

Luncheon attendees at odds with survey results

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A recent study commissioned by Women in Mining (WIM) says the wage gap between women and men in the mining sector is 32%, or 11% higher than the national average.

A sampling of the women attending a WIM luncheon during the annual Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada convention in Toronto revealed that most were at odds with the survey's findings.

"I am surprised by the results because I don't see it in my own company," said Lorraine Godwin, a regional director with mining software firm Geosoft. She added that about one-third of the employees in her company are women.

Another woman who works for a Toronto-based gold producer was more frank.

"I know in my company there is nothing like that. If you're a project geologist, they don't care what gender you are, that's what you get paid. (Pay) is based on experience," said the executive, who preferred to remain nameless.

Jane Spooner, a mining industry consultant, participated in the survey. Spooner suspects that fewer than half of the women who work in the mining sector are not directly employed by mining or exploration companies.

"The survey seemed to be geared toward women in mining companies and I'm not one of those," Spooner said. "It seemed to have a bias."

The survey says women represent 14% of people working in the sector, up from 11% in 1996 but way below the national average of 47.4%. In fact, mining has the lowest percentage of female employees of any industry sector, including fisheries and forestry.

Ingrid Hibbard, president and CEO of Pelangio Resources, said women need to learn to be more promotional. "We're not really good at promoting ourselves," she said.

"I think we need to be getting out there and promoting the geosciences and the jobs in mining in high school. And getting into the universities and showing women what's out there and what opportunities they have," Godwin said. "That would be the best way to level the playing field."

The survey said that among the barriers to women entering the mining sector were a paternalistic work culture and the perception of women's abilities.

Stephanie Anderson, who recently completed a master's degree in geology at Acadia University, agreed.

“I was doing heavy iron exploration up in northern Quebec. I was with all guys, a bunch of dudes -- natives, students from Acadia who came with me -- and if one of them ever made a mistake or did something wrong it was ‘so-and-so made a mistake or so-and-so did this’ but if I ever made a mistake it was ‘Effing broads! Do we have to put up with this?’” Anderson recalled, who added she was paid \$25 more per day than her fellow students.

“I think it is better to hire women because women still have something to prove,” Anderson said.