

# **Corporate Reactions to Workplace Conditions in Wyoming**

**A Statement of the Wyoming Advisory Committee  
to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights**

February 1982

The opinions in this report are those of managers in the mineral extraction industries and do not reflect the positions of members of the Wyoming Advisory Committee of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights or of the Commission's Rocky Mountain Regional Office. For this reason, other interested parties or experts have not been consulted.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Wyoming Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights recently completed research into workplace conditions experienced by female and minority workers in the mineral extraction industries of the State. Advance copies of the draft research report were distributed to a sample of 26 mineral extraction corporations with headquarters in the Denver, Colorado area. Approximately half of these companies had mineral extraction operations in Wyoming and half did not. A representative of the Rocky Mountain Regional Office of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights called upon managers and officials of these corporations to obtain reactions to the report.

The purposes of this followup effort were to determine what aspects of the report seemed convincing to managers in the industry, what parts were questionable, what suggestions there were for overcoming apparent problems, and any other reactions of corporate officials which might enhance the report. One further aim was to bring the findings of the report to the attention of industry leaders.

Sixteen officials from 14 companies were eventually interviewed. Some firms declined to participate and others could not be reached. The following statement summarizes corporate reactions to the report and includes their suggestions which flow from comments made.

Corporations which participated in the followup study were:

ADOBE GAS AND OIL CORPORATION

AMAX CORPORATION

AMOCO PRODUCTION COMPANY

CONTINENTAL OIL COMPANY

COTTER CORPORATION

ENERGY FUELS CORPORATION

FMC CORPORATION

HOMESTAKE MINING COMPANY

IDEAL BASIC INDUSTRIES, INC.

PEABODY COAL COMPANY

ROCKY MOUNTAIN ENERGY COMPANY

TOSCO CORPORATION

WESTERN NUCLEAR INCORPORATED

WYOMING MINERALS CORPORATION

SUMMARY OF WORKPLACE CONDITIONS IN WYOMING: WOMEN AND  
MINORITIES IN THE MINERAL EXTRACTION INDUSTRY

In 1980 approximately 80 persons working in Wyoming's mineral extraction industries were interviewed in regards to workplace conditions for the increased number of female and minority employees. Miners were interviewed at their job sites when corporate cooperation allowed. The interviews were conducted at six different locations around the State in order to obtain a more representative picture of conditions.

The survey produced the following conclusions:

Women employed in Wyoming's mineral extraction fields reported various types of harassment on the job. This harassment ranged from being assigned the most undesirable work to verbal abuse, sexual advances, and physical violence.

Verbal harassment of minorities and women in the workplace is illegal race and sex discrimination. Such harassment can lead to emotional debilitation and hostility. This harassment necessarily limits employment opportunities of individuals on a basis other

than individual merit and can be a serious inhibition to self-confidence and ability to perform the job.

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission guidelines make employers legally liable for sexual harassment even when they are unaware of it. Harassment may also adversely affect the employer by causing high turnover rates and low employment morale as well as diminished quantity and lesser quality of work product.

Many women and minority workers in Wyoming's mineral extraction industry are not aware of their State and Federal rights regarding sex and race discrimination. Neither do these persons know where to file formal complaints.

The Wyoming Fair Employment Practices Commission is challenged to keep pace with the workload it encounters in Wyoming's expanding economy. With the anticipated increase in numbers of women and minority workers in the Wyoming mining extraction industries and in other non-traditional fields, the Wyoming Fair

Employment Practices Commission can expect a substantially greater workload.

In addition to these findings the report of the research also contained a set of recommendations along with materials that could be used to avoid workplace harassment. For convenience some of these materials are also included here.

#### REACTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS OF CORPORATE MANAGERS

Each executive interviewed for the follow-up study was asked for reactions to the research report and its findings. Interviewees were also probed for suggestions about ways of eliminating, ameliorating, and/or preventing the problems female and minority workers reported. The following is a synopsis of the views of these managers in the mineral extraction industry. Their suggestions are highlighted.

