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# Supervisor Roles and Responsibilities:

an occupational health and safety handbook

## Note to the reader

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This handbook is current to March 2015. The law is constantly changing with new legislation, amendments to existing legislation, and decisions from the courts. It is important that you keep up with these changes and keep yourself informed of the current law.

This handbook is for general information only and may be applicable to assist in establishing a compliant health and safety system at your work site. However, it is critical that you evaluate your own unique circumstances to ensure that an appropriate program is established for your work site. It is strongly recommended that you consult relevant professionals (e.g. lawyers, health and safety professionals and specialists) to assist in the development of your own program.

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# Introduction

Supervisors fill an important role in every workplace. Workers look to their supervisor for ongoing guidance and support in their day-to-day job tasks. Employers rely on them to mentor, monitor and help motivate their workers to uphold adopted standards.

Alberta's *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, Regulations and Code set minimum standards for health and safety in Alberta's workplaces. This legislation also assigns responsibilities for meeting those standards, and penalties for not. As a supervisor you have responsibility for the health and safety of the workers you supervise.

This toolkit is designed to help you understand what Alberta's legislation expects from you in your role as a supervisor. For the sake of convenience, we've included references to related legislation throughout the handbook.

You don't have to be an expert in the law to be successful as a supervisor. You need to know your employer's health and safety standards. Those must, at minimum, comply with the law — that's your employer's responsibility.

You need to make sure the people you supervise are working in a way that will keep them healthy and safe. To do that, you need to understand everyone's health and safety responsibilities. Start by understanding your own.

Near the end of this handbook is a short section for employers (Qualities of an effective supervisor). It focuses on the essentials of hiring and supporting supervisors in light of their health and safety responsibilities in the workplace.

# Glossary of terms

## Competent

A person who is adequately qualified, suitably trained and with sufficient experience to safely perform work without supervision or with only a minimal degree of supervision.

## Contractor

A person, partnership or group of persons who, through a contract, an agreement or ownership, directs the activities of one or more employers involved in work at a work site.

## Employer

A person who is self-employed, or who employs one or more workers, or who is designated by an employer as the employer's representative.

## Hazard

A situation, condition or thing that may be dangerous to the safety or health of workers.

## Hazard assessment

A written process to recognize hazards at work before they cause harm to people or property.

## Imminent danger

A danger that is not normal for a particular occupation or under which someone engaged in that occupation would not normally carry out their work.

## Incident

The negative outcome (such as an injury or an illness) from an uncontrolled hazard.

## Safe work practice

General Do and Don't guidelines for an activity or work process.

## Safe work procedure

A written, step-by-step instruction for how to perform a task from beginning to end.

## Worker

A person engaged in an occupation. A worker can be a volunteer.

## Work site/workplace

A location where a worker is, or is likely to be engaged in any occupation. A work site includes any vehicle or mobile equipment used by a worker in an occupation.

# Who is a supervisor?

The term “supervisor” can be used to describe the position of the individual in charge of a work site or directing the activities of workers. The following job titles\* may also be used and share the roles and responsibilities of a supervisor:

Chair

Charge Nurse

Chief

Director

Foreman

Lead Hand

Manager

Shift Lead

Superintendent

Team Lead

\*The above job titles are provided for sample purposes only and are not intended to be a complete list.



# Supporting a strong health and safety culture

Behind every organization with a strong health and safety culture is an employer who values worker health and safety.

The employer gives management the authority to put worker health and safety ahead of other corporate values like speed of production or operating cost efficiencies.

When workers see their organization's leadership putting health and safety first in their everyday decisions — as opposed to just talking about it — that's when the health and safety culture takes root. And generally, the stronger an organization's health and safety culture is, the better its related performance. A safe organization is a productive organization.

As a supervisor, it's your job to make sure the workers you supervise not only understand the organization's health and safety expectations, but that they live up to them. Everyone should own the responsibility of going home safe and healthy at the end of their workday.

