RECOGNIZING SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Threats and rewards for sexual actions are often clear cut—and clearly wrong. Sexual harassment is often related to power on the job—someone forcing someone else to put up with or do something they don't want. It can be:

PHYSICAL

- Touching the person's clothing, hair, or body
- Holding—long or inappropriate hugs
- Massaging a person's neck, shoulders, etc.
- Hugging, kissing, patting, or stroking
- Brushing up against another person, "accidental collisions"
- Goosing, caressing, or fondling
- Exposing oneself
- Physical assault or rape

VERBAL

- Turning work discussions to sexual topics
- Calling a person a hunk, doll, babe, or honey
- Asking personal questions about social or sexual life
- Asking about sexual fantasies, preferences, or history
- Making sexual comments about a person's clothing, body, or looks
- Making kissing sounds, howling, smacking lips
- Telling lies or spreading rumors about a person's sex life

NON-VERBAL

- Staring at another person's body
- Leaning over someone at a desk or standing closer than appropriate
- Offensive gestures or motions
- Circulating letters or cartoons
- Blocking a person's path
- Facial gestures such as winking, throwing kisses, or licking lips
- Letters, gifts, or materials of a sexual nature
- Sexual and/or derogatory comments about men/women on coffee mugs, hats, clothing, etc.

Inasmuch as any of the conduct listed above has a high potential for being unwelcome to at least some employees, it all runs a high risk of being ruled sexual harassment. Whether an action constitutes harassment depends largely on how it is viewed by the person receiving the attention. As a result, the prudent and best course of action is to avoid such behavior in the workplace.