One of the most heated and widely debated issues touched upon in Workplace Conditions and which surfaced again during the followup survey is the matter of whether or not women can do mining work. Some corporate officials interviewed for the followup expressed the opinion that there were some parts of mining work that women could not do, or could only do with great difficulty, because of the

physical strength required. But other officials maintained that in their opinion there was no work in mining that women could not do.

Some of those interviewed asserted that the strenuousness of the work and the dirt and grime of mining were the cause of the higher turnover rates for female employees reported in Workplace Conditions. Executives who offered such explanations were asked if their corporations had ever conducted tests to determine the strength required for mining work. None of the companies had; nor were these managers aware of any such tests being conducted by government agencies.

Because of the extent of conflict about women's ability to perform mining work, companies might help insure adjustment of female miners if they would, as one interviewee recommended, conduct tests to determine the amount of strength various mining tasks require. These tests could be conducted by the companies themselves and results could be widely distributed throughout the industry.

Objective tests might help settle an issue about which exist strong feelings or many opinions but few facts. If a man or woman was not able to meet the strength tests then this could be taken into account in work assignments. The work could be restructured, machinery might be used, or other modes of accommodation might be attempted.



It is a widespread belief that the first women to enter a mine are apt to encounter the greatest difficulties. If turnover rates and conflicts are high for this initial set of non-traditional employees, a tone can be set for continued difficulties when additional women are employed. One means of avoiding such problems, according to industry managers is to take care to hire the finest women available, especially if they are the first women on the job. Seek out women who know the work, are strong, and will have a high probability of staying on the job.

These women will demonstrate to male miners that women can do the work and will stay with it. Less experienced females can then be added to the workforce with fewer barriers to overcome.

In addition to the belief that female worker turnover rates result from difficulty in dealing with the work, corporate managers put forward other explanations for the disparity between male and female turnover. Some executives contended that women's lack of familiarity with mining was at least part of the problem. New miners, regardless of sex, have higher turnover rates, according to these respondents. It is contended that while the salary for mining work may seem appealing to many, some become disenchanted when they learn what the work is really like. Thus, since fewer women have experience in mining, their attrition rates are higher, at least in part, because of disillusionment.

Claims of workplace harassment by female miners were seen by some managers as attempts to justify quitting a job that was more difficult and distasteful than had been anticipated. It was suggested that this might account for the finding of Workplace Conditions that many female miners claimed they had been harassed.

Another mineral extraction official offered a method for determining causes of higher turnover rates for women. He recommended that when the turnover rate for women or minorities is higher than for white males, exit interviews should be conducted to discuss the reasons for leaving.

Some corporate executives maintained skepticism about the extent and seriousness of workplace harassment. Even a few of those convinced of the seriousness of harassment problems were not sure that any actions taken by the employer would have an effect. Several said they did not believe anything could be done to change the behavior of male miners. Others did not believe that corporations stood in a position to correct harassment. These corporate officials believed they were not responsible for harassment by their employees.

Many of those interviewed stressed the need to make a commitment to a program designed to eliminate sexual and racial harassment from all levels of the corporation. Without aggressive action from top-level management most interviewees believed little would be done to change workplace conditions. Some insisted that commitment of a

company's chief executive officer had to go beyond the mere issuing of statements and that concrete steps were needed.

Those who did see a need for employers to attempt to deal with harassment made several suggestions as to how companies might proceed.

#### EMPLOYERS CAN

hire consultants to determine the extent of harassment, if any, and to suggest preventive or corrective measures.

Although most companies like to believe they can handle such issues from within, it was suggested that on matters so sensitive outside help could be valuable. Employees are likely to be more willing to talk with non-employees, expert in such matters. Corporate officials also saw value in obtaining an unbiased view of their corporation's status regarding harassment issues. Written statements of company policies on racial and sexual harassment were also seen as a positive step.

#### EMPLOYERS CAN

include a discussion of company policies regarding harassment in an employee handbook.

While not all companies distribute written information to new employees, those who do could easily include materials on harassment. Companies that do not have written orientation materials (and even those who do) can follow another recommended step.

#### EMPLOYERS CAN

develop and distribute a fact sheet outlining corporate policies on racial and sexual harassment.

Workplace Conditions contains materials that would be helpful in developing either a fact sheet or an employee handbook statement.

