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(I.S.S.N 2321- 6417 (Online))

Ph: +919310053923 Website: [journal.lawmantra.co.in](http://journal.lawmantra.co.in)

E-mail: [info@lawmantra.co.in](mailto:info@lawmantra.co.in) [contact@lawmantra.co.in](mailto:contact@lawmantra.co.in)

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## **ROLE OF FACILITY MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONAL IN PREVENTION OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT OF WOMEN AT THE WORKPLACE\***

### **ABSTRACT**

Chapter VI of the Sexual Harassment of Women at the Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act 2013 spells out duties of the Employer. One of the responsibilities is a safe working environment at the workplace which shall include safety from the persons coming into contact at the workplace.

The Act does not lay down any specific provisions to be complied with, by an employer so that the workplace may be considered safe.

### ***Safe workplace***

Among other things, the Facility Management Professional ensures proper security of the premises, controlled visitor management, background checks of outsourced staff, installation of CCTV systems at appropriate places with regular monitoring, proper illumination in the offices etc.

Besides being responsible for company transport, he also ensures that women employees who leave after 9.30 pm are dropped home safely.

### ***Lack of information***

The Internal Committee while conducting an inquiry may seek information like records of visitors, co-travelers in company provided transport, details of drivers, outsourced staff etc. What if, the information sought is not available? Lack of information being made available in a timely manner can have a direct repercussion on the Employer.

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\* Sandya Advani, Principal Trainer, Posh Systems.com.

## **What the paper seeks to do**

The paper seeks to spell out specific actions that a Facility Management Professional (Admin professional) can do to assist an employer in ensuring compliance with the Sexual Harassment of Women at the Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act 2013.

**Key Words:** Office Infrastructure, Workplace, Safety of Women, Prevent Sexual Harassment.

## **Introduction:**

**Case 1** The Internal Committee receives a complaint of sexual harassment experienced by a female employee at the hands of a visitor. The Committee seeks details of the visitor. However only the name and contact number are available. On calling the contact number, the mobile phone is found to be switched off. There is no other information available at the Security Desk.

**Case 2** In another case, a driver in a company provided transport, passes some sexually colored remarks at a female employee when she is getting off the vehicle. The employee lodges a complaint with the Internal Committee who requests for background verification of the driver from the Facility Management (FM) team. However, it is found that apart from some address proof which is of a rented place and a photograph, there are no other details available.

Chapter VI of the Act relates to the Duties of the Employer. The Act does not lay down any specific provisions on what it is, that the Employer needs to do, to make the workplace safe.

This paper seeks to lay down a checklist of best practices that, if followed by the FM professional can help the employer to comply with the provisions of the Act in making the workplace safer. The steps will also ensure that necessary documentation needed is always available with the FM team and can be provided as and when requested. No company can afford to get into the limelight for all the wrong reasons especially the basic ones of providing a safe workplace.

**Best practices to be followed for a safer workplace - Checks for outsiders who come into the workplace.**

## **Issues faced with visitors**

- a) Queues- Multiple visitors coming at the same time
- b) Misuse of log books- Visitor can see names and details of previous visitors.
- c) Wrong information may be entered in visitor book. This poses a threat
- d) Loitering visitors- pose a threat
- e) Head Count- Keeping track of number of persons in the premises.
- f) Easy to get in- no process of cross verification of data provided

## **How does one make the workplace safer?**

## 1. Visitor Management System

- i) By using ready to use software systems*-There are quite a few readily available software for visitor management. The process generally followed is as below :
- a) The visitor enters the office.
  - b) He hands over his visiting card.
  - c) Business card scanner scans the visiting card.
  - d) Data on the card is captured in the system.
  - e) Web cam clicks a picture of the visitor.
  - f) The finger print reader captures his finger print.
  - g) The digital pen captures the signature of the visitor.
  - h) The bar code scanner scans material being taken inside (maybe a laptop, I-pad etc.)
  - i) The label printer prints the visitors pass.
  - j) The concerned person receives a message along with a picture about visitor.
  - k) The visitor is permitted to go in.

Visitor management software verifies the mobile number of the visitor using a four-digit verification code.

In case visitor overstays in office, an alert is sent by SMS to the host and the visitor.

