

# Authorize managers to act fast to remove offensive material from workplace

Here's a good way to stop needless sexual or other harassment claims: Empower even low-level supervisors to immediately remove any material anyone could consider even remotely offensive. *The best outcome:* Offensive material disappears before anyone has a chance to complain.

Make sure the supervisors forward to HR specific information about the materials they remove. Discipline anyone caught posting the materials. Then follow up with staff training on what's appropriate in the workplace.

**Recent case:** When Brenda Williams was fired from her job, she sued, alleging various forms of harassment and discrimination. Her employer was able to provide solid documentation that it had fired her for poor performance.

But Williams also alleged that several times during her tenure with the company she saw offensive materials posted around the work site. For example, she claimed that a sign displaying the words "Stimulus Checks" had been altered to be sexually hostile. However, when questioned, she admitted that the signs had been removed *before* she even got a chance to complain to HR.

The court said that showed the company was serious about preventing sexual and other harassment. It dismissed Williams' case. (*Williams v. Altec Industries*, No. 5:10-CV-356, ED NC, 2011)

**Final note:** Being proactive is especially effective in factories and other places where co-worker harassment can otherwise go unnoticed until it is too late. Remember, just one egregious incident—like a noose or racial graffiti—can be enough to create a hostile work environment.