

Activision launches sexism review ahead of walkout

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Activision Blizzard employees called for a protest over allegations of discrimination and harassment of female staff members.

Video games giant Activision Blizzard announced a far-reaching review of its workplace practices Wednesday as it faced a staff walkout over accusations of widespread sexism and harassment.

Employees of the gaming giant were set to stage protests at the California offices or stop working remotely after claims of a pervasively toxic workplace reverberated in the wake of a state lawsuit.

Chief executive Bobby Kotick issued a statement to his staff acknowledging that the company's initial response had been "quite

frankly, tone deaf."

"Anyone found to have impeded the integrity of our processes for evaluating claims and imposing appropriate consequences will be terminated," he said.

The company behind "Call of Duty" and "World of Warcraft" is facing a civil lawsuit in California over claims that it violated state laws because it "fostered a sexist culture and paid women less than men."

Staff at the Activision's campus in the Southern California city of Irvine were planning a walkout Wednesday in protest of sexism and other workplace issues.

"I will be standing with my friends and colleagues in order to make our voices heard and demand real change," an Activision designer posted on Twitter under the name Zorbrix using the hashtag #ActiBlizzWalkout.

"Together we are far stronger than alone."

A statement which organizers said was signed by some 2,600 employees called for an end to mandatory arbitration in harassment cases, improvements in recruiting practices and creation of a diversity and equity task force.



A large screen shows scenes from the game Skylander's Giants by Activision on the second day of the E3 videogame extravaganza in 2012.

Reviewing sexist content

Kotick said in his statement that the Santa Monica-based company "will continue to investigate each and every claim" of sexism at Activision "and will not hesitate to take decisive action."

Content from Activision's games criticized as sexist will also be removed following complaints from both staff and players, Kotick said, while "listening sessions" will be organized to allow staff to "speak out and share areas for improvement."

The walkout at the Irvine campus was set to last throughout the work day Wednesday, with a live event during lunch hours.

Organizers expected about 50 people to take part in the campus protest, with others joining virtually due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Workers had blasted Activision Blizzard's initial response to a slew of sexism and harassment complaints in a letter calling its reaction "abhorrent."

According to the lawsuit from the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing, women make up only about 20 percent of Activision's staff and "very few women ever reach top roles at the company."

"The women who do reach top roles earn less salary, incentive pay and total compensation than their male peers," it added.

The lawsuit also detailed widespread inappropriate behavior, describing male employees who groped women co-workers, "talk openly about female bodies, and joke about rape."

Activision Blizzard had initially pushed back on the allegations, saying that the lawsuit "includes distorted, and in many cases false, descriptions of Blizzard's past."

"In cases related to misconduct, action was taken to address the issue," it said.

The game company said the Californian state agency had "rushed to file an inaccurate complaint, as we will demonstrate in court."

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