

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

NOAA Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Policy

This Action Applies to Rubric Item: #10, Improved Policies

Description of Work: Improvements to NOAA's Sexual Assault Sexual Harassment (SASH) Policy

In 2018, NOAA developed and authored its original Sexual Assault/Sexual Harassment Policy (SASH) policy. This was done in response to legislation calling for the implementation of a policy that addressed training, victim advocacy, and Human Resource (HR) actions revolving around these issues. The policy was received with mixed results. The NOAA workforce was happy to see SASH being taken seriously and a policy being rolled out; however, many in the agency were confused by the language of policy, unclear as to who and where to report SASH incidents, and what rights members of the diverse workforce had.

Therefore, in 2019, the Workplace Violence Prevention and Response (WVPR) program manager worked with the HR policy staff to revise previous policy to create a clearer and more customer-friendly version. This updated policy is the result of over a year of effort and is currently in review. It sets a new standard for how NOAA will respond and prevent SASH.

Policy Highlights

Key policy highlights can be condensed into two categories: prevention and response. These categories demarcate NOAA mechanisms for response as well as the agency's commitment to training its workforce to prevent SASH incidents.

To address prevention, the updated policy now addresses a more comprehensive wrap-around approach to harassment and assault at the agency. The new policy now includes:

- Annual training requirements for the entire workforce. This explicitly states the needs for effective and evidence based strategies including bystander intervention
- Establishment of a Sexual Assault Sexual Harassment Council, composed of representatives of agency offices and divisions, which meets monthly
- the SASH Reduction Plan, to be updated biennially

To address response, the updated policy does the following:

- Establishes clear reporting mechanisms
- Provides explanation of victim advocate services

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- Establishes workplace flexibilities for those impacted by harassment and assault
- Defines procedures to remove and facilitate transfers for victims
- Describes the new SASH investigation department

These improvements work to enhance the policy and clarify the agency's mechanisms for response and prevention and ensure they are victim-centered.

Creation of the an Informal Policy Team

One of the unique aspects of the improved SASH policy is the addition of the informal policy. The first version of the policy included input from limited sources and left many key stakeholders out of the development process.

In the revised version, in an effort to make the policy more robust and inclusive, NOAA actively sought input. It created a policy team which would meet monthly (at a minimum) to create the revised policy. This team convened to discuss gaps in the previous policy version and establish new pathways to reporting and prevention.

The informal policy team consists of representatives from the following NOAA offices and divisions:

- Acquisition and Grants Office
- General Council
- Office of Civil Rights
- NOAA Corp Leadership
- HR Investigations
- Employee and Labor Relations
- Office of Security

Future Policy Changes and External Policy Review

In an effort to make sure NOAA's policy is current, an independent organization was hired . This company provides ongoing input to ensure NOAA's policy complies with current standards and remains sensitive to victims. For future efforts, the policy will be reviewed by an external agency every 2 years.

NOAA continues to work toward policies that are inclusive and current. For its updated SASH policy, NOAA created an informal policy team with key stakeholders within the agency to contribute to its policy and strengthen it by specifying prevention and response measures. Finally, NOAA is consulting with an independent agency that specializes in sexual harassment for the current version of the policy, and has committed to similar external review every 2 years to ensure the SASH policy remains strong, comprehensive, and relevant.

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Website for further information (if applicable): <https://www.noaa.gov/workplace-violence-prevention-response-program>

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