

FEMA Releases Survey Results on Harassment and Discrimination within its Workforce

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WASHINGTON -- Today, the RAND Corporation released results from a 2019 survey requested by FEMA which was designed to estimate the prevalence of workplace harassment and discrimination within the agency.

The survey, focused on the timeframe of spring 2018 through spring 2019, found 20% of FEMA employees reported experiencing a civil rights violation on the basis of sex, and 18.4% of employees reported experiencing a violation on the basis of race or ethnicity. The report also suggests that during this time period women had a less positive experience in the workplace overall, when compared to their male counterparts. Further, the survey identified for the same time period, a gap in trust between employees and agency senior leaders; that employees felt barriers to reporting civil rights violations existed; and that some employees who did report violations or misconduct also indicated experiencing retaliation.

FEMA hired RAND in 2019 as a third-party company to conduct an independent and objective assessment of harassment and discrimination in the organization after an internal investigation discovered allegations of misconduct involving senior leaders. The results of the survey identify areas for improvement and will help continue to guide FEMA leadership decisions on programming and policy responses.

“Even though the data from this survey is more than a year and a half behind us, these findings are alarming and simply not acceptable,” said FEMA Administrator Pete Gaynor. “Our people spend their days helping Americans before, during and after disasters -- and they deserve to work in an environment that makes them feel valued, protected and safe. To address recommendations from the RAND report, we’ve built a Culture Improvement Action Plan that outlines six areas of focus that agency-wide actions will emphasize and advance in the next 12 months.”



The [Culture Improvement Action Plan](#) is the latest in a series of actions FEMA leadership team has taken to correct these issues ever since they were discovered. It builds on programs and policies FEMA has instituted over the past two years to combat harassment and misconduct in the workplace, including: establishing an Office of Professional Responsibility to ensure expeditious, fair and objective investigation of allegations of misconduct; conducting mandatory anti-harassment/ civil treatment training courses for employees at all levels; presenting safe space training for employees; providing counseling services for employees; and delivering organizational doctrine with an emphasis on the core values of compassion, fairness, integrity and respect and designed to foster a supportive, healthy and productive environment throughout the organization.

“We also reviewed how we handled allegations of misconduct and the repercussions of such acts, and were able to streamline and improve our processes,” said Karen Filipponi, FEMA Chief Component Human Capital Officer. “When the findings of an OPR investigation are received by our Labor and Employee Relations branch, we ensure they are addressed with the utmost importance and handled fairly and equitably.”

Jo Linda Johnson, Director of the Office of Equal Rights, says the push to eradicate discrimination and harassment from within FEMA ranks continues.

“We’ve come a long way over the past two years, but we know our work is not done. We’ve hired RAND to do a second survey in 2021, to assess improvements from the 2019 baseline report, and we’ve initiated a Barrier Analysis within FEMA to determine the root cause underlying the experience and opportunities for women in the workforce. Our culture is everyone’s responsibility, but as leaders, it’s on us to understand our employees’ lived experiences in the workplace and build an environment of professionalism, dignity and respect.”

