

Harassment from management should be grieved despite hotline



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In a recent article from Link, the USPS announced the following:

The Postal Service has established a toll free phone number for employees and managers seeking guidance on what actions to take in the event of an incident of alleged harassment.

The number is 877-521-4272. Harassment is unwelcome behavior that an individual finds offensive and harmful, and that a reasonable person would consider intimidating, hostile or abusive. Such behavior is prohibited by the Postal Service and may also violate federal antidiscrimination laws. Workplace harassment may include offensive or derogatory comments, names or slurs; engaging in negative stereo-

typing; circulating or displaying inappropriate graphic materials; and engaging in physical or verbal threats, intimidation or humiliating actions. The offensive behavior could be a one time occurrence or may occur over a period of time. Although not every instance of inappropriate behavior may fit the legal definition of harassment, such behavior in the workplace undermines morale and may violate the Postal Service's standards of conduct and/or policies. USPS, through its supervisors and managers, takes prompt action to prevent, investigate, address and remedy conduct that is found to be against its policies and/or the law. **The Postal Service will act to protect the confidentiality of complainants but cannot guarantee complete confidentiality.** For more information, USPS encourages employees to review Publication 553, Employee's Guide to Understanding, Preventing, and Reporting Harassment, and/or call the harassment information line. (Emphasis added.)

If you feel the desire or need to use the above hotline to protest the harassment to which you are subjected, please do the following:

1. Make sure that you gather the facts that you have available, then draft out what you want to report. If you go it alone, you do not have the investigative rights of a shop steward. Only the union has those rights as specified in Articles 17 and 31 of the National Agreement.
2. Once you have determined what you want to report, make sure that you take notes on what information you gathered, and a word-for-word description of the facts as you report in your call.
3. Make sure that you take the names of the people with whom you speak, along with their titles and

contact information, in the event that a follow-up will be necessary.

4. Ask them to identify what steps they will take to look into your concerns and when to expect them to respond to your needs.

Keep in mind, however, that your use of this USPS harassment hotline should not be used instead of the grievance procedure. Article 15 of the National Agreement provides that we must initiate a grievance within 14 days of the event that causes the grievance, or the grievance may be declared untimely.

The NALC has no control of the above process.

The union has no say in how your call will be handled. If you want to make sure that your complaint is handled, please see your shop steward promptly to make sure we can look into your complaint and file a grievance, if necessary, before expiration of the 14-day time limit.

The above message from the USPS is not new. It comes from the commitments made in the National Agreement going back to its roots in Section 115.4 of the *Handbook M-39*, 115.4 *Maintain Mutual Respect Atmosphere*:

The National Agreement sets out the basic rules and rights governing management and employees in their dealings with each other, but it is the front line manager who controls management's attempt to maintain an atmosphere between employer and employee which assures mutual respect for each other's rights and responsibilities.

Prior to the existence of the Joint Statement on Violence and Behavior in the Workplace (JSOV), this *M-39* language has existed for many decades and for years was the basis of our grievances protesting the treatment of employees (see C12168, in which the offending manager was required to issue a written apology, and C11805, in which the offending manager was required to post a written apology for inappropriate harassment of the grievant). There are many other cases throughout the country that our NALC advocates have presented.

The bottom line is, if you don't object to the way you are treated, nothing will change. I have been asking you to do your best to observe how others are treated and stand up for each other as witnesses so that we can help make the changes necessary. For a listing of the other workplace issues articles, please go to my Safety and Health additional resources page at: nalc.org/workplace-issues/safety-and-health/safety-and-health-resources.

Keep an eye on each other.