

National //

# The Smithsonian stated that he 'has a zero tolerance policy against harassment'

Some 16 women scientists described a culture of inappropriate sexual behavior by high-ranking men from the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute



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Updated 12/10/2021 10:32  
Created 12/10/2021 08:38



The Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI), stated that it will "not" allow sexual harassment of its investigators, after the American digital media, BuzzFeed News, published a newspaper article, which points out that 16 researchers who worked at headquarters in Panama would have suffered alleged sexual abuse, while studying on the island of Barro Colorado.

According to the publication, the scientists denounced "inappropriate sexual behavior by high-ranking men" of the Smithsonian, events that would have occurred for more than a decade and under the management of at least five directors."

The Smithsonian has a zero tolerance policy against harassment and has numerous ways to report this type of behavior. In the last six months, @stri\_panama has taken additional measures to strengthen its fight against workplace harassment," the STRI said on its twitter account.





The Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI) in Panama. **On loan**

According to the Smithsonian, in their community they implement a culture survey to obtain information from their employees about their experiences and gather ideas to make the institute a "safer" workplace.

He assured that he is continuously strengthening his policies and procedures to "fully investigate allegations of harassment and take appropriate corrective measures."

We understand how difficult it can be to report incidents and that is why our priority is to strengthen our internal policies and processes to make @stri\_panama an inclusive and welcoming workplace that promotes safety, equity and professionalism," the Institute said.

Barrio Colorado is a small island managed by the Smithsonian, in the middle of the Panama Canal, for research and development of scientific projects related to forests and tropical species.

It is the only Smithsonian's unit located outside the United States and is dedicated to enriching knowledge about the biological diversity of the tropics; and in which many researchers one day dream of working. It is estimated that, every year, about 1,200 scientists from around the world arrive on Barro Colorado Island.

But for 16 scientists, according to BuzzFeed News, the experiences there were "nightmares." They described a "pattern of inappropriate sexual behavior by high-ranking men in the institute," one of whom recognized their "inappropriate" behavior.

Complaints at STRI covered "more than a decade, throughout the terms of at least five directors, and include accusations of inappropriate sexual conduct against three current or former staff scientists."

"During that time, reports of inappropriate sexual behavior at STRI were an open secret transmitted through whisper networks," according to interviews with women scientists.

In fact, one of the researchers said that a director of a laboratory "raptured her at a scientific conference in San Francisco in 2011." And seven other women claimed that this same director sexually harassed them.

Even one that described its "predatory pattern of abuse", in 2018. He remained in high school for another two years and in 2019 he received the Distinguished Researcher Award from the Secretary of the Smithsonian.

Seven of the scientists said they stopped visiting the institute or collaborating with its staff due to the unprofessional behavior they said they had experienced or witnessed there, and two have left the academy completely.

However, internal emails and complaints reviewed by BuzzFeed News, as well as interviews with 25 scientists, show that "STRI leaders for years issued little more than verbal warnings or social restrictions to employees accused of inappropriate sexual behavior while allowing them to continue interacting with young researchers who have just arrived."

According to the publication, "the institute finally took additional disciplinary measures

against two of the accused scientists in 2019 and 2020," but "a third scientist continues to work at STRI."

We regret if anyone has suffered harassment at STRI and we are grateful for those who have come to tell us their experiences," STRI Director Joshua Tewksbury said in the note, refusing to comment on specific accusations.

"We take this responsibility very seriously and have clear protocols to investigate and address people's concerns as they arise," Tewksbury said.

Reports of inappropriate sexual behavior occur when the Smithsonian faces a settling of scores about a work culture that has left many women feeling insecure or unwelcome.

An April 2020 report from the U.S. Government Accountability Office. USA. He found that the Smithsonian forgot to provide guidance to supervisors on how to handle complaints of inappropriate sexual behavior.

A group of staff scientists published an open letter in April 2021 asking the Smithsonian leadership to review their systems to inform and address inappropriate sexual behavior, according to the publication."

We recognize the pain and understand the value it takes to be able to face and talk about these situations," said the Smithsonian, although he does not refer to the cases reported in the publication for "privacy restrictions."

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