The data thus collected includes- name of visitor, photograph, fingerprint, mobile number (verified), company name, signature, duration of visit, frequency of visits to the company, person whom he meets, details of laptop carried etc.

- ii) Escorting of visitors* – Visitors are escorted by the Security guard and seated in the meeting rooms. When the meeting is over the host escorts the visitor to the main entrance.

- iii) Location of meeting rooms* - It's a good idea to have meeting rooms near the reception and segregated from the main office area, so that visitor meeting area remains separate from the office. The visitor has no access to other parts of the office premises. He finishes his meeting and leaves.

- 2) Access Control** - Access to the area where the employees are seated is controlled with the help of access control devices. It is advisable to have biometric access control systems rather than just having an access card which could be misused if stolen or lost.

- i) Monitoring of Access* - When a new employee joins the organization or separates out, HR sends out a mail communication to the Facility Managers and Security Desk. Accordingly, access is granted or disabled.



Biometric access control

- ii) **Color coded lanyards for ID cards**- Employee ID cards can be worn around the neck with a lanyard. These lanyards can be of different colors for employees, contract staff and visitors. It makes it very easy to identify visitors by the color of the lanyards worn by them.
- iii) **Prevent Tailgating** -Security needs to be vigilant towards tailgating. An unauthorized person follows an authorized user into the premises by walking closely behind him and entering the premises when the door is open for the authorized user to enter. This is called as piggybacking or tailgating. This could easily happen when a group of employees are returning from lunch. It may even happen innocently due to an employee holding the door open for others behind him or her.
- iv) **CCTV cameras** placed at the main entrance can highlight instances of tail gating. Such persons need to be pulled up and warned. Repeat instances should be punished.

**How this helps** – Capturing of complete information about visitors in the data base, allows visitor access to be controlled. This is one of the first steps towards making the workplace safer from outsiders.

### 3. Installation of CCTV cameras

- i) **CCTV cameras** capture images. They need to be clear. The cameras should be installed in a manner to cover all the areas of the office except the washrooms. Most of the times the cameras are sensitive to movement. The recording happens throughout the day. In the night cameras record only if there is movement. Infrared surveillance cameras record even if there is darkness. The recording is stored for a period of 15-30 days. In large offices, the CCTV display is manned by Security guards who monitor anything unusual. So, instances of misbehavior in the passages etc. if any, would get captured and brought to the notice of the FM professional the next morning.
- ii) **Retrieval of CCTV footage**- Apart from recording the CCTV footage, the FM professional ensures that footage is copied and stored for a period of 3 months.

Checks are made to ensure that the stored data can actually be retrieved if required. A process is setup to check whether data is being stored properly and can be easily retrieved when needed. These checks are done periodically and are documented.

### ***How this helps***

- a) CCTV footage is vital evidence to ensure safety of all employees. Any woman accusing someone of misbehavior or sexual harassment can request for CCTV footage to be used as evidence.
- b) Secondly instances of objectionable behavior are captured and brought to the notice of the FM professional who can then proactively take it up with HR.
- c) It works as a deterrent for any misbehavior more so, when the person knows that he is being watched.

## **4. Meeting rooms**

It is a good idea to have meeting rooms with glass walls. Some portions of the glass may be covered with frosted film to ensure privacy.



Glass walls with frosted film panels

***How it helps-*** Anything untoward happening can be noticed immediately.

## **5. Illumination in the workplace**

Adequate illumination ought to be made available in the workplace to avoid dark pockets. Areas that are not frequently used could have motion sensors. In case of anyone coming in that area, lights would come on.

***How it helps-*** A perpetrator cannot take advantage of dark corners to harass anyone, resulting in a safer workplace.

6. **Workstations** – They need to be 4 feet x 2 feet so that there is space between the employees. They also need to have a modesty panel fitted in for better privacy. Modesty panel is a thin board made of wood or metal to conceal view of a person's legs.



Modesty panel in a workstation

## 7. Background checks

**Vendors** – Before taking the services or any company, the FM professional does a Client reference check to check quality and reliability of services. In case of man power being deployed the following documents are taken from the staff before being placed in the premises.