In your efforts to keep workers safe you'll plan ahead to provide health and safety guidance in different situations. You'll conduct pre-job safety meetings or bring workers up to speed on safe work practices and expectations during one-on-one training sessions. This is important stuff to talk about. Just remember: it's not always what you say that comes through loud and clear. It's what you do.

Supervisors set the example for workers to follow. People are looking to you for guidance.

## Supporting a strong health and safety culture

Lead by example. Make safety awareness part of everything you do on the job. Demonstrate a positive attitude toward health and safety, and good related habits — always. Show up on site wearing the personal protective equipment you want your workers to wear. Keep your eyes and ears out for potential hazards, and address these with the workers. Your level of commitment to health and safety will help inspire their level of commitment to staying healthy and safe on the job.

A strong health and safety culture is one where all levels of the organization are equally committed. Your workers need to trust you, their supervisor. They count on you to be informed, respectful and approachable. They need to know you'll do what's right for them. With the authority and support from your employer, you're in a position to do what's right for everyone.



# The supervisor's role in health and safety

To be updated

# The supervisor's role in health and safety

As a supervisor, you're a leader with some responsibility for other workers. You help the people you supervise understand your employer's expectations. You plan their work and provide support to help them succeed. You monitor their individual performance to ensure they deliver, and you report back to management with results and/or any concerns.

Alberta's occupational health and safety legislation (the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, Regulations and Code) gives you all the same rights and responsibilities as other workers — plus specific duties related to your role as supervisor.

**You** have obligations relating to the health and safety of the workers you supervise:

- 1 You must do everything reasonable (due diligence) to ensure the health and safety of the workers you supervise on the job.

You're expected to know what to do — and to do what you know. This includes knowing, following, and making sure your workers know and follow all of your organization's health and safety policies and procedures. Your employer is responsible for making sure those standards meet or exceed the minimum legislated requirements in Alberta.

## The supervisor's role in health and safety

- 2 You must inform workers about any known workplace hazards, existing controls for those hazards and/or safe work practices.

Every workplace has situations, conditions or things that may be dangerous to the safety or health of workers. These are called hazards. As a supervisor you must know and make sure workers know the hazards connected to the work they do. You must also know and communicate the controls designed to protect against those hazards, including safe work practices.

- 3 You must involve workers in the process of hazard identification and controls.

Workplace hazards can put workers in harm's way. As a supervisor, you must involve workers in the hazard assessment process. Talk to them about the work. Ask questions and respond to any related feedback they provide. Since they're actually doing the job, workers have a valuable perspective. This is true when it comes to deciding on controls as well. Workers can tell you — arguably better than anyone — whether a proposed control is going to help, hinder, or even fly (i.e. are workers going to comply?) and why.

- 4 You must make sure all workers have the proper training and equipment (tools/PPE) for the job they're expected to do.

As a supervisor, you need to make sure your workers know what to do and how to do it. Without proper training, workers can pose a hazard to themselves and to others. Having all the right tools to do the job is necessary, but it isn't enough. Workers require the skills to use the tools and do their work safely. Likewise, even the best personal protective equipment is only effective if it's used as intended. Setting your workers up for success includes training them to succeed.

- 5 You must know and communicate workers' health and safety rights and responsibilities.

Workers must follow workplace health and safety policies and procedures. It's your job to let workers know exactly what that means for them. Workers are required to:

- Behave in a way that won't result in harm or damage to themselves, others or the employer.
- Wear specific personal protective equipment while performing specific tasks.
- Report hazards whenever they see or suspect one.

Workers need to know what it is they need to do, and as their supervisor it's your job to tell them.

Employers are required to have occupational health and safety legislation available for reference. Make sure your workers know where to access it.

# The supervisor's role in health and safety

## Due diligence

Employers are expected to do their best to ensure the health and safety of their workers. In the event of a workplace incident, they should be able to demonstrate due diligence, or to show that every reasonable effort was made to avoid illness, injury or harm. Due diligence can be established if, in spite of competent supervision, no one could have seen the incident coming, or taken advantage of an opportunity to prevent it from happening.



