



Ontario

Prevention Starts Here

Health & Safety at Work

A Worker's Guide in 4 Steps

This workbook explains your rights and responsibilities on the job and tells you what Ontario's Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHS Act) 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.

Prevention – preventing injuries and illnesses at work - starts here, with the things you learn in this guidebook, but it doesn't end here. One of your employer's duties under the OHS Act is to give you specific information and instructions on how to stay safe on your job. What you learn from this program will help you understand those instructions. We hope you will use what you learn here every day of your working life.

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.

Last year in Ontario, more than 250,000 workers got hurt or sick at work. That many people would fill a dozen big hockey arenas.

From the list below, who do you think is more likely to get hurt or sick on the job? Check one of the boxes and explain why.

1. New and young workers

Why? _____

2. Experienced workers

Why? _____

The right answer is #1. Studies show that new and young workers in Ontario are four times more likely to get hurt during the first month on the job than at any other time. That's because they often aren't told about or understand the hazards of the job. They don't know what to expect from their employer and supervisor. Sometimes they aren't sure what questions to ask. Sometimes they don't even know who to ask.

That's where the law comes in.

How the Occupational Health and Safety Act works

The OHS Act is a set of laws that spells out the duties and responsibilities of employers, supervisors and workers. A lot of different Regulations are attached to the OHS Act. They have more detailed laws about how to make the workplace safe in specific situations. For example, one Regulation explains how to work safely with chemicals and other hazardous materials. This includes training, warning labels on products and information sheets. There are also Regulations for different types of work, like jobs in construction, health care, factories and mines.

The whole point of the Act and Regulations is to keep people from getting hurt or sick on the job. There are inspectors from the Ministry of Labour who make sure the laws are followed and issue orders or lay charges if they aren't. If a person is convicted of breaking the law, there can be penalties such as fines or time in prison.

The OHS Act gives everyone 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:

- the employer (who is in charge of everyone)
- the supervisor
- the worker (you).

To which of these three people do you think the OHS Act gives the most duties? Check one of the boxes below and explain why.

1. The employer

Why? _____

2. The supervisor

Why? _____

3. The worker

Why? _____

The right answer is #1 – the employer. The more authority a person has in the workplace, the more health and safety duties they have.

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

Duties of the employer

Here are some of the things the OHS Acts says every employer has to do as part of their job:

- Do everything reasonable to keep workers from getting hurt or sick on the job.
- Create health and safety procedures for the workplace.
- Make sure everyone knows and follows the health and safety procedures.
- Make sure workers know about hazards and dangers and how to work safely.
- Make sure workers wear and use their protective equipment.

- Make sure every supervisor knows how to take care of health and safety on the job.

Duties of the supervisor

Here are some of the things the OHS Act says every supervisor has to do as part of their job:

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

Duties of the worker

Now here are some of the things the OHS Act says every worker has to do as part of their job:

- Follow the law.
- Work and act in a way that won't hurt them or anyone else.
- Always wear or use the protective equipment that the employer requires
- Report any hazard they find in the workplace to their supervisor.

Suppose you have been asked to run a piece of equipment that you don't know very much about. What should your employer and your supervisor do to make sure you are able to do it safely? Explain in the space below.

The people who made the OHS Act thought about that same question. The Act says that your supervisor and your employer have to "take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances." That means they have to do everything that is reasonable to protect you on the job.

Your employer has the responsibility to make the equipment as safe as possible and to tell you about any remaining hazards in the work you do. Your supervisor has the same duty. They also have to make sure you know 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.

If someone asks you to do something that you don't know enough about, your employer and supervisor are responsible for making sure you know.

That's why you have the right to speak up and ask questions - even if you are shy or unsure. People can get hurt on the job if they don't have the right information or training.

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 Act says or for asking your employer or supervisor to do what the Act expects them to do. This is called a "reprisal". It's even against the law for your supervisor or employer to threaten to punish or fire you for doing these things.

You also have rights if your employer or your supervisor doesn't fix a health and safety concern that you told them about. The OHS Act says that you have the right to refuse to do work if you have reason to believe it puts you or someone else in danger. We will look at this right and your protection from reprisals in more detail later.

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

Step 1 quiz

Before we move on to Step 2 of the program, here is a short quiz on the material we have just covered (the answers are on the last page, but please don't look at them ahead of time).

1. Last year in Ontario, more than 250,000 workers got hurt or sick on the job.

Yes No

2. New workers are less likely to get hurt on the job than people who have been on the job longer.

Yes No

3. The Occupational Health and Safety Act and Regulations tell everyone from the employer to the newest worker how to make the workplace safer.

