

Workplace safety should be everyone's concern

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Occupational Health
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Occupational health and safety focuses on the promotion and restoration of health, the prevention of illness and injury and the protection of workers from occupational and environmental hazards within the setting of a safe and healthy work environment.

Having an occupational health and safety program can save money and adds value to the organization.

An occupational health and safety program can increase productivity and morale as well as reduce turnover.

For an organization's workers, a program can add value to life. When workers get hurt or sick, it is not just physically painful but also impacts on their lives with potential for a significantly reduced income and increased stress levels the worker may not be able to participate fully with an active family life.

What is an occupational health and safety program?

A health and safety program is designed to prevent accidents and illnesses in the workplace.

In Ontario, workplaces are guided by the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

The Act outlines minimum requirements.

Many workplaces have implemented more than what is legislated to increase the safety in their workplace.

Required elements of a health and safety program include a policy statement, individual responsibilities, health and safety committees, correct work procedures, training programs,

accident/incident investigations, emergency procedures, medical and first aid programs, promoting and implementing health and safety programs and finally, evaluating the effectiveness of the health and safety program.

A customized program may need to be developed to ensure the specific requirements of an individual workplace are met.

The policy statement is a document that states the principles and rules that will be used as a guide for action.

Management commitment

Senior levels of management must be committed to ensure the policy is implemented.

The policy should include management's commitment to protecting the health and safety of all employees, the objectives of the program and the organization's health and safety philosophy.

The responsibilities of employees should be stated.

It should be clear that unacceptable behaviour towards health and safety duties will not be tolerated.

The policy will be clearly written and updated on a regular basis.

Health and safety is the responsibility of all workers, both management and workers.

Every worker needs to know their responsibilities which can range from wearing the correct personal protective equipment, following procedures, reporting

injuries, illnesses or unsafe acts or conditions immediately and participating in joint health and safety committees.

Supervisors need to ensure the workers receive instruction and follow safe workplace procedures, follow up on reported illnesses or concerns, ensure workers are properly trained on the equipment being operated, and enforcing the health and safety regulations.

A joint health and safety committee works together to identify potential hazards, to evaluate these hazards, to recommend corrective action and to follow up on the implementation of the recommendations.

This is achieved through regular workplace inspections and meetings.

Remember, your joint health and safety committee is in your workplace for the benefit of all workers. If you have a concern regarding health OR safety, it should be brought to the attention of the committee.

Work smart, work safe!

If your organization needs assistance with policy writing or information about occupational health and safety, please do not hesitate to contact the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers Inc. (Sudbury).

• **Colleen Hill is a registered nurse and a certified occupational health nurse at the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers Inc. (Sudbury). This article was written with the assistance of information from the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety and the Ontario Ministry of Labour.**