

Occupational Health and Safety Policy



Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) policies express an organization's commitment to a safe and healthy workplace. OSH policies set the context for practices and behaviour aimed at preventing injury and disease and promoting good health. Workplace policies and practices must comply with applicable Occupational Health and Safety laws and regulations and with Workers' Compensation laws and regulations, which deal with compensation for accidents and disease. The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS) website is a rich resource for timely answers, contact information of agencies, and updates on changes to legislation.

Employers and employees share responsibilities for making sure work environments are healthy and safe. Encourage and invite employees to work on developing and implementing your OSH policy and programs. Review your policy regularly and be vigilant about implementing it. Make sure that everyone understands the policy and their responsibilities and post OSH information in visible areas.

An OSH policy should include these key elements:

- Individual responsibilities
- Workplace rules and procedures
- Employee orientation and training
- Workplace inspections (preventive action)
- Reporting and investigating accidents and health and safety incidents
- Emergency procedures, medical and first aid
- Health and safety committee (required in most provinces and territories in workplaces with a specified minimum number of employees)
- Employees' right to refuse to work without fear of reprisal if they believe it is unsafe for themselves or someone else. Legislation provides guidelines on specific rights, procedures, and penalties for non-compliance

Your OSH policy must be specific to your workplace. It needs to deal with any unique workplace issues. Here is a sample list of issues and some ideas about how they can be addressed:

Smoking and scents

A policy prohibiting or restricting smoking can be part of a health promotion initiative in your office. This promotion may include support for smoke cessation programs. The increasing prevalence of sensitivities to fragrances and

allergies may trigger a need in your workplace for a scent free policy.

Workplace violence

Some workplaces and work situations are at higher risk than others. Several provinces now have legislation requiring employers to have policies that relate specifically to workplace violence. The CCOHS website covers workplace violence in detail.

Working alone

No jurisdiction prohibits working alone. Some jurisdictions have specific legislated guidelines on working alone – for example, working at a worksite where assistance in case of emergency or illness is not readily available. Consult applicable OSH legislation for more details.

Substance abuse

Substance abuse can impair work performance and increase absenteeism and the likelihood of accidents. The website for the Canadian Centre for Substance Abuse has current information on pre-employment testing, employer and employee rights and the application of human rights legislation.