



Worker Health and Safety Awareness in 4 Steps



INTRODUCTION

This workbook explains your rights and responsibilities on the job and tells you what Ontario's Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) expects from your employer, your supervisor and you. These are things you need to know and understand so that you can be safe at work today and every day.

Everyone in the workplace, from the employer to the newest worker, has different but important duties to keep the workplace safe. Because employers have the most authority in the workplace, they have the greatest responsibility but it's important for your own safety that you understand everyone's health and safety duties, including yours.

One of your employer's duties under the OHSA is to give you specific information and instructions about how to stay safe on your job. What you learn from this program will help you start to understand those instructions.

Step 1: Get on Board

EVERYONE HAS A ROLE IN SAFETY

A new job is a chance for a fresh start. You're learning new skills and meeting new people. But every job has hazards, no matter how safe it looks. The number of people in Ontario who suffer a work-related illness or injury each year would fill the seats of a dozen big hockey arenas.

Studies show that new and young workers in Ontario are four times more likely to get hurt during their first month on the job than at any other time. That's because they often aren't told about or don't understand the hazards of the job. They don't know what to expect from their employer, their supervisor, and of themselves. Sometimes they aren't sure what questions to ask. Sometimes they don't even know who to ask.

HOW THE OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY ACT WORKS

The OHS Act is a set of laws that spells out the duties of employers, supervisors and the rights and duties of workers. There are also different Regulations that are attached to the OHS Act.

The whole point of the OHS Act and Regulations is to keep workers from getting hurt or sick on the job.

There are inspectors from the Ministry of Labour who make sure the laws are followed and may issue orders or lay charges if they aren't. If a person is convicted of breaking the law, there are penalties such as fines or time in prison.

The OHS Act gives everyone in the workplace duties. These duties are connected to the level of authority each person has in the workplace. To sort out all the duties in a workplace, the OHS Act breaks them down to three main levels of authority:

1. The employer (who is in charge of everyone)
2. The supervisor
3. The worker (you)

The OHS Act assigns the most duties to the employer.

It's important for your safety that you understand everyone's health and safety duties.

DUTIES OF THE EMPLOYER:

1. Make sure workers know about hazards and dangers in the workplace and how to work safely.
2. Make sure every supervisor knows how to take care of health and safety on the job.
3. Create health and safety policies and procedures for the workplace.
4. Make sure everyone knows and follows the health and safety procedures.
5. Make sure workers wear and use the right protective equipment.
6. Do everything reasonable to keep workers from getting hurt or sick on the job.

DUTIES OF THE SUPERVISOR

1. Tell workers about hazards and dangers in the workplace and show them how to work safely.
2. Make sure workers follow the law and the workplace health and safety policies and procedures.
3. Make sure workers wear and use the right protective equipment.
4. Do everything reasonable to keep workers from getting hurt or sick on the job.

DUTIES OF THE WORKER

1. Follow the law and the workplace health and safety policies and procedures.
2. Always wear or use the protective equipment that the employer requires.
3. Work and act in a way that won't hurt them or any other worker.
4. Report any hazard they find in the workplace to their supervisor.

The Act says that your supervisor and your employer have to “take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances for your protection.” That means they have to do everything that is reasonable to protect you on the job.

RIGHTS OF THE WORKER

Your employer and supervisor have the responsibility to make the workplace as safe as possible and to tell you about any hazards in the work you do and how to avoid those dangers and work safely. You have the right under the OHS Act to be told about the hazards in the work you do and to be instructed on how to do your work safely.

If someone asks you to do work that you don't know enough about, you have the right to speak up and ask questions.

You should never have to be worried that you will get in trouble for asking questions or reporting a problem. It's against the law for your employer or your supervisor to punish you in any way for doing what the OHS Act says or for asking your employer or supervisor to do what the OHS Act expects them to do. This is called a “reprisal.” It's against the law for your supervisor or employer to threaten to punish or fire you for doing these things.

You also have a right to refuse to do unsafe work if you have reason to believe it puts you or a fellow worker in danger.

Prevention starts here, but it doesn't end here.

