

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.”







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."