Yes No

4. The OHS Act puts the greatest responsibility on the employer to make sure no one gets hurt or sick on the job.

Yes No

5. It's against the law for my employer to fire or punish me for doing what the OHS Act says.

Yes No

Step 2: Get in the Know

You need to know about hazards

Some people say that what you don't know can't hurt you. That's not true at work. On some jobs, what you don't know can kill you. A hazard is anything that could hurt you or hurt the people you work with.

All of us have heard about a worker or group of workers who were killed on the job. We have heard of workers falling from heights, getting caught in equipment or being electrocuted and burned. Events like these send a shock wave through the workplace and the community, and it is tragic for the victim's family and friends. Unfortunately, this kind of event happens not once or twice but dozens of times each year in Ontario.

There is a hazard at the root of almost every workplace death, injury or sickness. A hazard can take many forms. Sometimes more than one hazard can combine to make an even bigger hazard. You need to know about the hazards in your workplace before you start working.

Think about the people you know. Do you know someone who has been hurt or killed at work? What was the hazard at the root of it? How did it affect you? How did it affect their family? Make some notes about your story in the space below.

Some common workplace hazards

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

- Repeating the same movements over and over, especially if you are in an awkward position or you use a lot of force. Think of someone who bends down all day, or someone who lifts heavy things over and over again.
- Slipping, tripping or falling. Think of something as simple as spilled coffee on the floor, a cluttered work area or a raised platform with no guardrails.
- Motorized vehicles. Think of being hit by a dump truck that is backing up on a construction site....or someone getting hit by a forklift truck in a warehouse or on a loading dock.

- Using or working near machinery. There is a long list of workers who have been killed or seriously injured by the equipment they were operating.
- Workplace violence. It can happen in many workplaces such as to a gas station attendant working alone at night or a health care worker in a hospital.

Can you think of any other common workplace hazards – especially ones in your own job? Here are a couple of possible examples. Try to list a few others.

- Loud noise
- Poor lighting
- _____
- _____
- _____

You also need to think about less apparent hazards – things like chemicals, fumes, toxic dust, or germs and viruses. Some of these hazards can make you very sick. Sometimes they make you sick right away; other times you don't know that you are sick until months or even years later. That's why it's important to know about these hazards now.

It's the employer's duty to make sure that the supervisor knows enough and has enough experience and training to keep workers safe. It's the 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 four important questions about your job that you need to know the answers to. If you don't know, ask:

- 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?

Can you think of any other health and safety questions you should ask? Here are a couple of examples. Try to list a few others.

- 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 the hazard completely. This is called “elimination” and a good example is replacing a toxic cleaning chemical with one that is non-toxic.

If the hazard can't be eliminated, then your employer can try to reduce the hazard. They can do this 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 by 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 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 OHS Act says that one of your duties as a worker is to always wear or use the protective equipment that your employer requires.

You may think that a hard hat, safety glasses, steel-toed boots or some other protective clothing or equipment are uncomfortable or slow you down. But if the OHS Act or your employer says you have to wear or use these things to do the work, you have to.

Some of the equipment in your workplace may have a guard. The guard protects you from coming in contact with a moving part. If your employer or a Regulation says that the guard has to be used, it has to be used. The OHS Act says that 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 or without involving your supervisor. Taking shortcuts by removing guards is a bad idea – and it's against the law.

The OHS Act says you have to make sure you don't use any equipment or machine in a way that could hurt you or anyone else. 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.

Other ways to find out about hazards

There are other ways you can find out about hazards in your workplace.

Your employer may have some of the workplace health and safety procedures in writing. These procedures are about the work you do and the machines and equipment you use. Your employer has to make sure that you know and understand them when you start work. Your employer is also responsible for making sure the procedures are followed by everyone.

The law says everyone at work has to have information and training about chemicals or hazardous materials that are used at work. You need to receive information 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, you should be informed and instructed on how to operate that equipment safely. One way to get information on safe use of machinery is from the operator's manual. It tells you about hazards and has instructions on how to use the equipment safely. Your employer should make sure anyone can check the manual if they need information. If you can't find the manual for the equipment you are using, you should ask your supervisor for information on how to operate the equipment safely.

Another important way that you can learn about hazards is through training. Sometimes your employer will give you the training at your workplace; sometimes you will be sent somewhere else for training.

You should be told how and where to get first aid, and what to do in an emergency. Then you should get specific training on how to deal with hazardous materials, use protective equipment and operate machinery safely.

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 2 quiz

Here is a quick quiz on this part of the program (Afterward you can check the answers at the back).