Every employer shall ensure, as far as it is reasonably practicable for the employer to do so,

- a. the health and safety of
  - i. workers engaged in the work of that employer, and
  - ii. those workers not engaged in the work of that employer but present at the work site at which that work is being carried out, and
- b. that the workers engaged in the work of that employer are aware of their responsibilities and duties under this Act, the regulations and the adopted code.

*Occupational Health and Safety Act, Section 2(1)*



# Workers' rights

Workers also have specific rights under Alberta's occupational health and safety legislation. It's important that they understand those rights. It's your job to make sure they do. Basic workers' rights are spelled out below, but check with your employer if you need additional clarification.

Occupational health and safety legislation recognizes **three** fundamental rights for Alberta workers:

## 1 The right to know:

Workers need to know about workplace hazards if they're going to act to stay healthy and safe on the job. They have the right to know. As their supervisor it's your job to inform workers of any known hazards, and to educate them about the presence and proper use of adopted controls.

## 2 The right to participate:

Workplace hazards represent some level of risk to the worker. It's only right that the worker be given the opportunity to participate in identifying hazards and their recommended controls. This level of participation is the worker's right and the employer's obligation.

## The supervisor's role in health and safety

### 3 The right to refuse unsafe work:

Workers should refuse to do work they believe would put themselves or others in the workplace in imminent danger. Here, unsafe work is anything the worker believes presents a danger that isn't a normal part of the worker's job or the job of someone in the worker's occupation.

Workers cannot be penalized for refusing unsafe work, but they must notify their supervisor (employer) as soon as possible, explaining their reason for refusal. No negative consequences can come out of refusing to perform unsafe work.

As a supervisor, you must take action to investigate, avoid reassigning the work to anyone else that would be at risk, and address the hazard by eliminating or controlling it. Check the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, Section 35, for additional responsibilities, or ask your employer.



# Supporting your employer's health and safety program

Alberta employers are encouraged to have a health and safety policy, along with a documented program to promote ongoing compliance with Alberta's occupational health and safety legislation. Sometimes this is called a health and safety management system. Sometimes it's called an occupational health and safety program. Make sure you know and use the term your company uses.

A big part of your role as supervisor is to help make sure day-to-day operations support your employer's health and safety policy and program.

You're in an ideal position to influence the success of your organization's health and safety program. You're present, working alongside the people you supervise. You know the tasks they perform. You actually see their skill level. You provide guidance, encourage worker feedback, and listen to what is said. You establish a rapport with your workers and you set the tone for what's taken seriously, and what is not.

You also have management's ear. Management depends on you to keep them informed about what's happening at the operations level: what's working well, and what is not.

What follows are the main elements every organizational health and safety system should include, and how you, as supervisor, can support each.

## Supporting your employer's health and safety program

### Organizational commitment

How people feel about their organization can influence how they perform on the job. A strong organizational commitment to health and safety tells workers they are valued beyond their role as workers. They're valued as individuals.

Clearly defined expectations reinforce the understanding that health and safety is important, and that everyone contributes in one way or another. As a supervisor, you encourage workers to provide insight and feedback. Include them in discussions about health and safety, and in related decisions that will affect how they do their jobs.

