01, "Prevention and Elimination of Harassing Conduct". While it was made available to them by email, when asked if they knew where to locate it if they had not received it via email, many did not know where to find it, and there was agreement that new employees (who did not receive the mass email) would not likely be able to locate it either.

Failure to see concrete and timely action appears to be a factor inhibiting reporting. Employees tend to stop reporting issues since they perceive that nothing will occur to remediate issues. They fear some form of retaliation (overt or covert) or being labeled as a "problem employee" or "troublemaker" as a result of reporting an incident. One employee focus group cited examples where accusers were punished with moves that disadvantaged them career-wise, and/or were shunned by co-workers and supervisors. Another described both overt and subtle messages from management that complainants are "trouble makers".

There were mixed perceptions of the most effective approach to mitigate workforce issues. Both employees and supervisors mentioned in interviews that employees were encouraged to go to their immediate supervisor as their first step, and the DOI Personnel Bulletin requires that supervisors take action when they get a report. Employees don't necessarily see this as being a useful approach. Some described a dysfunctional loop where supervisors were reluctant to listen to a complaint because they would be required to take action once it was reported, leading them to push back to make sure the employee didn't get pulled into a process the employee would later regret.

Employees see that:

- Situations do not get resolved easily or quickly;
- Complaining could have a negative impact on their careers;
- The entire situation is very stressful; and
- Most people don't want to deal with it.

Some in BOEM have embraced a technique (i.e., use of a "code word" such as "ouch") in meetings or other interactions to alert an individual that he/she may have crossed a line in an interaction. Virtually all BOEM staff who were exposed to this type of technique found it to be somewhat effective.

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Human Resources (HR) and Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) offices are not always viewed as helpful. Lack of BOEM-specific HR support, HR competency, and failure of HR to maintain confidentiality/privacy were noted. Several regions reported that the combination of small staff sizes and collocation with Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE) HR support staff at most locations made confidentiality all but non-existent. Anecdotes were frequently provided of offense reports circulating among the entire region within hours of reporting to HR.

Training

These questions focused on:

- How often anti-harassment training was required;
- How the training was presented, training's effectiveness; and
- How it could be improved.

All staff are required to complete annual online anti-harassment training in the DOI learning system (formerly DOI Learn and currently DOI Talent), which was recently revised. While this training is generally viewed as an improvement of prior modules, most admit to clicking through quickly to “check the box.” Examples and role playing in the training module are viewed as too obvious and do not portray the subtle situations and nuances that need to be assessed in real life workplace issues. Many believe in-person or some form of interactive training is needed in order to allow for discussion.

No matter what training is used, many expressed the concern that lack of self-awareness will make it less effective—those who need it the most seem least interested in and attentive to the training or feel that the training is geared toward “someone else, not me.”

A number of individuals stated that BOEM staff need training that takes into account generational differences. For example, individuals from the “Baby Boomer” generation may hold quite different values and points of view on language, actions, norms, etc. from that of an individual born in the “Millennial” generation. Moreover, using generational membership as a measure for behavior is also stereotyping and not always accurate. Younger employees have different expectations about how fast they can move up compared to what older employees have experienced, which creates some tension. Some suggested that the techniques being used in BOEM's leadership training (which includes study on communication styles, conflict management, flexibility, emotional intelligence, and understanding personality types) could be useful in preventing or reducing harassment.

Supervisory training needs to be strengthened. New supervisors do not always get the necessary supervisory training immediately, and there is no mandatory refresher training for more experienced supervisors.

Some of what appear to be attempts to promote dialogue (either through training or informal discussions) in response to harassment issues, even if well-intentioned, appear to have been handled poorly and therefore backfired. Examples were cited:

- Employees were asked to share personal stories of alleged harassment with the harassers in the room;
- Managers attended training using examples that supposedly were general, or “masked” identities, but everyone knew the person(s) involved and both the harassed person and the accused harassers were involved in the same discussion regarding the case, effectively re-arguing their points before the group.

Note on Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE) HR Support for BOEM

Since October 2011, BSEE has provided administrative services for BOEM through a reimbursable support agreement. Administrative services include Acquisition Management (AMD), EEO, Finance, HR,

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Management Support, Technology Services (TSD), and a team which oversees Records, Delegations and Directives. BSEE is co-located at most BOEM locations, including the Alaska and Gulf Regional Offices, and provides the full range of operational HR services, including recruitment and staffing, employee relations, benefits, and personnel processing for BOEM employees.

At BOEM, several of those interviewed expressed concern about the lack of confidentiality when reporting harassment to the BSEE HR staff. While this perception served to deter some employees from taking their issues directly to BSEE HR, a number of BOEM managers interviewed reported that they relied on BSEE staff for their expertise and counsel in conflict situations which may or may not rise to the level of harassment complaints. The degree to which managers and employees utilized BSEE in dealing with harassment matters depended, in large measure, on the personal relationships which individual service providers had established with BOEM staff. In the Alaska Region, for example, the BSEE HR representative was cited as being extremely effective in the early intervention and resolution of potential conflicts.

However, the somewhat natural perception remains that having an organization external to BOEM providing HR, EEO, and other employee services will inherently be less immediate and potentially less effective than having that capability in-house. This may be particularly true when it comes to dealing with issues of harassment, where the tendency is to want to handle them as an internal matter, where they will be given top priority. Several supervisors and employees recommended having a BOEM-only capacity to deal with harassment, either through a dedicated employee, an enhanced ombuds function, or via an anonymous hotline. These ideas may be pursued without undoing the fundamental support services which BSEE will continue to provide BOEM for the foreseeable future.

