



Non-discrimination and anti-harassment guidelines of the Virgo collaboration

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The Virgo Collaboration

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1. Introduction:

The scope of this document is to affirm that the Virgo collaboration repudiates and does not tolerate any form of harassment, sexual or otherwise among its members. The Virgo collaboration wants also offer some guidance and advice to those members who have been subject to (or who have witnessed) harassment by other colleagues during their regular work, including either LVC meetings or events. We are convinced that incidents of sexual or other harassment create a hostile environment, harm the reputation of the collaboration itself and lead to the loss of intellectual capacity needed for achieving pre-established scientific goals to the search for gravitational waves. Besides this, incidents of this kind are wrong and in some cases illegal. The role of the Ombudsperson, motivated by the development of the anti-harassment policy, is defined here. We note that the Ombudsperson can provide informal advice and dispute resolution for any matter related to Virgo collaboration activities or events.

2. Definition: what harassment means:

- Any physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature and other conduct based on sex affecting the dignity of a person of any gender, which is unwelcome, unreasonable and offensive to the recipient.
- Where a person's rejection of, or submission to, such conduct is used explicitly or implicitly as a basis for a decision, which affects that person's job.
- Conduct that creates an intimidating, hostile or humiliating working environment for the recipient.
- Sexual harassment does not refer to occasional compliments of a socially acceptable nature. It refers to behavior that is not welcome, is personally offensive, debilitates morale, and therefore, interferes with work effectiveness.
- Anybody can be a victim of sexual harassment, independently of any sexual orientation or gender identity.

3. Virgo policy basic statements.

The Virgo collaboration, in accordance with applicable European laws of the state members, rejects discrimination against or harassment of any person employed by or seeking employment on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, physical or mental disability, medical condition, ancestry, marital status, or age.

In compliance with applicable law and European policy, the Virgo collaboration undertakes affirmative action to assure equal employment opportunity for under-represented minorities, women and for persons with disabilities.

Virgo group leaders set the tone for the enforcement of this policy. They have a special obligation not to engage in discrimination, harassment, retaliation or sexual assault.

The Virgo Steering Committee nominates an Ombudsperson, having the role to provide confidential, informal, independent, and neutral dispute resolution advisory services for all members of the collaboration.

4. The Virgo Ombudsperson: role and function

The Virgo Ombudsperson provides confidential, informal, independent, and neutral dispute resolution advisory services for all members of the Virgo collaboration. The Ombudsperson assists all members in identifying and evaluating options for resolving and managing conflicts, provides various types of informal mediation services, and makes referrals to other appropriate academic and community resources. The Virgo Ombudsperson is meant to help with conflicts that arise in LVC working groups or events, not in problems internal to an academic or research institution, which usually can be mediated by the appropriate offices in the host institution.

The Ombudsperson is familiar with the organizational structure of the collaboration and can provide current information about services, programs, policies, and procedures. Due to its informal, confidential, and independent role outside the administrative structure of the Collaboration, notice to the Ombudsperson about a problem does not result in the generation of records, nor does it constitute legal notice to the member host institution about the existence of a problem. For those interested in making official complaints to the university

or their own institutions about a problem, the Ombudsperson can assist by making appropriate referrals.

The Virgo Ombudsperson reports only to the Virgo Spokesperson, but does not share any confidential information. The Virgo Ombudsperson may be a member of the collaboration, but should not have any other leadership or supervisory role that may compromise the Ombudsperson's impartiality.

5. Policy for formal complaints

The scheme follows several other similar documents concerning the same matter and in particular it is compliant with the one approved by the LSC collaboration (M1300005-v2).

1- Consult the Ombudsperson for confidential and informal advice. The Ombudsperson will assist the Virgo member at any time in identifying and evaluating options for resolving and managing the incident and make referrals to other appropriate academic and community resources.

Confidentiality will be honored unless you explicit request an action that requires otherwise.

2- If possible, and you feel comfortable, inform the perpetrator that his/her behavior is unwelcome. Explain what is bothering you, identify the behavior as harassment, and state that you want that behavior to stop. If you are uncomfortable talking to the harasser face-to-face, you may write a brief note or email. Be sure to keep a copy. However, you are not required or expected to confront your harasser prior to reporting an harassment-related incident and are welcome to consult the ombudsperson for advice on this step.

3- If you want to initiate a formal complaint or request actions to be taken by the Virgo Leadership, inform the Virgo Spokesperson. After consulting with the VSC and the Chair of the Diversity Committee, the Spokesperson may, at her/his sole discretion, contact affected parties and, in instances of unresolved or serious conflicts, institutional resources of the accused party for a formal investigation.

4- If appropriate, report the incident to the law enforcement agencies.

6. Rules to be followed in case you witness harassment

In the following basic rules to be followed in case you witness harassment are given.

- 1) If you believe safety to be an issue, report to law enforcement including all details, and intervene only if it can be done safely
- 2) Report the incident to the Ombudsperson who will contact the Spokesperson unless you request otherwise. Do not disclose the incident publicly to allow the Ombudsperson to act.

7. Conclusions

With the present document, the Virgo collaboration affirms its strong opposition to any form of harassment and give some basic guidance and advice in case of harassment, for those who have been subject or have witnessed harassment during their regular work activity. The role and function of the Virgo Ombudsperson has been defined here. The person will serve for confidential, informal, independent, and neutral dispute resolution advisory services for all members of the collaboration.

The guidance provided in this document is inspired by the prior analogous report first drafted by the LIGO Scientific Collaboration, and hence adopts a similar anti-harassment policy.