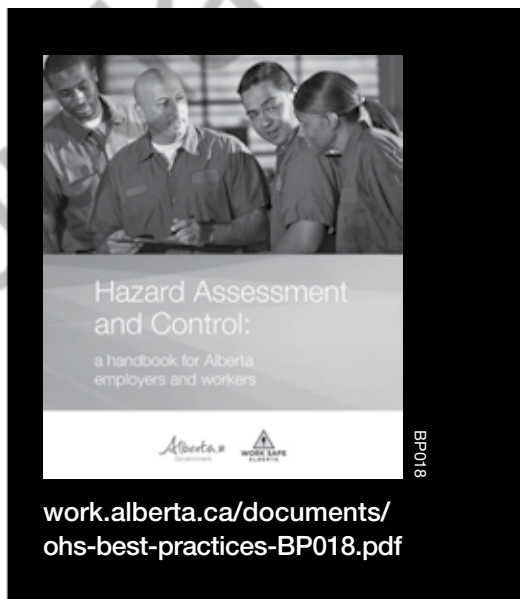
Talk is good, but it's not always enough. Workers have to see their employer make health and safety an operational priority. You can demonstrate your organization's commitment through your actions, like always wearing the proper personal protective equipment on site, or delaying the start of a dangerous job until the proper controls are in place.

## Hazard identification

Alberta's Occupational Health and Safety Code defines a hazard as “a situation, condition or thing that may be dangerous to the safety or health of workers.”

We can't protect ourselves effectively if we don't know what the hazards are. That's why the hazard assessment and control process is required by law (Occupational Health and Safety Code, Part 2, sections 7–9). It is a fundamental element in every occupational health and safety program.

As a supervisor, you'll normally take the lead in hazard identification, but you can't do it alone.



An employer must involve affected workers in the hazard assessment and control or elimination of the hazards identified.

Occupational Health and Safety Code, Part 2, Section 8(1)

## Supporting your employer's health and safety program

### Together with your workers, you will:

- 1 Analyze the individual tasks that every job entails.
- 2 Look for any health or safety hazards related to those tasks.
- 3 Create a written record of what you find.
- 4 Discuss both the hazards found and the controls being introduced with affected workers.



## Hazard controls

Not knowing the potential hazards related to a job is a problem. Knowing the hazards, but not doing anything about them is an even bigger problem. It's irresponsible — and it's against the law.



If an existing or potential hazard to workers is identified during a hazard assessment, an employer must take measures in accordance with this section to

- a. eliminate the hazards, or
- b. if elimination is not reasonably practicable, control the hazards.

Occupational Health and Safety Code, Part 2, Section 9

Eliminating the hazard is always the preferred approach. When elimination is not possible, the next best thing is control.

Alberta's Occupational Health and Safety Code (Part 2, Section 9(2–5)) establishes the hierarchy of controls to follow when elimination of the hazard is not an option.

# Supporting your employer's health and safety program

## FIRST CHOICE

**Engineering controls –**  
control the hazard at the source.



Insulate for sound to  
reduce noise levels.



Introduce ventilation  
system for exhaust.



Use less or non-toxic chemicals.



Use equipment guards.



Use hoists or trolleys to  
lift and move heavy loads.



## SECOND CHOICE

**Administrative controls** – control the hazard along the path (i.e. between the hazard and workers).



Develop and follow safe work practices and procedures.



Provide training and supervision for workers.



Establish and maintain a good housekeeping program.



Limit exposure time by rotating jobs.

## Supporting your employer's health and safety program

### THIRD CHOICE

#### Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) – control at the worker.



Cut resistant gloves



Reflective vest



Safety harness



CSA-approved footwear



Hard hat



Eye protection



Respirator

**Note:** PPE is often the easiest control to implement but is usually the least effective. For this reason, it should be considered a last resort and should always be used in combination with other control methods.

If the hazard cannot be controlled by using a single control method, the employer may use a combination of engineering, administrative and personal protective equipment to provide a greater level of worker protection.

## STEP 1 ▶

### HAZARD IDENTIFICATION

- 1 Analyze the individual tasks that every job entails.
- 2 Look for any health or safety hazards related to those tasks.
- 3 Create a written record of what you find.
- 4 Discuss both the hazards found and the controls being introduced with affected workers.

## STEP 2 ▶

### HAZARD CONTROLS

#### ELIMINATION

or, if elimination is not possible:

#### FIRST CHOICE

**Engineering controls** – control the hazard at the source.

#### SECOND CHOICE

**Administrative controls** – control the hazard along the path (i.e. between the hazard and workers).

#### THIRD CHOICE

**Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)** – control the hazard at the worker.

#### COMBINATION OF CONTROLS

If the hazard cannot be eliminated, or controlled by using a single control method, the employer may use a combination of engineering, administrative and personal protective equipment to provide a greater level of worker health and safety.