1. The Occupational Health and Safety Act says that you have the right to know about hazards in your workplace.

Yes No

2. If a hazard can make you sick, you will always start to feel sick right away.

Yes No

3. To keep from getting hurt on the job, you need to find out about the hazards while you're working.

Yes No

4. If you have any doubts about the safety of the work you're doing, you should keep those doubts to yourself.

Yes No

5. If you see a hazard while you're working, you should report it to your supervisor or employer right away.

Yes No

Step 3: Get Involved

Working together for safety

The Occupational Health and Safety Act is all about knowing the health and safety duties of employers, supervisors and 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 anything that could hurt you or the people you work with, you have a duty to speak up. This includes reporting equipment that isn't working right, or seeing someone do something that the Act or Regulations say they must not do. It's important that you report to your supervisor or employer any injury, incident or near-miss, so that they can prevent those kinds of things from happening again in the future.

You have the right to participate in health and safety

The 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. Can you think of three?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

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

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

Health and safety representatives and joint health and safety committees

The OHS Act says that almost all workplaces with six to 19 workers need to have a health and safety representative who is picked by the workers or their union. In almost all larger workplaces with 20 or more workers, the act says a joint health and safety committee has to be set up. The committee has to have at least two people on it; the workers or their union pick one of them and the employer picks the other.

The committee plays an important role in helping to keep workplaces safe. If there's a problem, the members make suggestions to the employer about how to fix it. Because there is an employer and a worker member of the committee, everyone has a say in identifying and solving problems. One way that worker members help is by regularly inspecting the workplace.

In smaller workplaces, the health and safety representative has many of the same roles as the committee. They help to improve health and safety at work. They do this by inspecting the workplace often. If they find a problem, they make suggestions to the employer about how to fix it.

What to look for and what to ask

The OHS Act says that your employer must post health and safety information in your workplace. Look for the posted names of your joint health and safety committee members – these are people you can talk to if you need help. Your employer also has to post a copy of the OHS Act. And if your workplace has more than five workers, your employer has to post the company health and safety policy.

If you can't find any of this information in your workplace, talk to your supervisor about it. Health and safety is an important part of his or her job. You can also talk to the people you work with and benefit from each other's experience.

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?

Can you think of any other questions to ask yourself? Here are a couple of examples. Try to list a few more.

- Is there another worker nearby who could get hurt by what I'm doing?
- Is this task more than I can physically handle?
- _____
- _____
- _____

These are good questions for everyone in the workplace to ask. "Prevention Starts Here" by paying attention to details and by following the OHS Act and the workplace health and safety procedures.

Safety role models

Most workers should be able to look to their supervisors as good health and safety role models. All workers should be aware that others may be looking to you as a role model for good health and safety practices. How people work, and the way we think and talk about the work, can affect the safety of the people we work with. The message you want others to get from you is: "Prevention Starts Here."

Step 3 quiz

Here is a quick quiz on this part of the program. Afterward, you can check the answers at the back.

1. It is important that you know the safe way to do your job. You should share what you know. If you see a hazard, you must report it to your supervisor or employer.

Yes No

2. You should get involved in health and safety by asking questions, and you should put what you learn from training into practice on the job.

Yes No

3. If you can't find any health and safety information posted in your workplace, you should just go back to work and not worry about it.

Yes No

4. Your health and safety representative or joint health and safety committee can help you with any concerns that you might have about working safely.

Yes No

5. It's OK to take shortcuts to get the work done faster and on time.

Yes No

Step 4: Get More Help

You are not alone

It's a sad fact that in some workplaces, nobody pays much attention to safety. In those workplaces, it's all about doing the work as quickly as possible. If someone questions the way things are being done, all they get is a dirty look. People in workplaces like that are often afraid to do anything about it because they don't want to be fired. So they keep quiet.

Maybe you felt that way on a past job. That's why it's important to know that you are not alone. Help is always available from outside the workplace.

If you see something dangerous that could hurt someone, you should report it to your supervisor or your employer, then your health and safety representative or committee if there is one. But if the employer or supervisor doesn't fix the problem, the Ministry of Labour needs to be told about it. The ministry's job is to enforce the OHS Act. 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. But the Ministry wants to hear if there's a problem on the job, anywhere in Ontario, that isn't fixed. 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. If you don't want to give your name when you call the Health and Safety Contact Centre, you don't have to. Here is the number:

1-877-202-0008

Remember we mentioned reprisals before? It's against the law for your employer or your supervisor to fire or punish you for doing what the act expects you to do, or because you asked them to do what the OHS Act expects them to do. It's even against the law for your employer or supervisor to threaten to fire or punish you for these things. The OHS Act is very clear on this.

