



A Soldier's performance in regard to fostering a climate free of sexual assault and sexual harassment will now be recorded on their Officer Evaluation Report or Noncommissioned Officer Evaluation Report, known as an NCOER. In this illustration from Army Field Manual 7-22, The Noncommissioned Officer Guide, a leader discusses his expectations with a junior NCO during NCOER counseling. (U.S. Army illustration)

Commitment to Ending Sexual Harassment Now Part of NCOERs

By David Vergun

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WASHINGTON — A Soldier's performance in regard to fostering a climate free of sexual assault and sexual harassment will now be recorded on their officer evaluation report or noncommissioned officer evaluation report.

"Officers and noncommissioned officers must commit themselves to eliminating sexual harassment and assault and to fostering climates of dignity and respect in their units," said Secretary of the Army John M. McHugh.

McHugh spelled out the details in a Sept. 27 Army Directive titled "Assessing Officers and Noncommissioned Officers on Fostering Climates of Dignity and

Respect and on Adhering to the Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention Program."

Follow-on guidance to that directive is provided in an Oct. 22 Military Personnel Message titled "Changes to the Evaluation Reporting System in Response to Army Directive 2013-20."

The MILPER directs that all officers and noncommissioned officer be assessed — within their officer evaluation report, known as an OER, or noncommissioned officer evaluation report, known as an NCOER — on their commitment to the Army's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Program, or SHARP.

Previously, leaders had the option of counseling or not counseling on their Soldiers' commitment or lack of commitment to preventing sexual harassment and assault. Now, that kind of counseling is a requirement, said David Griffiee, chief of the Evaluations Branch within the Army Human Resources Command, known as HRC.

"The changes to the OERs and NCOERs are in line with the Army senior leaders' intent to ensure accountability from a top-down, bottom-up perspective," said Dr. Christine T. Altendorf, director of the Army SHARP Program Office.

"The enhancements to the evaluation system also instill confidence that the Army cares about the climate it is setting for its Soldiers, civilians and family members," she continued. "It says we don't tolerate sexual harassment and sexual assault — nor leaders who do."

"This is no longer just a commanders' program. It's now an all-leaders' program," Griffiee said. Leaders at every level will be assessed on how they're meeting goals and objectives to further improve the command climate.

Those goals and objectives will be left up to the discretion of each leader, since they are in the best position to observe and affect the direction of their commands, he said. Subordinates as well should be setting their own goals in the interactive counseling process.

If ideas or resources pertaining to goals and objectives are needed, Griffiee suggested that Soldiers seek out their unit SHARP or victim advocates.

Leaders are being given a lot of latitude and responsibility in working with their subordinates to set the climate.

Some leaders have asked for examples of what to write in the OER and NCOER, said Lt. Col. Bettina

Avent, the operations chief of the Evaluations, Selections and Promotions Division at HRC.

"We're choosing not to give specific examples, because history has proven to us that when we do that, people copy and paste those and it becomes an exercise in futility," she said.

"The point we're making is that leaders at every level need to take the time to think, consider, communicate, coach, teach and mentor those that they lead in what 'right' looks like and what performance objectives and behaviors should be," she continued. "We specifically don't provide example comments because we want each leader to embrace communicating with people they're rating."

The new policy affects Soldiers no matter where they are, including those in Army and other service schools as well as Soldiers in civilian institutions such as those attending degree completion programs, Avent said.

Although the changes to the evaluations are designed to reinforce the requirement for leaders to set the correct command climate so victims feel free to report without fear of reprisal, Soldiers who believe they've experienced professional retaliation for reporting sexual assault and sexual harassment may seek recourse through the Army Board for Correction of Military Records, part of the Army Review Boards Agency, Altendorf said.

Griffiee concluded that "the Army has always held Soldiers accountable when they fail. This is holding them accountable for doing the right thing, ensuring they're fostering a climate of dignity and respect.

"It's sending a signal to the field that the Army is recognizing Soldiers for the positive things they are doing to better the Army," he said. ■



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