## Supporting your employer's health and safety program

As a supervisor you may or may not be involved in determining the controls for identified hazards. You will, however, be responsible for making sure the recommended controls are put in place, and that the workers you supervise are aware of, trained in and diligent about their use.

### Ongoing inspections

From time to time, new equipment or processes are introduced. New workers are hired on. The workplace is always changing.

Regular inspections are an effective way to spot outdated controls or newly introduced hazards. Your employer should have an inspection schedule that you need to know and follow.

Formal inspections are scheduled. They are intended to check for and report on specific items in the workplace. They provide a consistent standard for gathering information and flagging concerns for follow-up. Using a standardized inspection form can help keep the inspection focused (see page 23). Look for and record any new hazards identified, act to eliminate or control the hazards, and talk to affected workers about both the hazards and controls.



## Supporting your employer's health and safety program

Informal inspections can be an effective health and safety tool. Unlike formal inspections, these do not involve a formal report or follow a specific schedule. The workers, supervisors or managers conducting informal inspections should act on what they learn immediately, making any required changes on the spot. In most cases, the required action only takes a few minutes. Both positive and negative observations should be noted and worker feedback is provided verbally. A few words of praise can go a long way to reinforcing positive health and safety behaviour at the work site.

Inspections are an excellent way to keep the subject of health and safety top-of-mind among workers. Involve workers in the inspection process by watching them work and asking them questions. Encourage management to participate as well. Those conducting inspections must be sure to use/wear any required personal protective equipment while on site.

## Worker training

As supervisor, you need to ensure the workers you supervise know the risks associated with the work they do, and what's expected of them for their own safety and that of others in the workplace.



An employer must ensure that workers affected by the hazards identified in a hazard assessment report are informed of the hazards and of the methods used to control or eliminate the hazards.

Occupational Health and Safety Code, Part 2, Section 8(2)

In all cases, formal training on the care, use and maintenance of personal protective equipment must be provided by the employer.



If a worker is required under the Act, the regulations or the adopted code to use or wear specific equipment, the employer must ensure that the worker uses or wears the equipment at the work site.

Occupational Health and Safety Regulation, Section 12(2)

## Supporting your employer's health and safety program

The workers must either be competent to do the work, or they must be under the direct supervision of a worker who is competent. That could be you.



If work is to be done that may endanger a worker, the employer must ensure that the work is done

- a. by a worker who is competent to do the work, or
- b. by a worker who is working under the direct supervision of a worker who is competent to do the work.

Occupational Health and Safety Regulation, Section 13(1)

Before you were promoted to the position of supervisor, or hired into it, your employer made sure you were competent to do the job. That means you have an understanding of your organization's health and safety system, related obligations, and the work site or activities of the workers you'll be supervising. If there's anything here you don't understand, talk to your employer.

Over time, workers might become complacent in their health and safety responsibilities. Familiarity with the job tasks and years of experience can lead to shortcutting correct safe work practices. Refresher training is an important way to keep everyone focused on the importance of health and safety.



## Emergency response planning

You should know the emergency response plan at the work site, and have the knowledge and training needed to activate and support it. You may be the go-to person in the event of an emergency.

Until help arrives (e.g. fire department, ambulance, police) you may be responsible for managing the situation. When help arrives, it's your job to help first responders understand the situation at hand, and any specific challenges on site (i.e. the location of hazardous materials).

You are not the only one who has to know what to do in the event of a workplace emergency. The people you supervise and any visitors on site need to know what's expected of them. You can help make sure they do. Emergency evacuation procedures must be clearly posted, pointed out, explained and rehearsed as part of the organization's emergency preparedness.

