



## focus: religious discrimination

### **What the law says**

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits companies from discriminating against job applicants or employees because of their sincerely held religious beliefs.

And the law says employers must work with staffers in order to reasonably accommodate their religious beliefs, unless the accommodation would create an undue hardship.

### **How to spot it**

Workers are allowed to practice their religious beliefs in a variety of ways. Many times, employees will request time off for religious observances.

A staffer might also want to talk to his or her coworkers about religion, or display religious symbols at his or her workstation.

And it's not unusual for a person to ask to be allowed to wear religion-based clothing to work, e.g., a Muslim headscarf.

### **What to do about it**

In many ways, your efforts to allow workers to practice their religion are similar to your responsibilities under the ADA.

For instance, the crew member seeking the religious accommodation must request it. And you have to communicate with the person in order to figure out the best way to get the job done but still allow the staff member to practice his or her religion.

In addition, employees can't be harassed by their coworkers because of their religious beliefs.

One of the main areas of

potential conflict is dress and grooming policies. Oftentimes, a person with sincerely held religious beliefs will want to dress differently than his or her coworkers. For the most part, you have to let him or her do so.

There are exceptions, however. Consider a scenario in which a male worker doesn't want to shave his beard because of his religious beliefs. Yet the man has a job for which he is required to wear a respirator to protect him from harmful chemicals.

More often than not, you'd be within your rights to insist that the worker shave. In such a case, his religious preference for the beard creates the undue hardship of exposing the company to potential worker injuries and costly lawsuits.