

# Uber to investigate sexual harassment claim by engineer

February 20 2017, by Danica Kirka And David Koenig

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In this file photo taken Tuesday, Dec. 16, 2014, a woman walks past the company logo of the internet car service, Uber, in San Francisco, USA. Uber's chief executive ordered an urgent investigation Monday Feb. 20, 2017, into a sexual harassment claim made by a female engineer who alleged her prospects at the company evaporated after she complained about advances from her boss. (AP Photo/Eric Risberg, FILE)

Uber's chief executive ordered an investigation Monday into a sexual-

harassment claim made by a female engineer who said her prospects at the company evaporated after she complained about advances from her boss.

In a blog post about her year at Uber, Susan Fowler Rigetti said the company's human resources department ignored her complaints because her boss was a high performer.

CEO Travis Kalanick responded Monday on Twitter that he had instructed the ride-hailing app company's chief human resources officer to look into Rigetti's charges.

"What's described here is abhorrent & against everything we believe in," Kalanick tweeted. "Anyone who behaves this way or thinks this is OK will be fired."

The engineer, who goes alternately by Fowler or Rigetti online, said she joined Uber in November 2015 as a site-reliability engineer in San Francisco. She said that on her first official day on her team at Uber, her boss propositioned her in a string of messages on the company chat.

She took screen shots of the messages because they were "clearly out of line."

"Upper management told me that he 'was a high performer' (i.e. had stellar performance reviews from his superiors) and they wouldn't feel comfortable punishing him for what was probably just an innocent mistake on his part," she wrote.

Rigetti said she changed assignments but found her career path blocked. She said sexism was rampant at Uber, although her original boss eventually left the company. Fowler also left, joining an online-payments company.

Rigetti's remarks will strike a nerve among those trying to bolster the number of women in science and engineering, who have long argued that the male-dominated atmosphere discourages talented women from seeking careers in the sector.

"It sounds like (Uber) is doing the right thing in trying to investigate what went wrong here," said Deborah Rhode, a legal-ethics expert at Stanford University law school. "But in too many organizations, high achievers often have a sense that they are invulnerable and entitled."

Some of the same issues were raised when Ellen Pao sued Silicon Valley venture-capital firm Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers, where she had been a partner, arguing that she was fired for filing a sex-discrimination complaint. A jury ruled against her after a 2015 trial.

Other tech companies have been sued by employees who charged that the firms systematically deny promotions to women. The companies often say there aren't enough women going into technical and scientific work.

"The answer to that is for companies to take proactive steps to increase the number of women who want to enter these fields and to make sure that they encounter a level playing field once they get there," Rhode said.

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Citation: Uber to investigate sexual harassment claim by engineer (2017, February 20) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-02-uber-sexual.html>

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