

No requirement to break up love triangles-- but be prepared for workplace violence

When romance blooms at work, trouble may lurk not far behind. That's especially true when co-workers fight over the same love interest. A spurned employee may be out to get her rival, leading to all sorts of conflict.

Fortunately, this isn't the sort of thing that employers have to intervene in—as long as there's no workplace violence.

Recent case: Ehnae Northington started working at a trucking company and began dating a man who had a child with another employee. The child's mother—also Northington's co-worker—didn't appreciate her child's father's relationship with Northington. She frequently called Northington a slut and a bitch.

After Northington was fired for failing a drug test, she sued. She alleged she had complained about the harassment from her co-worker, but that no one had done anything about it. She claimed that was sex discrimination.

The court didn't buy it. While sex may have been the root of the conflict, that didn't make for sexual harassment.

Plus, the company had warned everyone that any workplace violence would mean immediate termination. The trucking company had no obligation to stop the conflict, other than to warn against violence. (*Northington v. H&M International*, No. 08-C-6297, ND IL, 2011)

Advice: You can avoid many problems like this by banning dating among co-workers. Employers have a responsibility to provide a safe workplace—something that could easily be compromised should a romance turn sour.