

Occupational Health and Safety is Everyone's Business

This PSHSA Fast Fact is intended to help JHSC members, other workers, supervisors, managers and employers to understand the role that they play in establishing a safe and healthy work environment.

Many people are involved with health and safety on the job. According to the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA), the Board of Directors, the employer, supervisors, the joint health and safety committee (JHSC) and workers all have personal responsibilities for occupational health and safety (OH&S).

Who Looks after Health and Safety?

Many organizations employ health and safety professionals (e.g., occupational health nurses, safety coordinators and industrial hygienists). These staff members act as resources and advisors to help managers and workers prevent job-related illnesses and injuries.

As well, workplaces in Ontario with 20 or more employees must have a joint health and safety committee (JHSC). The JHSC members have rights and duties related to OH&S. Union and non-unionized workers have an obligation to select worker representatives for the JHSC. Workplaces with 6 to 19 workers do not require a JHSC but they must have health and safety representatives who carry out these rights and duties.

Where Do I Fit In?

Everyone in the workplace has a personal responsibility for safety. These responsibilities are defined in the OHSA and should be an integral part of the job. Responsibilities for health and safety begins with the Board of Directors and should flow through all levels in the organization. Health and safety objectives should be clearly defined in job descriptions, communicated to all workers, and enforced through the performance appraisal system. If you are unclear about your specific health and safety responsibilities, ask your supervisor, manager, JHSC member or health and safety representative.

What Questions about Health and Safety on the Job Should I Ask?

Every worker has the right to basic information about health and safety on the job. If you are unaware of the potential hazards of a job, ask your supervisor some questions before you start the job:

- What dangers are related to my job?
- What hazards do I need to know about (e.g., noise, chemicals, sharps)?
- Will I receive job safety training? How often? On what topics?
- What safety clothing should I be wearing? When should I wear it? How should I wear it?
- Will I be trained in emergency procedures (e.g., fire, chemical spill)?
- Where are fire extinguishers and other emergency equipment located?
- What do I need to know about my clients/assignment?
- What are my health and safety responsibilities?
- Who are my safety representatives or JHSC members?
- What should I do if I have an accident?
- What health and safety rules should I know about?
- Who should I talk to if I have more questions?
- What do you expect from me in terms of OH&S?

If you are a supervisor or member of middle management, you should ask yourself the same types of questions. But in this case, you will need to play a dual role – seeking answers from your supervisor while giving answers to your staff.

To provide clear information to workers, you will need to be clear about your role in the overall OH&S program and what the employer and senior management expects of you.

How Else can I Improve Health and Safety in my Workplace?

Each person working in the organization can make a difference by:

- wearing the appropriate protective equipment.
- using safe work practices.
- asking questions for clarification.
- attending and participating in educational programs.
- identifying and reporting hazards.
- ensuring health and safety issues are resolved.

When everyone works together, we can really be healthy, safe and successful.