Women in Nontraditional Jobs

What is a nontraditional job?

Any occupation in which women make up 25% or less of the total work force is considered "nontraditional". In 1997, only 5.7% of all working women were employed in nontraditional jobs.

Why do women want nontraditional jobs?

There are many good reasons:

- Better pay - 20% to 30% more than women in traditionally female jobs.
- Better benefits - Jobs in technical fields and in the trades often have better health benefits and sick and vacation leaves than those provided in traditionally female jobs.
- Greater autonomy - There is less direct supervision in some non-traditional jobs.
- The opportunity to work outdoors, to be physically fit, and to work with your hands.

What barriers keep women from taking and keeping non-traditional jobs?

Unsupportive attitudes of family, friends, and co-workers. Society still socializes women into valuing traditional roles and steers women away from considering nontraditional jobs.

Lack of equity in education begins early in life. Young girls are often encouraged to take classes that are "traditional" and not directed into classes that are "nontraditional" such as math and science. This results in a gender gap in girls math and science achievement. Girls may also be steered away from classes where they would learn to use and repair tools and machinery.

Workplace discrimination often makes women who choose nontraditional jobs more likely to leave their jobs. There are both obvious and not-so-obvious ways in which women are treated differently in the work place. For example;

- Lack of acceptance by male supervisors or coworkers.
- Not getting proper training and not being allowed to learn all aspects of the job.
- Being given tools and equipment that aren't sized for women, which may be complicated by unfamiliarity with tools.
- Being assigned the heaviest, dirtiest, or most menial tasks.
- Isolation on the worksite including limited access to mentoring and to female role models.
- Unlimited access to support services such as childcare, transportation, and counseling.

Sexual harassment occurs more frequently in nontraditional work environments

Women in non-traditional jobs may face greater sexual harassment than other workers. This can happen in several ways and makes it more difficult for women to succeed at their jobs:

- Women entering previously all-male environments are not treated as "one of the crew; but instead may be subjected to increased foul language or unwelcome sexual conduct.
- Male supervisors or coworkers may resent that women are in their work place and use sexually harassing behavior to demean them.
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How can the union help?

- Make sure state and federal laws are followed to ensure that women have equal access to jobs.
- Prevent sexual harassment by educating the members and supervisors about sexual harassment, and negotiating anti-sexual harassment language in your collective bargaining agreement. This will help create a climate of respect in the work place in which it is clear that sexual harassment will not be tolerated.
- Include effective job posting and bidding language in your collective bargaining agreement to give every one the opportunity to bid on all available jobs. Also, include provisions for educational assistance and job training.
- Organize a Women’s Committee or other group within the local to give women a place to address specific issues affecting women in nontraditional jobs.