

Miner Judy Jarvela, a mother of three whose husband was disabled and unable to work, opened her locker at the mine and found semen on her clothes. The third time it happened she complained to her foreman, but no one was disciplined.

As other women joined the workforce, they too were stalked, pinched, grabbed, flashed and propositioned. The abuse, they all assumed, came with the territory and was the price they had to pay for high union wages. But fearful for their safety, some women armed themselves—a knife in a lunch box, a small gun in a bra. Outside work, the women were shunned, called “mining whores” by miners’ wives who were fearful of women working with their husbands. Some of the women’s children were teased and bullied at school.

By 1984, Jenson, an avid reader of newspapers and magazines, realized that what was happening to her and her female coworkers was illegal. When her boss—who had written her long love letters—eliminated her job because she would not return his affection, she finally filed formal complaints about the harassment first with the union and then with the Minnesota Department of Human Rights. When that tack proved a dead end, Jenson then picked up the Yellow Pages and called 50 lawyers.

On August 15, 1988, Minneapolis lawyer Paul Sprenger, who had a successful record of litigating employment civil rights cases, filed *Lois E. Jenson and Patricia S. Kosmach v. Eveleth Taconite Co.*, asking the U.S. District Court to certify the case as a class action. Sprenger knew it would be much harder to discredit a group of women than just one or two.

Until that day, there had never been a sexual-harassment class action. Only two years had passed since the Supreme

Stop Right There!

Here's an anti-harassment tool kit that really works.

BY MARTY LANGELAN

Strong legal remedies against sexual harassment in the workplace are essential but, as Lois Jenson and her sister miners in Minnesota learned, achieving justice under the law can be a long, frustrating process. So feminists have also developed powerful, precise “nonviolent confrontation” tactics to deal with harassers.

A clear, principled confrontation surprises the harasser and throws him off balance. Most harassers fold immediately; some will even apologize. Just remember to stay calm (no insults, sarcasm, cursing or yelling), stand tall, make eye contact and use a matter-of-fact voice. Don't smile or undermine your message with verbal fluff and padding. Keep your statement brief, honest, serious and specific. You're simply defending a basic human right: the freedom to work without sexual abuse.

Here are a few of the most effective confrontation tools:

- **Name the behavior.** Describe out loud exactly what the harasser is doing, stating the behavior, the principle and a direct command: “You are exposing yourself. This is about respect. Put that penis back in your pants right now.”
- **Interrupt harassers with this all-purpose statement:** In an almost bored voice say, “Stop harassing women. I don't like it—no one likes it. Show some respect.”
- **Make an A-B-C statement (or write a short A-B-C letter).** “When you do A, the effect is B, and I want C from now on.” For example, “When you stare at women's breasts, it's obvious to everyone in the room. Look us in the face from now on.”
- **Jot it down.** To unnerve a repeat harasser, whip out a notebook and write down what he says or does as he's standing there. Keep a copy in a safe place for documentation.
- **Ask a Socratic question.** “That's so interesting—can you explain why you think you can put your hand on my leg?” The more idiotic the action, the more impossible it will be for him to explain.
- **Put up a “stop sign.”** Put your hands in front of your chest, palms facing out, look the harasser in the eye and say, “Stop right there.”
- **Stick to your own agenda.** Don't get tangled in what the harasser says; like a broken record, just repeat, “You heard me. Show some respect.”
- **Organize a consistent group action** to confront persistent harassers and groups of harassers. Working with coworkers or others, decide as a group to say exactly the same line every time harassment occurs: “Stop harassing women. No one likes it.”
- **Find unexpected allies.** The good guys have been silent way too long. Ask the harasser's buddies to tell him they don't like what he's doing.
- **Be an ally yourself.** Speak up even when you're not the target; you may have more safety or job security than the one being harassed. Intervene to stop racism, gay-bashing, male-bashing and other types of bigotry. Speak on your own account: “I don't want to hear that.”

Marty Langelan is author of *Back Off: How to Confront and Stop Sexual Harassment and Harassers (Fireside/Simon & Schuster, 1993)*. Past president of the D.C. Rape Crisis Center, she provides training, consulting and research on harassment, assault, self-defense and violence-intervention strategies.