



NORFOLK LOWLAND SEARCH AND RESCUE

HARASSMENT POLICY & PROCEDURE

Norfolk Lowland Search and Rescue recognises a duty of care to volunteers and service users and has developed the following policy and guidance to ensure that the risk of harassment in places where Norfolk Lowland Search and Rescue undertakes activities is minimised.

A. POLICY STATEMENT

1. Norfolk Lowland Search and Rescue believes that every individual should be treated with dignity and respect. Accordingly, any harassment, whether intentional or unintentional, is totally unacceptable. In our respect for each other, we are all responsible for challenging all forms of harassment.
2. Harassment is unwanted behaviour which, is perceived to cause distress and/or annoyance to the victim or to a third person. This covers the circumstances where a victim may not have sufficient confidence to complain but a third person may do so on their behalf or, alternatively, the intended victim is not distressed/annoyed but the third person is.
3. It can bring about fear, stress, anxiety and demoralisation in the victim and the damage, tension and conflict which harassment creates makes for an unpleasant working environment for all.
4. Sexual and racial harassment are commonly recognised forms of harassment. However, people can be subjected to harassment on other grounds including:-
 - Ethnic and national origin, nationality and skin colour, sexual orientation, disabilities and learning difficulties, age, health, physical characteristics, religion, personal beliefs.
5. Harassment may be persistent or an isolated incident and may be directed towards one or more individual. It can range from extremes, such as assault, to less obvious forms like ignoring someone. Other forms include:-
 - Bullying, physical contact, jokes, offensive language, gossip, slander, letters posters, graffiti, obscene gestures, isolation or non co-operation and exclusion from social activities, coercion for sexual favours, intrusion by pestering, spying and stalking.
6. Harassment will be treated as a serious disciplinary offence; it may result in dismissal. In certain circumstances, harassment may be a criminal offence.

7. Volunteers should not ignore behaviour which makes them feel uncomfortable but take appropriate action so that the behaviour stops. For example, minor sexual harassment may be stopped by the victim making it clear to the harasser that the behaviour is unacceptable and must stop.
8. However where approaches by the victim have failed or where a more serious harassment has occurred the victim should make a formal complaint.
9. It is best to follow the route outlined in Norfolk Lowland Search and Rescue's Grievance Procedure, however there may be occasions where it would not be appropriate to use the procedure and the complaint should be made to the appropriate Team Leader or Committee Member.
10. We recognise that people who are being or who have been harassed may be helped by receiving support and advice from an independent person. Any requests for additional support will be treated sympathetically.
11. All allegations of harassment will be thoroughly investigated and dealt with as quickly as possible. Norfolk Lowland Search and Rescue will undertake to take all reasonable steps to ensure that the investigation is completed within four weeks.
12. If it has been found that an allegation of harassment has been made maliciously, the matter will be treated very seriously and disciplinary action taken against the person who made the allegation.
13. Whatever the outcome of a complaint of harassment, no one who has made a complaint should be allowed to suffer victimisation for having made the complaint.

B. PROCEDURE FOR DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS OF HARASSMENT

To aid the handling of allegations of harassment and recognising the sensitive and confidential nature of such allegations, Norfolk Lowland Search and Rescue expects that the Management Committee will be consulted in every case. The Management Committee will be able to discuss, advise and counsel and initiate the appropriate action. If the allegation is being made against the Management Committee the complaint should be directed to the Chairman or Vice Chairman.

1. All allegations of harassment should be treated seriously and confidentially. A full investigation should be carried out by a Team Leader, where appropriate.
2. A statement should be provided by the victim. In some cases it may be appropriate for a statement to be taken by another person, e.g. the Management Committee. In some cases it would be sensible if this other person was someone of the same sex. Statements should be taken/ required from any witnesses.
3. After the allegation has been made, care should be taken to ensure that the complainant is able to continue working without embarrassment or anxiety. It may be that arrangements can be put into place to minimise contact between the two volunteers.
4. If, on the basis of these statements, it appears that harassment may have taken place, the allegations should be put to the alleged harasser and opportunity given to him or her to comment on his/her conduct. It is probably advisable to deal with the evidence on the basis of statements rather than having the witness present. However this will mean that there may have to be adjournments to obtain a response from witnesses to any serious conflict of evidence.
5. At the end of this process, the person conducting the investigation has to decide whether harassment has taken place and on the seriousness of the harassment.
6. If harassment has taken place disciplinary action should be taken. The action taken will depend on the seriousness of the harassment; see the grievance disciplinary procedure.
7. Where appropriate the victim should be informed of the action taken.
8. If the harasser remains a volunteer, it is important to check that the harassment has stopped and there has been no victimisation or retaliation.
9. Where appropriate, the outcome should be discussed with the volunteer who has been harassed.

If the offence is of a criminal nature it should be reported to the Police immediately and the internal investigation will be placed on hold until the Police investigation is completed.