Federal agencies are required to demonstrate a commitment to a work environment that is free from discriminatory harassment. According to a June 2016 report from the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), those who experience workplace harassment suffer mental, physical, and economic harm. Beyond that, workplace harassment affects all workers, leading to decreased productivity, increased turnover, and harm to the organization’s reputation. Yet sexual harassment, a component of workplace harassment, remains a pervasive issue in the Federal Government.

The EEOC has established minimum standards and guidelines to help agencies develop anti-harassment program policies. For agencies, such as the Department of Transportation (DOT), with numerous subcomponents, the EEOC also recommends that each subcomponent have an anti-harassment policy that complies with the EEOC’s Enforcement Guidance and is enforced consistently.
At DOT, the Secretary of Transportation has issued a policy that states harassment will not be tolerated and must not occur. However, during our recent audit of the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy’s Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Program, we identified concerns about the extent to which the Department’s Operating Administrations establish and implement anti-harassment policies and procedures, including collecting and using data on harassment complaints.

Given the potential impact of harassment on the Department and its employees, we are initiating an audit of DOT’s anti-harassment programs. Our objectives are to assess the extent to which the Department and its Operating Administrations (1) have anti-harassment policies and procedures that comply with EEOC guidance and (2) collect and use data on harassment complaints.

We plan to begin the audit immediately and will contact your audit liaison to schedule an entrance conference. We will conduct our work at DOT Headquarters in Washington, DC. If you have any questions, please contact me at 202-366-1959 or Barry J. DeWeese, Assistant Inspector General for Surface Transportation Audits, at 202-366-5630.

cc: DOT Audit Liaison, M-1
Federal Aviation Administrator
FAA Audit Liaison AAE-100
Federal Highway Administrator
FHWA Audit Liaison, HAIM-13
Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administrator
FMCSA Audit Liaison, MCPRS
Federal Railroad Administrator
FRA Audit Liaison, RAD-43
Federal Transit Administrator
FTA Audit Liaison, TBP-30
Maritime Administrator
MARAD Audit Liaison, MAR-392
National Highway Traffic Safety Administrator
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Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administrator
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Saint Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation Administrator
SLSDC Audit Liaison