

Blue Origin accused of 'toxic' work culture, compromising safety

September 30 2021, by Glenn Chapman



Jeff Bezos speaks about his flight on Blue Origin's New Shepard into space during a press conference.

A group of current and former Blue Origin employees on Thursday accused Jeff Bezos' space company of having a "toxic" work culture with

rampant sexual harassment and a pattern of decision-making that prioritized speedy rocket development over safety.

The allegations, firmly rejected by Blue Origin, were outlined in a lengthy blogpost signed by Alexandra Abrams, the company's former head of employee communications.

The post said it also represented the views of 20 other workers and ex-workers in various divisions who wanted to remain anonymous.

"Workforce gender gaps are common in the [space industry](#), but at Blue Origin they also manifest in a particular brand of sexism," it said.

One senior executive was said to have reported for sexual harassment multiple times, but remained within the "loyal inner circle" of CEO Bob Smith.

Another former executive frequently referred to women co-workers as "'[baby girl](#),' 'baby doll,' or 'sweetheart'" and inquired about their dating lives, the post added.

"It appeared to many of us that he was protected by his close personal relationship with Bezos—it took him physically groping a female subordinate for him to finally be let go," the authors said.

They also said a former NASA astronaut and Blue Origin senior leader once instructed a group of women: "You should ask my opinion because I am a man."

Abrams and her co-authors further claimed that the company romanticized burnout, suppressed dissent, and was obsessed with competing with rivals SpaceX and Virgin Galactic in the race to launch their billionaire founders, thus compromising safety.

"In the opinion of an engineer who has signed on to this essay, 'Blue Origin has been lucky that nothing has happened so far,'" they said.

A Blue Origin spokesperson denied the allegations, saying Abrams was dismissed two years ago after warnings over issues involving US export control regulations.

"Blue Origin has no tolerance for discrimination or harassment of any kind," the spokesperson added.

"We provide numerous avenues for employees, including a 24/7 anonymous hotline, and will promptly investigate any new claims of misconduct."

The US Federal Aviation Administration told AFP that the regulatory agency "takes every allegation seriously" and is reviewing the information.

Bezos spent a few minutes beyond Earth's atmosphere in July on Blue Origin's first crewed mission—a breakthrough moment for the space tourism sector after years of delays.

The 10-minute hop from a west Texas base to beyond the Karman line and back again minted four new astronauts, including the oldest and youngest ever.

Blue Origin announced plans this week for a second flight in October, and an unconfirmed report said it may include a celebrity astronaut: Bill Shatner, who played Captain Kirk on "Star Trek."

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