Region/Location-Specific Interview/Focus Group Notes

The following section summarizes issues relevant to a specific location only which became evident through the interviews and focus groups in that location.

Anchorage, Alaska Regional Office

Many employees stated that the Anchorage office is a small office which contributes to employees opting to not report issues. Because the staff size and office setting is small, there is a pervasive sense that when complaints are lodged, everyone tends to be aware of who has complained. Complainants fear being labeled as “troublemakers,” which is then perceived to impact on future career progression. Moreover, several employees stated that retaliation by the individual being accused of inappropriate behavior was more likely than by supervisors.

In spite of the WES findings, several employees compared the BOEM culture to prior Federal and industry work environments, indicating that they found BOEM to be much more positive and inclusive.

Managers and supervisors all stated that they felt that bureau and regional management are very supportive of early intervention in addressing and preventing workplace harassment, a view not held by all employees.

Most, but not all employees, agreed that the in-person, interactive training would be an improvement over the current online training, provided that it did not involve role-playing.

Camarillo, California Regional Office

Close proximity and relationships between BOEM and BSEE employees (resulting assumedly from the small office environment) tends to discourage employees from reporting all incidents, out of concerns that some information about the incident may be circulated, inadvertently or otherwise.

The Camarillo Regional Office is a small, close-knit organization where it is not unusual for managers and supervisors to have close relationships with staff. Several staff noted what they perceived to be inappropriately close external personal friendships/relationships between managers and staff which create conflict and hamper reporting/corrective action in the office. This fosters a work environment wherein employees feel unable to raise issues to managers who are perceived to be close friends with employees who could, at some point be the focal point of a complaint (will the manager treat that employee equitably?).

Almost every interviewee identified what seems to be the same small number of employees who are viewed as being the source of most bullying and workforce environment issues; issues with these employees tend to be unaddressed because “that’s the way [name] is.” Most felt that, were Camarillo to strongly address issues involving these specific employees, most problems in Camarillo would resolve.

New Orleans, Louisiana Regional Office

New Orleans was described as a “contentious” environment with more frequent EEO complaints than other agencies/locations, and cliques among supervisors/managers. This reputation was acknowledged nearly universally in interviews and focus groups both among supervisory and non-supervisory participants. It is worth noting that this reputation extends outside of New Orleans (other locations/offices described it similarly).

Historically, New Orleans had tended to hire mainly males in professional occupations. Hiring patterns in recent years/decades have resulted in a growing percentage/number of females and minorities in the workforce. In addition, contrary to past pervasive hiring patterns, more and more New Orleans employees may come from other parts of the United States, and may reflect differing social attitudes towards workforce behavior. These demographic and attitudinal differences have a direct relation to

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what is viewed as appropriate/inappropriate in the workplace. Long-term employees accustomed to a male-dominated culture may be at odds with more recent hires which may have been accustomed to a more diverse workforce and workplace. While blending these two viewpoints is not impossible, it requires communication, familiarity, understanding, and sharing of ideas and values on an even playing field. New Orleans staff recognize the need for such activities and appreciate the positive impact this can have on the workplace, but structurally, the office environment tends to prevent this from occurring organically. The office consists of high cubicle walls and cubicle doors which isolate employees and limit employee interaction during the workday. External office “social” events have been curtailed over the years for numerous reasons (money, loss of staff who had previously planned/organized such events, increases in workload, etc.) Many felt more opportunities for staff from different program areas to interact and learn more about each other would be valuable.

New Orleans fills supervisory positions on an acting basis (details) for extended periods of time. This practice, continued over time, has negative consequences. The natural assumption is that a short-term, non-permanent acting supervisor is not in a position to aggressively and affirmatively act on issues because he/she will likely not be there long enough to follow through on them. Additionally, acting supervisors may be viewed by staff as unaware of or unfamiliar with supervisory requirements and responsibilities and may tend to avoid becoming involved in negative staffing matters since they lack the implicit authority of a permanent supervisor who will be able to manage the outcomes of the matter as well as the execution of any disciplinary or remedial efforts required.

Mid-level managers were frequently cited as contributing to environmental issues in New Orleans. This was in large measure due to an ingrained practice of promoting senior technical/scientific employees into supervisory roles for which they may have little preparation, training, or competence in required management, leadership, and interpersonal competencies and skills. In fact, interviewers personally heard statements from mid-level managers during focus groups which seemed to indicate entrenched behaviors that managers may not even realize are acts of bias and discrimination. Examples were discussed in focus groups of issues managers have faced and how they have dealt with them, such as addressing issues of bias by adjusting team assignments. While this may avoid conflict, it could have the unintended effect of limiting opportunities for some employees to make potential professional and technical contributions as well as social marginalization and further entrenchment of cultural and racial biases in the workplace.⁷

Some appear to adopt a “blame the victim” mentality, thinking that all employees should be equally outspoken and willing/able to confront bad behavior directly, and belief that many complaints are frivolous. Employee concerns of retaliation have been minimized as simply a “rumor”.

Sterling and Main Interior Building (MIB)

During the interviews and focus groups, most in both MIB and Sterling were decidedly positive in their assessment of their workforce environment and, other than potential for improvements in diversity, identified no additional or specific issues.

⁷ The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at Ohio State University describes “implicit bias”, “(A)lso known as implicit social cognition...(as) the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. These biases, which encompass both favorable and unfavorable assessments, are activated involuntarily and without an individual’s awareness or intentional control. Residing deep in the subconscious, these biases are different from known biases that individuals may choose to conceal for the purposes of social and/or political correctness. Rather, implicit biases are not accessible through introspection.” State of the Science: Implicit Bias Review 2015, <http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu>, (undated).