Harassment and Bullying — study guide

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A ship is a seafarer's home for many months at a time, which is exactly why harassment and bullying aboard are so damaging. This guide covers the signs, the policy, the complaint process and everyone's responsibilities.[1]

Context

A ship is often seen as a seafarer's **home** for many months at a time. According to recent studies, bullying or harassment is a response to stress or internal suffering — it says more about the perpetrator's state than the victim.

Recognising it

Behavioural changes that can highlight that someone might be experiencing harassment or bullying include a lack of motivation resulting in unsatisfactory work performance, abusing drugs and alcohol, and a change in mood — becoming agitated, alert or aggressive. The three most common types of harassment are **physical**, **sexual**, and **verbal or written**. Examples of sexual harassment include flirting, over-familiar behaviour, gesturing or making sexual remarks about a person's appearance; inappropriate touching against a person's will; and displaying or sharing pornographic or sexual images or other sexual content.

The policy

A shipping company's harassment and bullying policy should include examples of actions deemed harassment or bullying (including **cyberbullying**), a statement of the company's commitment to eliminate harassment and bullying aboard ships, and a clear overview of the complaint process and what the outcome will look like.

Handling a complaint

The perpetrator should have the right to a **hearing** where they can give their version of events and respond to the complaint. The victim and the perpetrator must be treated **fairly** and should both have the option to call **witnesses** if required.

Responsibilities

Seafarers help eliminate harassment and bullying by reporting it when observed or experienced, by avoiding harassing or bullying others and actively getting involved if another seafarer is targeted, and by supporting the right of everyone to be treated with dignity. Companies and seafarer organisations raise awareness through awareness, educational and social-skills training programmes; management and seafarer guidelines; and posters, notices in staff areas and articles in staff magazines. Protected characteristics include age, disability, gender and race.

Key facts to remember

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- A ship is a seafarer's home for months; bullying/harassment is a response to stress or inner suffering.
- Warning signs: poor performance, drug/alcohol abuse, agitated or aggressive mood.
- Three common types: physical, sexual, verbal or written.
- Policy: examples (incl. cyberbullying), commitment statement, complaint process and outcome.
- Complaint: perpetrator gets a hearing; both treated fairly; both may call witnesses.
- Seafarer duties: report, don't perpetrate, intervene, uphold dignity. Protected characteristics: age, disability, gender, race.

Sources

1. Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 (as amended) — elimination of harassment and bullying and provision of a safe, respectful working environment.