Planning for emergencies involves understanding the potential risks within the workplace. Every workplace is subject to change over time. Use what you learn during safety inspections and hazard assessments to help keep the emergency response plan up to date and relevant. It should address all foreseeable emergency scenarios.

# Supporting your employer's health and safety program

## Investigating incidents

A workplace hazard is a situation, condition or thing that may be dangerous to the health or safety of workers. An incident is the negative outcome from an uncontrolled hazard such as an injury or an illness. It's the result of something that went wrong.

Investigating an incident can tell us what went wrong so we can prevent it from happening again. As supervisor, your investigation is going to rely on help from the workers involved.

It's important that no one disturbs the scene.



Except as otherwise directed by a Director of Inspection, an occupational health and safety officer or a peace officer, a person shall not disturb the scene of an accident reported under subsection (1) except insofar as is necessary in

- a. attending to persons injured or killed,
- b. preventing further injuries, and
- c. protecting property that is endangered as a result of the accident.

*Occupational Health and Safety Act, Section 18(6)*

Your company should have its own internal reporting requirements, but legal reporting to government agencies is as follows:



The injuries and accidents to be reported under subsection (1) are

- a. an injury or accident that results in death,
- b. an injury or accident that results in a worker's being admitted to a hospital for more than 2 days,
- c. an unplanned or uncontrolled explosion, fire or flood that causes a serious injury or that has the potential of causing a serious injury,
- d. the collapse or upset of a crane, derrick or hoist, or
- e. the collapse or failure of any component of a building or structure necessary for the structural integrity of the building or structure.

*Occupational Health and Safety Act, Section 18(2)*

To report an injury or accident as defined above, call the Occupational Health and Safety Contact Centre at **1-866-415-8690**.

## Supporting your employer's health and safety program

### Workers' Compensation Board (WCB)

Employers must report to WCB within 72 hours of being notified of a work-related injury or illness that results in or will likely result in a visit to the doctor. Call **780-498-3999** or toll-free **1-866-922-9221**. As a supervisor, this responsibility may fall to you.

It's also important that workers understand the focus of the investigation. This is not about assigning blame to individuals. It is about getting to the bottom of the situation so the underlying problem(s) can be corrected.

As you investigate the incident, you will look at both direct and indirect causes. **Direct causes** are the unsafe conditions or unsafe behaviours that led up to the incident. Poor visibility, equipment breakdown or lifting too heavy a load are examples of direct causes.

**Indirect causes** are the reasons the direct causes happened. Why was visibility so poor: inadequate lighting? Why did the scaffolding fail: improper assembly, or perhaps a maintenance issue? Why did the worker lift such a heavy load: no perceived options/working alone?

Knowing the direct cause of an incident is the first step in an incident investigation. It tells us what happened. Determining the indirect cause points us to what we need to change about the workplace or work process to avoid similar incidents in the future.

Incident investigations are an important part of an organization's commitment to improving its health and safety performance. **Involve workers during the investigation and share your completed investigation reports with management to initiate change.** Then follow up with the workers by explaining any changes that will be introduced as a result of the investigation.



## STEP ONE

### 1 Incident is reported to supervisor or employer



**Report to authorities  
as required**

(see pp. 29–30)

## STEP TWO

### 2 Investigate the incident



a



**DIRECT CAUSE**

Example: Poor visibility



b



**INDIRECT CAUSE**

Example: Inadequate lighting



c



**Share completed investigation  
report with management**



d



**Implement required changes  
as a result of investigation**

Example: Improve lighting

# Supporting your employer's health and safety program

## Health and safety program administration

Supervisors are the hands-on administrators of their organization's health and safety program.

You take the health and safety message to the workers, providing orientations, explaining expectations at health and safety meetings, and demonstrating and reinforcing safe work practices every day.

Communication is a necessary skill for you as supervisor. The ability "to communicate readily and clearly with the worker" forms part of the definition of a "direct supervisor" in the Occupational Health and Safety Code (Part 1).