Step 2: Get in the Know

You need to know about hazards

SOME COMMON WORKPLACE HAZARDS

Here are some of the most common hazards in Ontario workplaces:

1. Repeating the same movements over and over, especially if you are in an awkward position, use a lot of force, or lift heavy things repeatedly above the shoulders or below the knees.
2. Slipping, tripping or falling (ex; spilled coffee on the floor, a cluttered work area, or a raised platform with no guardrails).
3. Working near motorized vehicles.
4. Using or working near machinery.
5. Workplace violence.
6. Less visible hazards related to your work, like: chemicals, fumes, toxic dust, or germs and viruses in labs and healthcare workplaces. *Note: hazards that can make you sick may not be felt right away.*

It's the employer's duty to make sure that the supervisor knows enough and has enough experience and training to keep workers safe and healthy while they work. It's the employer's and supervisor's duty to inform workers of health and safety hazards. It's the worker's duty to report hazards they know of to the supervisor or employer as soon as possible so they can fix it. Employers, supervisors and workers work together to make the workplace safer.

Here are important questions about your job that you need to know the answers to.

If you don't know, ask your supervisor:

- What are the hazards of this job?
- Is there any special training needed for this job?
- Do I have the right protective equipment for this job?
- If I have any questions about safety, who do I ask?
- How do I report an injury?
- What do I do in an emergency?

PROTECTING YOU FROM HAZARDS

There are many ways that your employer can protect you from workplace hazards. The best way is to get rid of or eliminate the hazard completely. A good example is replacing a toxic cleaning chemical with one that is non-toxic.

If the hazard can't be eliminated, your employer can try to reduce the hazard. This can be done by reducing how much of the hazard you are exposed to. An example of this is turning up the ventilation system in a factory, or putting a barrier around a dangerous piece of equipment. These are called "engineering controls."

Another way to reduce hazards is to reduce how long or how often you come in contact with the hazard. This can be done by arranging the work differently so that you are not exposed as long. These are called "administrative or work practice controls."

If the hazard still exists after trying to control it through elimination, engineering controls and administrative or work practice controls, your employer may require you to use protective equipment and/or protective devices.

PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT AND DEVICES

The OSHA says that one of your duties as a worker is always to wear or use the protective equipment that your employer requires. If the OSHA or your employer says you have to wear or use these things to do the work, you have to.

If your employer or one of the OSHA Regulations says that a machinery guard has to be used, it has to be used and you must never remove or disable any protective device that is required. If the device has to come off for any reason, you should not use the equipment without a replacement device. Taking shortcuts by removing guards is unsafe – and it's against the law.

The OSHA says you have to make sure you don't use any equipment or machine in a way that could hurt you or any other worker. You also can't act or behave in a way that could hurt you or anyone else. That means no playing games, pranks or acting in other ways that could hurt someone.

The law says every worker has to have information and training about chemicals or hazardous materials in the workplace. The Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) Regulation says that you need to receive information and instruction on how to use, store and get rid of hazardous materials safely. This information is available on warning labels and information sheets.

If your job involves using equipment, your employer and supervisor must instruct you on how to operate that equipment safely. Your employer also has to tell you how and where to get first aid, and what to do in an emergency.

In a safe and healthy workplace, everyone knows about hazards. If you see a hazard on the job or a “close call”, report it to your supervisor or employer right away. That way, someone who knows how to fix it can deal with it so that no one gets hurt. “Prevention Starts Here” when everyone knows about hazards.

Step 3: Get involved

WORKING TOGETHER FOR SAFETY

Understanding the Occupational Health and Safety Act is all about knowing the health and safety duties of employers, supervisors and the duties and rights of workers, and putting them into action. We all have to get involved.

If an employer knows about a hazard and doesn't try to eliminate or reduce it, or make sure the workers are told about it and how to deal with it, that employer is not doing what the law requires.

If a supervisor knows about a hazard and doesn't explain to the workers how to deal with it, that supervisor is not doing what the law requires.

If a worker knows about a hazard and doesn't report it to the supervisor or the employer, that worker is not doing what the law requires.

If you see a hazard on the job, you have a duty to speak up. This includes reporting equipment that isn't working right, and any other hazards that may be present as a result of not following the OHS or Regulations. It's important that you report to your supervisor or employer any injury, incident or close call, so that they can prevent those kinds of things from happening again in the future.

THE RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE IN HEALTH AND SAFETY

The OHS Act gives you the right to participate and get involved in keeping your workplace safe and healthy. There are many ways you can do this.

Here are four good ways to get involved in keeping your workplace safe, but there are many more:

1. You can ask questions when you're not sure about something.
2. You can volunteer to become a worker health and safety representative or a worker member of the joint health and safety committee.
3. You can help your health and safety representative or joint health and safety committee with health and safety inspections by pointing out possible hazards in your work area.
4. You can take your health and safety training seriously and put what you learn into practice in your job.

