VSEA 2013 Whistleblower Survey

Survey Overview:

Near the end of the 2012 Vermont legislative session, Vermont State Auditor Doug Hoffer testified to a legislative committee about his desire to protect the identities of state employees who pass on information or tips to his office about problems within state government. He explained that he is currently unable to protect the name of a "whistleblower" because there are no laws right now providing him that authority. Like VSEA, Auditor Hoffer is concerned that many employees are currently afraid to act as whistleblowers because Vermont has not taken the steps necessary to protect a whistleblower's confidentiality.

In an effort to demonstrate support for the Auditor's call for whistleblower confidentiality, VSEA issued a survey over the fall to its members to better determine what state employees knew about the practice of workplace whistleblowing, what personal experience they have had with workplace whistleblowing (if any) and how they feel about the level of whistleblower protection that exists today. Their answers, you'll see, are illuminating.

"I had responsibilities taken away. I was pressured to quit. I wasn't afforded the same opportunities—that I was qualified for—that were offered to my peers."

Whistleblowers VSEA Survey

SurveyMonkey

1. Are you familiar with the term "whistleblower?"

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	**97.7%**	**607**
No	2.3%	14
	answered question	**621**
	skipped question	**3**

2. Have you ever been a whistleblower yourself?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	24.0%	148
No	**76.0%**	**468**
	answered question	**616**
	skipped question	**8**

3. If yes, what did you whistleblow about?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Bad money management (i.e. waste)	10.5%	36
An unlawful practice or behavior (i.e. fraud)	17.2%	59
A safety or health violation	11.6%	40
Corrupt/unethical practice(s)	23.5%	81
A direct threat to public interest	2.3%	8
Not Applicable	**60.2%**	**207**
	answered question	**344**
	skipped question	**280**

4. If you said yes, please provide a brief description of the outcome of your whistleblowing action.

	Response Count
	144
answered question	**144**
skipped question	**480**

5. Have you ever known a state employee who has been whistleblower?

	Response Percent	Response Count
YES	28.3%	171
NO	**71.7%**	**434**
	answered question	**605**
	skipped question	**19**

6. If so, what did s/he whistleblow about?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Bad money management (i.e. waste)	10.0%	34
An unlawful practice or behavior (i.e. fraud)	19.5%	66
A safety or health violation	9.4%	32
Corrupt/unethical practice(s)	27.7%	94
A direct threat to public interest	5.3%	18
Not Applicable	**54.3%**	**184**
	answered question	**339**
	skipped question	**285**

7. If you are able, please provide a brief description of the outcome of this whistleblower's action.

	Response Count
	117
answered question	**117**
skipped question	**507**

8. Do you think there's much whistleblowing in state government right now?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		5.7%	34
No		**94.3%**	**562**
		answered question	**596**
		skipped question	**28**

9. If not, what is the primary reason you believe more state employees do not whistleblow?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Fear of retaliation	**47.8%**	**276**
Ignorance of existing protections	1.2%	7
Lack of confidentiality	6.6%	38
Fear of publicity	1.6%	9
Apathy/indifference	8.1%	47
Nothing to whistleblow about	7.8%	45
All of the above	26.9%	155
	answered question	**577**
	skipped question	**47**

10. Are you aware that VSEA championed and help pass legislation (S. 201) in 2007 to protect state employee whistleblowers from retaliation?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	46.2%	276
No	**53.8%**	**321**
	answered question	**597**
	skipped question	**27**

11. Have you, or any state employee you know, ever had to invoke this legislation due to whistleblowing activity?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	4.0%	24
No	**96.0%**	**569**
	answered question	**593**
	skipped question	**31**

12. Do you believe the language negotiated by VSEA is helping in any way to prevent managers in state government from retaliating, or threatening to retaliate against whistleblowers?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes, I think it makes them think twice	10.0%	59
No, it makes no difference	29.7%	175
I have no relevant experience to base an answer upon	**60.3%**	**355**
	answered question	**589**
	skipped question	**35**

13. Is VSEA's language to prevent whistleblower retaliation enough, or should the language be supplemented with language to protect an employee's identity?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Enough	6.6%	36
Need both protections	**87.2%**	**479**
Don't need either	6.2%	34
	answered question	**549**
	skipped question	**75**

14. If the Vermont legislature was to include language to protect a whistleblower's identity, would you be more likely to come forward with reports of corruption, unlawful practice, etc?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	**82.1%**	**472**
No	17.9%	103
	answered question	**575**
	skipped question	**49**

15. What do you believe the ramifications for you would be if your boss found out you are a whistleblower, or about to whistleblow?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Immediate discipline	21.1%	121
Face-to-face meeting to discuss	36.1%	207
Threat to fire	14.5%	83
A big thank you for pointing out injustice	6.3%	36
Promotion	0.3%	2
No reaction whatsoever	6.3%	36
No Idea	**40.4%**	**232**
	answered question	**574**
	skipped question	**50**

16. Please complete the sentence "Today, retaliation against employees is _____?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Widespread	35.6%	191
Isolated	**59.5%**	**319**
Non-Existent	4.9%	26
	answered question	**536**
	skipped question	**88**

17. Please complete the sentence "In my opinion, supplementing employee whistleblowers' protection from retaliation with identity protection is ____

		Response Percent	Response Count
Essential		**82.6%**	**469**
Not essential		5.6%	32
No opinion		11.8%	67
		answered question	**568**
		skipped question	**56**

Quotes: If you have ever known a whistleblower, please describe the outcome of his/her whistleblowing action

"The person was forced to retire early due to retaliatory harassment."

"It was made clear the person would not get any type of promotion or raise; they would be tasked with work duties not applicable to their job and they would essentially be purposely overlooked for any possible opportunity for professional development or gain. The person left the department to work somewhere else."

"One was eventually fired because s/he came forward. The other had to look for other employment in another agency with the state due to retaliation, etc."

"Outcome was that nothing was done."

"Complaints...were met with undue pressure and eventual administrative leave, pending termination (the whistleblower has been out on leave for months now)."

"The employee was marginalized and passed up for promotion in favor of a newer employee. They ended up leaving the office as a RIF."

"Nothing. The supervisor got away with payroll fraud."

"The whistleblower was not highly regarded or well liked in the department and was eventually out on administrative leave and investigated. The whistleblower was 100% correct in the complaint."

"The whistleblower's employment was terminated by certain members of administration."

"There was no resolution because there were not enough wasted dollars for the AG's office to be interested in pursuing."

"Demotion and removal of tasks/responsibilities. Pressure to quit."

"The State of Vermont was sued for discrimination and a very large settlement was paid."

"No outcome. Told to document a year ago and still documenting."

"The person was given a better job at another location after suffering through retaliatory behavior."

"Testified to Senate and HR director and was ignored."

"Eventually let go."

"The law continued to be broken despite his efforts."

"He retired because they would not allow him to grow within company. That was their retaliation."

"It was such a traumatic event that this person offered to RIF herself just to get away from higher ups who might discriminate against her."

"He was labeled a "disgruntled employee" by the department, through the media."

"There appeared to be retaliation by management."

"A horrible series of internal investigations. The person eventually left the agency but it was a while after the investigation. Some people's lives were significantly disrupted."

"They were hounded until they quit."

"Management was told to cease and desist threatening practices."

"Management said it wouldn't correct what it can't see firsthand."

"Employee was targeted by management and ended up quitting state job."

"Continued harassment and threats."

"He no longer works for the state."

"Lost his job."

"There was a justified sense of fear of what management might do as a response."

"Hostile work place created by supervisor."