It's not enough to be a good speaker: able to provide clear instructions and communicate expectations. A supervisor also has to be a good listener. Your workers need to know they can come to you with questions or concerns. They need to know you'll hear them, provide support and follow up as necessary.

While your workers look to you for timely guidance and support, your employer relies on you to be their eyes, ears and record keeper on the front line. You monitor performance, collect worker feedback, track attendance and record incidents.

Your paperwork helps paint a picture of your organization's actual health and safety performance. It contributes to audit results. It keeps your health and safety program up to date and informs future health and safety program initiatives.

Your organization's health and safety program, together with Alberta legislation, determines the records you keep. There is a documented chain of requirements that includes safety standards and safe work practices. You need to know what's required when, and you need to make sure those requirements are met. If you don't know, ask your employer.



# Supporting your employer's health and safety program

## Dealing with non-compliance

At minimum, your employer's health and safety policies and procedures must comply with Alberta's occupational health and safety legislation. It's your employer's responsibility to make sure they do. As supervisor, it's your job to make sure the workers you supervise follow your organization's health and safety program.

If your employer has a documented disciplinary process to deal with non-compliance, you must know and follow that program. If no formal process exists, you should follow this guideline:

Whenever you see unsafe behaviours or activities, take action.

- As soon as it's safe to do so, stop the work.
- Identify the worker involved.
- Find out what instructions the worker received and who provided those instructions.
- Find out why work was performed in this manner (root cause).
- Notify the employer.
- Take corrective action.
- Document what happened.



## Ticketing and administrative penalties

Alberta's occupational health and safety officers have the authority to enter a work site at any time during work hours for the purposes of conducting an inspection. They are authorized to issue tickets or administrative penalties to any parties regulated by the legislation including workers, contractors, suppliers, prime contractors and employers.

Tickets are a compliance tool that delivers an immediate consequence to workers or employers. When occupational health and safety officers see someone violating specific provisions of occupational health and safety legislation, they may issue a ticket.



## Supporting your employer's health and safety program

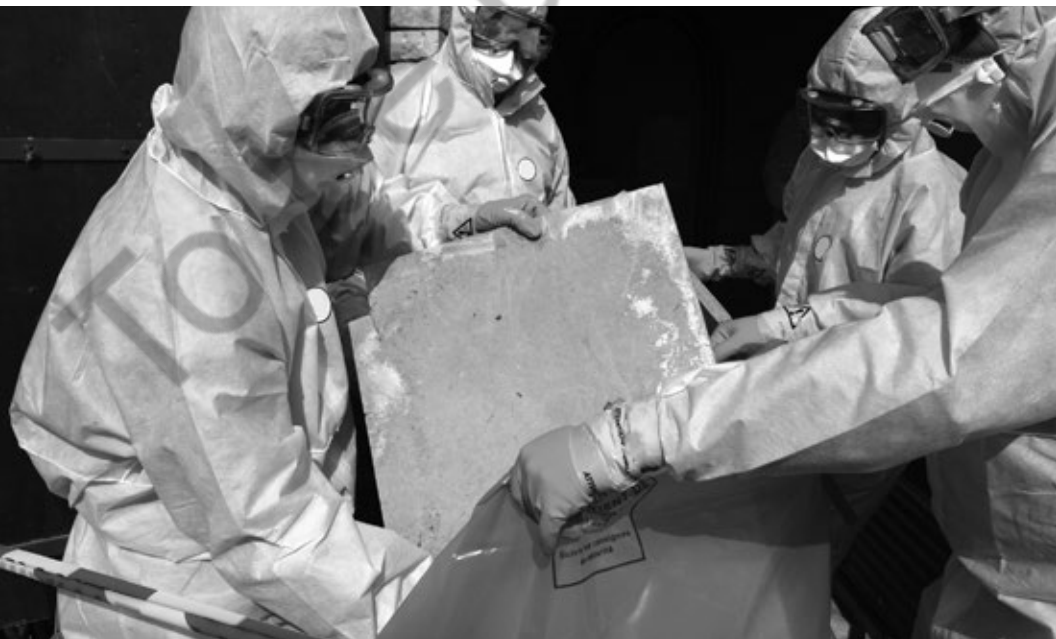
Tickets can be issued to workers as well as employers/organizations. They're based on observed violations such as not wearing required personal protective equipment, or smoking near a flammable substance. They hold individuals accountable for their behaviour in much the same way as a traffic violation ticket and can be paid or contested in court.