### **Security guards**

- i) Police Clearance Certificate
- ii) Biodata
- iii) Proof of identity issued by the Government
- iv) Proof of address/stay issued by the Government
- v) Photograph
- vi) Letter of authorization from Vendor/Service provider of his being deputed to your premises.

### **Cab Drivers**

- i) Police Clearance Certificate (ideal). However, in practice, many a times service provider is unwilling to provide.
- ii) Biodata
- iii) Proof of identity
- iv) Proof of address/stay
- v) Photograph
- vi) Copy of driving license
- vii) Letter of authorization from Vendor or Service provider of his being deputed to your premises.



***Other staff - Housekeeping, Pantry boys, Electricians, Technical Staff deputed for maintenance of equipment like AC, UPS, DG etc.***

- a) Biodata
- b) Proof of identity issued by the Government.
- c) Proof of address/stay issued by the Government.
- d) Photograph
- e) Letter of authorization from Vendor/Service provider of his being deputed to your premises.
- f) Letter from Service provider confirming that all background checks have been carried out by him and have been found to be satisfactory.

**Regular Audits of documentation-** Biannually updating of documents provided will ensure that all documents are up to date and complete.

***How this helps*** – Background verification will ensure staff with a dubious past are kept out of the workplace making it safer. Regular audits of documents provided will ensure that updated data of all vendor staff is well maintained and complete in all respects. In case of a situation where the Internal Committee requests for information on any staff, this updated data would be readily available.

8. **Clause in Vendor contracts/Client contracts** - Point with respect to zero tolerance of the Company with respect to Sexual Harassment should be included in all vendor and customer contracts and action that would be taken in case of any complaints needs to be incorporated.

***How this helps*** – Vendors and customers are aware about the company policies and will be cautious.

#### **9. Company provided transportation**

In case of female employees leaving beyond 9.30 pm, security guards are provided in the company cab/company bus, especially if the number of female employees is less or her home drop is last.

There are also software and gadgets available which is installed in the vehicles. These allow real time tracking of vehicle and SOS button available on the mobile app of the software installed on employee phones.

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Mobile app has a SOS button to summon for help

**How it helps-** Better safety for female employees and access to help when needed.

#### 10. Employee related support

- a) Employees should be provided with laptops so that they can work from home after office hours.
- b) In time and out time of female employees especially should be monitored. Late sitting of employees beyond office hours especially female employees needs to be brought to the notice of HR if it is regular occurrence.
- c) Working in office on holidays should be permitted only if it is preapproved by manager.

**How it helps-** Better safety for female employees and accountability for managers if female employees' stay beyond office hours or come to office on holidays.

#### 11. Act related support

- a) **Vigilance** – The FM professional is vigilant to the happenings and proactively takes note of anything untoward happening brought to his notice. He then takes it up with HR.
- b) **Display posters** –The FM team generally looks after the printing and fixing of the posters required to be displayed to create awareness and provide details of the members of the Internal Committee.
- c) **Provide support in case of an inquiry-** by providing
  - i. meeting rooms,
  - ii. procuring attendance of witnesses,
  - iii. providing information and
  - iv. other logistical support needed by the Internal Committee.



## 12. Various actions and their impact on the implementation of the Act

Impact on the Act	Action taken by Facility Management Professional
Prevention	Installation of Visitor Management System
	Access control
	Installation of CCTV
	Meeting rooms
	Illumination
	Background checks
	Clause in contracts
	Company transportation
	Employee related support
	Vigilance
Prohibition	Display of posters- to create awareness and provide details of Internal Committee members.
Redressal	Providing information if required to the Internal Committee
	Logistical support for conducting inquiries
	Support for ensuring attendance of witnesses
	Corporate tie up with agencies for Community Projects



As quoted by Cesare Beccaria – It is better to prevent crimes than punish them.

**Recommendation** – The Act needs to lay down some guidelines on steps to be taken by the employer to create a safer workplace. An Annual Safety Audit could be made mandatory and its report should form part of the Annual Report being sent to the statutory authorities.

**Conclusion** – The Facility Management professional in his role can create a difference to the implementation of the Act with various best practices leading to Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal of Sexual Harassment of Women at the Workplace. .