HEALTH AND SAFETY REPRESENTATIVES AND JOINT HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEES

The OHSA says that workplaces with 6 to 19 workers need to have a health and safety representative or a joint health and safety committee. In most larger workplaces with 20 or more workers, the OHSA says a joint health and safety committee has to be set up. Committees have to have at least two people on them; the workers or their union, if any, pick one of them and the employer picks the other. In workplaces where there are 50 or more workers, the committee must have at least four members, and at least half of the members have to represent workers.

Your health and safety representative or joint health and safety committee can help you with concerns regarding working safely.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR AND WHAT TO ASK

The OHSA says that your employer must post the OHSA and other health and safety information in your workplace, such as an occupational health and safety poster. Look for the posted names of your health and safety representative or joint health and safety committee members – these are people you can talk to if you need help. And if your workplace has more than 5 workers, your employer has to post the company health and safety policy.

Always be on the lookout for hazards to yourself or others. Before you start your work day, ask yourself questions like:

- Is any of the machinery broken?
- Are there warning labels or signs?
- Is there any moving equipment I could get caught in?
- Is there something I could slip or trip on?
- Do I need protective equipment?
- Do I know how to do this job safely?
- Is there another worker nearby who could get hurt by what I'm doing?
- Is this task more than I can physically handle?

BE A SAFETY ROLE MODEL

Most workers should be able to look to their supervisors as good health and safety role models. But others may also be looking to you as a role model for good health and safety practices. How you work, and the way you think and talk about the work, can affect the safety of the people you work with. The message you want others to get from you is: **“Prevention starts here”**.

Step 4: Get More Help

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

If you see something unsafe that could hurt someone, you need to report it to your supervisor or your employer. It's also a good idea to tell your health and safety representative or committee if there is one. But if the employer or supervisor doesn't fix the problem, you can call the Ministry of Labour. The Ministry's job is to help prevent workplace injuries and illnesses through enforcing the OHS. They want to know if there are problems that aren't being fixed.

Ministry of Labour inspectors can't be in all workplaces at all times, so it has a toll-free number that you can call. Calling that number connects you to the Health and Safety Contact Centre that takes calls 24 hours a day, seven days a week. You don't have to give your name when you call. Here is the number:

1-877-202-0008

It's against the law for your employer or your supervisor to fire or punish you for doing what the OHS expects you to do, or because you asked them to do what the OHS expects them to do.

If you feel that your employer is taking action against you for raising a health and safety concern, you can discuss it with a union official if you are a member of a union, or bring a complaint to the Ontario Labour Relations Board. If you're not sure what to do, you can call the Ministry's toll-free number for information. The Office of the Worker Adviser also provides free advice and representation to non-unionized workers who are in this situation. You can call their toll-free number for help: 1-855-659-7744.

THE RIGHT TO REFUSE UNSAFE WORK

If you have reason to believe that the work you are doing or the equipment you are using might hurt you or someone you work with, you can refuse to do that work. This means that you tell your employer or supervisor (and your health and safety representative or committee) that you think you are in danger and you are not going to do the work. You need to tell them why.

All workers have the right to refuse work if they have reason to believe it's dangerous. It's important to know that you can also refuse work if you have reason to believe that the area where you are working is likely to endanger you or any other worker, or that you are in danger from workplace violence.

You must report the situation to your supervisor or employer, and should also contact your health and safety representative or committee. If the problem isn't fixed or you still have reason to believe the work is unsafe, you can continue to refuse the work. A Ministry of Labour inspector will then be called in to investigate.

Some workers, such as nurses, firefighters and police officers cannot refuse work if the danger is a normal part of their job or if refusing work would put someone else in danger.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Now that you have completed this general awareness program, you are ready to be given more specific information and instruction by your employer and supervisor as required by the OHSA.

You should hear about:

- ✓ Specific hazards in your workplace
- ✓ The procedure to follow when reporting health and safety concerns, incidents or injuries
- ✓ Any protective equipment you are required to wear or use
- ✓ Where the company's health and safety policy is posted (in workplaces with more than 5 workers)
- ✓ Where the first aid station is and the names of qualified first aid providers
- ✓ The company's emergency plan
- ✓ Information on hazardous materials in your workplace
- ✓ The workplace violence and harassment prevention policy
- ✓ Where a copy of the OHSA is posted
- ✓ Where the names of your joint health and safety committee members are posted

Knowing your health and safety rights and duties, and the duties of your supervisor and employer, is an important first step in staying safe on the job.