

# Sexual Harassment

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At a truckstop recently, I heard a thought provoking exchange on the cb. A lady driver asked a question, a guy made a suggestive comment to her and when she didn't respond, he repeated himself. I assume she could see who was saying these things because she threatened to call his company and file a sexual harassment complaint on him. What the guy said was rude, crude and socially unacceptable, but was it sexual harassment or was he just a jerk?

The sexual harassment law was passed to protect people from being forced to provide sexual favors to obtain or retain a job or to advance in one's career by people with power. When this law was first enacted, it was fairly concise, but since then, it has been overused and abused resulting in paranoia in the work force and businesses throughout the country.

I have only experienced one clear cut incidence of sexual harassment. In '83, I had completed the company requirement of running second seat for 6 months to a year and get a winter under my belt to advance to solo or lead seat. When I asked the safety director to move up, he said I could if I would do a sex act with him. I refused and remained second seat. I wrote up a complaint on him with the company but it just made his file thicker...nothing was done.

I have heard of many instances of trainers/lead seats forcing their trainees/second seats to have relations with them for the trainee/second seat to advance to their own truck. A lady I know recently went through school and went to work for a training company. She was placed with a male trainer who forced her to have relations with him. She supposedly tried to get help from her company, who didn't believe her, and also from police in various towns. She didn't receive any assistance and had to stay with this trainer until they reached a terminal where she could finally get off his truck. The company allowed her to advance to her own truck but quickly found a reason to terminate her. The trainer was retained by the company and continued to train women.

While working personnel for a trucking company '84 to '86, I investigated many reports of sexual harassment and found 75% to be true, the other 25% cases of the trainee being unable to do the job and used complaints to get back at their trainer for failing them.

Complaints often come down to he said/she said situations. My current employer told me that he had received a call from a lawyer one day stating that one of our drivers had sexually harassed a shipping clerk. She said the driver had said inappropriate things to her, the driver said he had asked if she was married and upon finding out that she was single, asked if she would go out to dinner with him sometime. There were no witnesses to the exchange and it wasn't really sexual harassment, so the episode went no further.

Many companies don't take reports and incidences seriously because of the abuse and misunderstanding of the law and how often, when we hear of another sexual harassment story, have we raised an eyebrow and thought 'yeah right.' As women in a male dominated industry, we have to deal with men daily.

Understanding the harassment laws and knowing the difference between a male being rude, interested in one, or demanding favors for your career advancement will not only help you cope

with your fellow drivers and company personnel, but will also make it easier for other women who have legitimate grounds to be believed when they file complaints.

By the way, remember the guy on the cb who made the inappropriate comments to the lady driver? It wasn't sexual harassment, he was just a jerk.