

GAO@100 Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-21-307](#), a report to the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Federal law prohibits sexual harassment in the workplace. Besides being harmful to those harassed, sexual harassment can decrease organizational performance and increase turnover. In January 2019, public allegations of sexual harassment in NNSA's nuclear security forces drew attention to this issue.

House Report 116-120 provided that GAO review sexual harassment in NNSA's nuclear security force. This report examines (1) what NNSA and its contractors know about the prevalence of sexual harassment in their nuclear security forces, (2) the extent to which NNSA and its contractors implement EEOC recommendations to prevent and respond to sexual harassment, and (3) the extent to which EEOC found that NNSA and DOE meet its requirements relevant to sexual harassment.

GAO reviewed information on sexual harassment and programs to address such harassment at DOE and NNSA from fiscal years 2015 through 2020. GAO analyzed documents and data, conducted a literature review, interviewed NNSA officials, and compared NNSA and contractor actions with EEOC-recommended practices for preventing harassment.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making five recommendations, including that NNSA survey for sexual harassment prevalence and consider the same for its security contractors; consider adopting EEOC-recommended practices; and, with DOE, implement plans to address EEOC-identified deficiencies. NNSA and DOE concurred with the recommendations.

View [GAO-21-307](#). For more information, contact Allison Bawden at (202) 512-3841 or bawdena@gao.gov.

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SEXUAL HARASSMENT

NNSA Could Improve Prevention and Response Efforts in Its Nuclear Security Forces

What GAO Found

The National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA)—within the Department of Energy (DOE)—and its contractors may have limited information on the prevalence of sexual harassment within the nuclear security forces. NNSA's nuclear security forces include federal agents in NNSA's Office of Secure Transportation (OST), which is responsible for transporting nuclear materials, and contracted guard forces at four of its sites. Federal officials at NNSA and contractor representatives at four NNSA sites that process weapons-usable nuclear material reported very few cases of sexual harassment from fiscal years 2015 through 2020. Research shows that the least common response to harassment is to report it or file a complaint. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)—which enforces federal laws prohibiting harassment—suggests organizations survey employees to assess the extent to which harassment is a problem in their organization. NNSA does not survey employees on this topic, nor does NNSA call for such surveys in its contracts for security forces. Because NNSA relies solely on reported incidents, it may not have full knowledge into the nature or extent of sexual harassment in OST or by its contractors at its sites. Surveying employees would better position them to identify actions to effectively prevent and respond to harassment.

To varying degrees, NNSA and its contractors follow EEOC's recommended practices to prevent and respond to sexual harassment in their nuclear security forces. For example, with respect to recommended training practices, NNSA and its contractors provide antiharassment training to all employees, but only one force offers workplace-specific training that addresses sexual harassment risk factors relevant to the security forces. Because NNSA has not formally reviewed EEOC's practices and considered which to adopt for its nuclear security forces, or made similar considerations for its security force contractors, the agency may be missing opportunities to prevent and respond to sexual harassment.

Selected EEOC Practices for Effective Training to Prevent and Respond to Sexual Harassment and Number of NNSA's Nuclear Security Forces That Reflect Those Practices in Training

EEOC Promising Practice	Number of forces that reflect the practice
Provided to employees at every level and location of the organization	5 of 5
Tailored to the specific workplace and workforce	1 of 5
Explains the complaint process, as well as any voluntary alternative dispute resolution processes	2 of 5
Explains the range of possible consequences for engaging in prohibited conduct	1 of 5

Source: GAO comparison of National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) and protective force contractor information with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's (EEOC) November 2017 *Promising Practices for Preventing Harassment*. | GAO-21-307

EEOC has found that NNSA and DOE do not meet all EEOC requirements relevant to preventing and responding to sexual harassment. For example, NNSA does not have an antiharassment program or a compliant antiharassment policy. According to EEOC officials, NNSA and DOE efforts to date have improved some aspects of their EEO programs, but because the agencies have not fully implemented their plans to address deficiencies identified by EEOC, DOE and NNSA may be missing opportunities to establish and maintain effective programs that include protection from and response to sexual harassment.