If you feel that you are being unfairly treated 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 and tell them about your situation.

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 can 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 should report the situation to your supervisor or employer, as well as your health and safety representative or committee. Most of the time, your supervisor or employer and your safety representative or committee member will be able to solve the problem. 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 decide if the work is likely to put a worker in danger.

Some workers, such as nurses, firefighters and police officers, have a limited right to refuse work. They cannot refuse work if the danger is a normal part of their job or if refusing work would put someone else in danger. Talk to your supervisor or employer if you think your right to refuse work may be limited by the work you do.

More information and resources

Ontario has a health and safety "system." The organizations that are partners in this system all have a lot of useful information about health and safety. Their focus is on prevention, which means stopping the injury or illness before it happens or making sure it doesn't get worse. Here are some of the organizations:

Organization	Description	Website	Phone Number
Ministry of Labour	Sets, communicates and enforces occupational health and safety and employment standards.	www.labour.gov.on.ca	1-877-202-0008
Workers Health & Safety Centre	An occupational health and safety training centre for workers.	www.whsc.on.ca	1-888-869-7950
Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers	Five medical clinics located across Ontario that provide occupational health services and information	www.ohcow.on.ca	1-877-817-0336

Organization	Description	Website	Phone Number
Health & Safety Ontario	Four health and safety associations that provide sector-specific consulting, training, products and services.	Infrastructure Health & Safety Association – serves electrical, construction and transportation sectors	1-800-263-5024
		Public Services Health & Safety Association – serves health, education and municipal sectors	1-877-250-7444
		Workplace Safety North – serves mining, pulp and paper and forestry sectors	1-888-730-7821
		Workplace Safety & Prevention Services – serves industrial, farming and service sectors.	1-877-494-9777
Workplace Safety and Insurance Board	Administers Ontario's no-fault workplace insurance for employers and their workers.	www.wsib.on.ca	1-800-387-0750

These organizations are part of Ontario's health and safety system. Another place you can go for information is the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety. They have information and fact sheets on their website. If you are having trouble finding information, you can ask questions by telephone at 1-800-668-4284 or through their website at www.ccohs.ca.

“Prevention Starts Here,” but it doesn’t end here

To help you understand how Ontario’s prevention system works together to help create safer workplaces, try to match the following list of organizations to their purpose. Draw a line from each organization to its actual purpose.

Organization

Purpose

Ministry of Labour

Health and safety training for workers

Health & Safety Ontario

Enforcement of the OHS Act

Workplace Safety and Insurance Board

Medical clinics for injured or sick workers

Workers Health & Safety Centre

Insurance benefits for injured or sick workers

Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers

Occupational health consulting, training, products and services

Step 4 quiz

Here's a quiz on the information we've covered in Step 4. Afterward, you can check the answers at the back.

1. If you report a dangerous situation to your supervisor and your health and safety representative and they can't find a way to fix it, you can call the Ministry of Labour's toll-free number for help.

Yes No

2. If you have reason to believe the equipment you are using might hurt you or someone you work with, you have the legal right to refuse the work.

Yes No

3. Some workers, such as nurses, firefighters and police officers, have a limited right to refuse work.

Yes No

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

Yes No

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 OHS Act. You should hear about:

- Specific hazards in your workplace
- The procedure to follow when reporting health and safety concerns, incidents or injuries
- Protective equipment you are required to wear or use
- Where the company's health and safety policy is posted (in workplaces with more than five 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 OHS Act is posted
- Where the names of your joint health and safety committee members are posted

We hope this program has been useful and that you'll use the information in your day-to-day work. 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. Prevention Starts Here, but it doesn't end here.

Remember that when it comes to your health and safety, there is no such thing as a silly question. That question could save your life - so ask it.

Answers to Quiz Questions

Step 1 Quiz

1. Yes
2. No – new workers are actually the most likely to get hurt.
3. Yes
4. Yes
5. Yes

Step 2 Quiz

1. Yes – the act says it's the duty of your employer and your supervisor to tell you about hazards in your workplace.
2. No – some hazards might make you sick right away, but other hazards might not make you sick until months or even years later.
3. No – you need to know about all the hazards before you start working.
4. No – you need to talk to your supervisor or your employer about it.
5. Yes

Step 3 Quiz

1. Yes
2. Yes
3. No - you should ask your supervisor where the information is posted.
4. Yes
5. No – all workers should set a good example and follow the law and work-place procedures.

Step 4 Quiz

1. Yes
2. Yes
3. Yes
4. Yes