

A RESOLUTION FOR THE NEW YEAR: HELP EMPLOYERS STAY IN COMPLIANCE WITH THE LAW

BOLI Employer Services

Keeping track of the ever-changing array of state and federal laws and regulations governing Oregon employers can make for a daunting task. Wage and hour laws (including rules on working conditions, payroll issues, minimum wage and overtime provisions) and civil rights laws (including discrimination and protected leave matters) are complex. Potential liability to employees and civil penalties for violations are expensive. Usually, lawsuits and enforcement actions require employers to incur costly attorneys' fees as well, even if the defense is successful. But there is help available and much of it is free!

All Oregon employers, private and public, have a resource they can use to help guide them through these issues. The Technical Assistance for Employers Program of the Bureau of Labor and Industries exists to help employers by providing a variety of free and fee-based services.

Training throughout Oregon is available on a variety of topics including Wage and Hour Laws, Leave Laws in Oregon, Avoiding Workplace Harassment, and Effective Supervisory Practices. An employer may also contract directly with Technical Assistance for on-site training tailored to the company's needs, which can be a cost effective way to provide training to all employees. For example, defending a claim of unlawful harassment could cost thousands of dollars. An employer could train all its employees to understand and recognize workplace harassment for a fraction of that amount. That training could also be used to demonstrate that the employer took steps to prevent future harassment cases from arising. A schedule of upcoming seminars is available on the website.

Technical Assistance writes and sells handbooks on a range of employer issues. Handbooks on Civil Rights Laws, Family Leave Laws, Policy Writing Guidelines, Documentation, Discipline and Discharge and Wage and Hour Laws are currently available. Employers purchasing these handbooks have a ready resource at their fingertips. Since the handbooks are reviewed by the BOLI divisions responsible for writing the rules and enforcing compliance, employers may be sure the information is accurate and reflects the most common questions and situations regarding employment laws and employer issues in Oregon.

In addition to the handbooks, Technical Assistance sells an "8-in-1" composite poster incorporating all of the commonly required postings in Oregon in English and Spanish. A new "6-in-1" poster for employers of fewer than 25 employees, and a new Leave Laws Comparison poster are also now available. The Leave Laws poster covers injured worker leave, disability leave, state and federal family leave, military leave and leave for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking. Laminated posters specific to agricultural employers are also available. Poster companies routinely sell their versions of the required

postings for over \$75. At prices ranging from \$10 to \$12, plus shipping, BOLI's poster is a bargain. However, an even better bargain may be found on the BOLI website where most of the individual mandatory posters may be downloaded at no charge.

Employers with questions about employment law may find answers on the BOLI website. Click on FAQs/Fact Sheets to find information on over 60 topics ranging from break requirements to religious accommodation. As new rules are enacted or new information becomes available, Technical Assistance staff will update the information. Employers who have specific questions may contact the Technical Assistance for Employers phone or email information services again at no charge. Staff is available Monday through Friday, 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, to respond to employer questions. Due to limited staffing and a large number of phone calls received, the turnaround time may be up to three business days. However, in most cases, the calls are returned within 24 hours and often during the same day. Technical Assistance staff cannot provide legal advice but can answer questions about wage and hour issues, civil rights, family leave, and many other topics. Since BOLI is a state agency, staff is also knowledgeable about issues specific to governmental entities.

The Technical Assistance for Employers Program will also be hosting its 27th Annual Employment Law Conference in Portland later this year. With some of Oregon's top employment law attorneys partnering with BOLI experts to provide seminars on the most relevant employment law topics and current developments, this event has consistently proven itself an invaluable resource for Oregon employers.

Technical Assistance is often asked why a government agency charges a fee for publications and seminars. The answer is that the program is largely self-funded, receiving very few tax dollars. The unit is supported primarily with the proceeds of sales and seminar fees. The employer assistance line and website information are services provided at no charge to employers.

The mission of the Bureau of Labor and Industries is to protect employment rights, advance employment opportunities, and protect access to housing and public accommodations free from discrimination. Oregonians who feel they have been discriminated against or who have not received their proper wages can call BOLI or visit their website for information and for help filing a complaint. The Bureau also helps build a skilled workforce through its apprenticeship and training programs and provides education to the state's employers through its technical assistance services.

For information about Technical Assistance to Employers services, visit our website at www.oregon.gov/BOLI/TA or call 971-673-0824.