Other methods of educating employees about their rights and obligations regarding workplace harassment were also put forward. Several executives offered ideas for training.

#### CORPORATIONS CAN

hold periodic meetings to deal with equal employment issues, to make company policy clear, and to provide an occasion for employees to come forward with problems.

Some extraction industry executives believed that such meetings would be particularly helpful to companies without a personnel officer or a full-time equal employment officer.

#### CORPORATIONS CAN

provide sensitivity training for men and women on how to work together.

This training could be included in orientation of new workers or could involve all employees. Some executives cautioned against setting up such a program so as to concentrate solely on women or solely on men. Both sexes should be included, they believed, in order to avoid resentments which could be caused by singling out one sex or the other.

#### CORPORATIONS CAN

**prepare new employees for conditions they will encounter when they begin work;**  
**in addition to the mandatory safety training, orient new miners to distinguish between the normal "kidding" that miners receive and sexual and racial harassment; and**  
**teach methods for dealing with harassment.**

As recommended, both sexes should receive the above training. Consultants could also be helpful in these above-mentioned areas.

Harassment problems are much more likely to be brought to the attention of the employer rather than to a government enforcement agency or a private attorney if the employer has established procedure for dealing with complaints. But even with a set structure, employees may not come forward with problems if they believe, as many do, that they will be subject to reprisal for discussing the problem. Companies must make it clear that retaliation against employees who

come forward with problems will not be tolerated. One interviewee stated that, unless employers repeatedly stress that retaliatory actions will not be condoned, employees will be reluctant to express legitimate complaints.

Another suggestion was put forth to encourage employees to approach management when they have difficulties, rather than quitting, filing a complaint, or tolerating harassment.

#### EMPLOYERS SHOULD

have women and minorities placed in positions of authority accessible to women and minorities who may want to discuss work environment problems.

The manager who suggested this believed that more employees could be kept on the job and more law suits avoided if employers had someone in their structure viewed by female and minority workers as particularly sensitive to their needs. Some of the personnel managers interviewed for this followup did not believe that any employee would hesitate to come forward with difficulties, but others saw reasons why workers might be reluctant. (The interviews with female and minority workers for Workplace Conditions uncovered considerable reticence to bring problems forward.)

#### EMPLOYERS SHOULD

establish a mentoring program to help non-traditional employees become familiar with new circumstances.

A related method for fostering better adjustment of non-traditional workers into the mineral extraction industries' workforce was the concept of mentoring. This was suggested by an executive who had employed such a system. This policy provides each new worker an assigned mentor who helps the new employee become comfortable with both the job and company environment.

One further area of concern addressed by one mining company executive was friction sometimes caused by the report that male miners' wives are unhappy about their husbands working with women in the mines. It was suggested that many of these apprehensions could be overcome. Thus, it was recommended that corporations bring the miners, their spouses and female miners together in informal settings so that apprehensions can be reduced. Although it is recognized that this is a personal issue with which husbands and wives have to deal, it was believed that the above-mentioned approach could reduce fears that husbands would become involved with female miners. Wives might be more inclined to lend women miners more support.

These are the principle suggestions made by the mining executives interviewed. Managers also made other recommendations for encouraging the mineral extraction industry to grapple with harassment. The major thrust of these remarks was the conclusion that the industry should take on the issue itself rather than permit governmental agency attempts to force corrective efforts.

## APPENDIX A

(Additional Suggestions Extracted From Workplace Conditions)

## COMPANY OFFICIALS SHOULD:

assume that women and minority workers may be experiencing problems;

inspect and compare the turnover rates of women, minorities, and white male workers as suggestive evidence of harassment;

conduct informal surveys of worker problems using personnel trusted by women and/or minority workers;

publicize policies on sexual and racial harassment and make clear that harassing behavior will not be tolerated;

conduct meetings to sensitize supervisors to needs of women and minority groups;

educate women and minority workers to be able to distinguish between normal kidding and harassment;

establish a complaint process and make it known to all staff;



assign more than one woman on a work crew whenever possible so that support may be provided;  
take immediate steps to investigate and remedy harassment complaints; and  
seek expert assistance when setting up anti-harassment programs.

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