

Questions and Answers About the MSU Compliance Hotline

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What is the MSU Compliance Hotline?

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The MSU Compliance Hotline is an option for making a confidential report using either the Internet or a telephone line to help the campus community identify and address suspected compliance concerns about accounting and financial, athletics, discrimination or harassment, health and safety, human resources, information security and technology and research matters at the university

This Internet and telephone reporting service is not maintained on the university's systems and is not maintained by university employees. EthicsPoint, based in Portland, Oregon, is the commercial service provider for the MSU Compliance Hotline. Reports can be filed anonymously and the reports are held securely and confidentially on the external systems.

Why do we need a tool like the MSU Compliance Hotline?

University policy encourages faculty and staff to report suspected legal, regulatory or policy violations engaged in by others to the appropriate university official. Although direct discussion with one's supervisor is the preferred mode, in some circumstances faculty or staff may feel the need for a more confidential, sometimes anonymous ability to express good faith concerns about noncompliance.

Federal guidelines for compliance programs include establishment of a channel of communication that permits anonymous reporting of potential regulatory compliance problems and concerns.

Won't this tool just encourage individuals to gripe or to make wild charges about others?

The MSU Compliance Hotline provides a channel of communication for good faith reports of suspected legal, regulatory and policy violations. A good faith report means an allegation made with the honest belief that violations may have occurred. A false allegation is a report that is made with reckless disregard for or willful ignorance of facts that would disprove the allegation. The university's policy on Reporting Suspected Legal,

Regulatory or Policy Violations states that faculty or staff making false allegations may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

What about reprisal or retaliation for making the report?

The university's policy on Reporting Suspected Legal, Regulatory or Policy Violations states that no individual who reports suspected legal, regulatory or policy violations in good faith will suffer harassment, retaliation or adverse employment consequences because they made the report. Any person who retaliates against any individuals because they made a report may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

When would I use the hotline?

What type of situations should I report?

The MSU Compliance Hotline is designed for faculty, staff, students and the general public to report violations of laws, regulations or policies in the following areas:

- Accounting and financial,
- Athletics,
- Discrimination or harassment,
- Health and safety,
- Human resources,
- Information security and technology and
- Research.

The MSU Compliance Hotline is not to be used for reporting academic matters or non-academic student conduct matters, which should be reported directly to the campus' academic affairs or student affairs offices, respectively.

If I see a violation, shouldn't I just report it to my supervisor or Human Resources and let them deal with it?

When you observe behavior that you believe violates law, regulation or policy, we expect you to report it. Ideally, you should bring any concerns forward to your direct supervisor, or other member of our administration. We recognize, however, that there may be circumstances when you are not comfortable reporting an issue in this manner. It is for these circumstances that we have partnered with EthicsPoint. We would rather you report anonymously than keep the information to yourself.

I'm not sure if what I've observed or heard is a violation of law, regulation or university policy, but it just doesn't look right to me. What should I do?

File a report. The MSU Compliance Hotline can help you prepare and file your report so it can be properly understood. We would rather you report a situation that turns out to be harmless than let possible violations go unchecked because you were not sure.

How does the hotline work?

May I report using either the Internet or the telephone?

Yes, by having both options, the MSU Compliance Hotline helps ensure that campus employees can file a report anonymously and in the manner most comfortable or convenient to him or her.

Where do these reports go? Who can access them?

Reports entered through the MSU Compliance Hotline are entered directly on the EthicsPoint secure server to prevent any possible breach in security. EthicsPoint makes these reports available only to specific individuals within the organization who are charged with evaluating the report, based on the type of violation and location of the incident. Each of these report recipients has had training in keeping these reports in the utmost confidence.

What happens after a report is filed?

The individual who has filed a concern report through the MSU Compliance Hotline website or phone number receives a unique user name and chooses a password. Through these, the individual has the ability to return to the MSU Compliance Hotline for a university response to the concern report after a specified later date. Meanwhile, EthicsPoint notifies the appropriate designated university administrator that there is a report posted to a secure access site on the EthicsPoint system. The university administrator reviews the report and begins the process of determining the facts and any appropriate action.

In some cases, no action will be taken. For example, anonymous reports must have sufficient corroborating evidence to justify the commencement of a review.

What if I remember something important about the incident after I file the report? Or what if the university has further questions for me concerning my report?

When you file a report at the MSU Compliance Hotline website or through the call center, you receive a unique user name and are asked to choose a password. You can return to the MSU Compliance Hotline again either by Internet or telephone and access the original report to add more detail or answer questions posed by a university representative and add further information that will help resolve open issues. We strongly suggest that you return to the site in the time specified to answer follow-up questions. You and the university now have entered into a dialogue where situations are not only identified but can be resolved, no matter how complex.

How are security and confidentiality handled?

Are anonymity and confidentiality guaranteed?

We cannot guarantee either anonymity or confidentiality but the MSU Compliance Hotline is designed to provide maximum potential for both. In some situations the university may not take action on a complaint unless the complainant is willing to identify him or herself. An example is a charge of research misconduct.

It's my understanding that any report I send from a university computer generates a server log that shows every website that my PC connects with, and won't this log identify me as a report originator?

EthicsPoint does not generate or maintain any internal connection logs with IP addresses, so no information linking your PC to EthicsPoint is available. In fact, EthicsPoint is contractually committed not to pursue a reporter's identity.

If you feel uncomfortable making a report on your work PC, you have the option of using a PC outside our work environment (such as one located at an Internet café, at a friend's house, etc.) through the EthicsPoint secure website. Many people choose this option, as EthicsPoint's data shows that fewer than 12% of reports are generated during business hours.

Can I file a report from home and still remain anonymous?

EthicsPoint's experience has been that fewer than 12% of reports are generated during business hours. Most people prefer to report from the comfort of their home after hours and on the weekend.

A report from home, a neighbor's computer, or any Internet portal will remain secure and anonymous. An Internet portal never identifies a visitor by screen name and the EthicsPoint system strips away Internet addresses so that anonymity is totally maintained. Plus, EthicsPoint is contractually committed not to pursue a reporter's identity.

Is the toll-free telephone line confidential and anonymous too? It's my understanding that university telephone logs show the phone numbers accessed through university telephone lines.

The MSU Compliance Hotline telephone reporting service is also operated by EthicsPoint and is available toll-free at 855-753-0486, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The caller will be asked to provide the same information that he or she would provide in an Internet-based report and an interviewer will type the responses into the MSU Compliance Hotline website. EthicsPoint safeguards reports received through the telephone just as it does those received through the Internet.

University telephone system logs do show telephone numbers accessed through university telephones. An individual who wishes to maintain maximum anonymity in using the telephone MSU Compliance Hotline service should make the toll-free telephone call using a non-university telephone.

I'm concerned that the information I provide through the MSU Compliance Hotline will ultimately reveal my identity. How can you assure me that won't happen?

The EthicsPoint system is designed to protect your anonymity. However, if you wish to remain anonymous, you - as a reporting party - need to ensure that the body of the report does not reveal your identity by accident. For example, "From my cube next to Jan Smith ..." or "In my 33 years ..." If the reporter is the only individual who could possibly know the reported facts, there may be an unintended deductive disclosure of the reporter's identity. The university will honor and protect the reporter's request for confidentiality to the extent possible as it fulfills its obligations in responding to the report.