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## 2021 OREGON BUILDING TRADES CONVENTION REPORT

# Safe From Hate

Culture change is coming in construction. Contractors increasingly say they will sanction hostile and harassing on-the-job behaviors that used to be overlooked or laughed off. That's the takeaway from one of the liveliest sessions in the three-day convention of the Oregon Building Trades Council: a Sept. 15 panel and audience discussion about an initiative called Safe From Hate. Safe From Hate is a local industry partnership formed last summer after someone hung a noose on a construction job in Portland in May—something that's not that unheard of on construction job sites.

Since then, 65 organizations, including contractors, developers and many local unions, have signed the Safe From Hate pledge: to enforce a zero tolerance policy against racial and sexual harassment, and to promote positive job site culture. A



**UNITED FOR A HATE-FREE WORKPLACE** "Safe from Hate" panelists, from left: Lisa Palermo of Oregon Tradeswomen; Lou Christian of Plumbers & Fitters Local 290; Sheldon Wormley of Laborers Local 737; Kelly Haines of Worksystems Inc.; Scott Zadow and Garth Bachman of IBEW Local 48, and Zach Culver of Laborers Local 737.

campaign web site is expected to launch in October. Safe From Hate is also rolling out a workplace training offered by Oregon Tradeswomen Inc., called RISE Up Oregon. Developed in Seattle, the training encourages bystanders to take a stand, to speak up. It's not a training that seeks to foist guilt on white men or to antagonize or divide. Instead, it calls on union members to be their best selves, and have the guts to intervene when they see one co-worker target another.

Addressing harassment isn't

just the right thing to do, Plumbers & Fitters Local 290 Business Manager Lou Christian told delegates; it's also a priority for union employers, who can suffer economic losses when workers sue after encountering repeated harassment in workplaces.

Local 290, together with its contractor association, is adopting an approach aimed at change and reform, not punishment, but that also ends the practice of booting perpetrators off one job only to dispatch them to another.

When a member commits egregious behavior, the union and employer will refer them for a training, and the union won't dispatch them for further work until they've completed it.

The issue is urgent, panelists said, in part because harassment undermines unions' efforts to diversify and grow their ranks.

On the convention's final day, delegates voted to make Oregon State Building and Construction Trades Council the latest to sign the Safe From Hate pledge.

—DM

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