Administrative penalties go to the employer/organization. These are triggered by offences such as failing to comply with a Stop Work Order, or continuing to use equipment that has a Stop Use Order. If you fail to act in compliance with occupational health and safety legislation, or fail to ensure the workers you supervise do, it can lead to an administrative penalty for your employer.

Ticketing and administrative penalties are options for Alberta's occupational health and safety officers. The goal is improved compliance with occupational health and safety legislation. Healthy and safe work environments are a shared responsibility between government and all regulated parties.

# Contractors and your health and safety responsibilities

It's common practice for organizations to hire contractors to take care of specific projects or aspects of larger projects at a work site. In some situations, supervisors are not involved in the process of selecting contractors, and you may not be authorized to manage their work activities (i.e. their contracts). But once they're working on site, it could be your responsibility to oversee the contractors in a way that protects the health and safety of everyone on site. You should check documentation and conduct inspections to confirm that contractors on site are in compliance with occupational health and safety legislation.



# Contractors and your health and safety responsibilities

## Prime contractor's role

Alberta legislation requires a prime contractor be identified at every work site where there is more than one employer present on site over the course of the project. By default, if no prime contractor is identified, the law considers the owner of the work site the prime contractor.



Every work site must have a prime contractor if there are 2 or more employers involved in work at the work site.

The prime contractor for a work site is:

- a. the contractor, employer or other person who enters into an agreement with the owner of the work site to be the prime contractor, or
- b. if no agreement has been made or if no agreement is in force, the owner of the work site.

*Occupational Health and Safety Act, Section 3(1–2)*

Different employers can have different health and safety priorities and expectations. It's the prime contractor's responsibility to make sure the work site remains safe for everyone despite those differences.

As a supervisor for the prime contractor, you'll need to coordinate effective communication about health and safety expectations on the site.



A prime contractor must ensure that any employer on a work site is made aware of any existing or potential work site hazards that may affect that employer's workers.

*Occupational Health and Safety Code, Part 2, Section 7(5)*

You'll also need to address and resolve any related conflicts. Regardless of who's doing the work, you're expected to do your best to make sure it's being done in a way that complies with Alberta's occupational health and safety legislation.



If a work site is required to have a prime contractor under subsection (1), the prime contractor shall ensure, as far as it is reasonably practicable to do so, that this Act, the regulations and the adopted code are complied with in respect of the work site.

*Occupational Health and Safety Act, Section 3(3)*

# Contractors and your health and safety responsibilities

## Contractor management system

A strong contractor management system will make your role in supervising contractors easier. It can limit health and safety issues by establishing consistent procedures, and defining clear roles and expectations for everyone from the beginning.

On the next page are some key elements that every contractor management system should cover, and why.



- **A contractor's health and safety program and performance history:** including this as part of the prequalification process for contractors sends a clear message that health and safety is a priority on your employer's work sites. Contractors are required to provide documentation up front that defines their health and safety practices, verifies they have the appropriate training and insurance coverage, and testifies to their past health and safety performance/lessons learned.
- **Contractor safety orientations:** this is about setting contractors up for success at your job site. These orientations should fulfill the legal requirement to communicate expectations, working conditions and hazards at the work site. They should cover the rules, safe work procedures, reporting requirements and emergency action plans that contractors are expected to follow.
- **On-site supervision:** keeps workers aware of and accountable for health and safety on the job by ensuring regular inspections, hazard assessments, planned safety talks and formal reporting procedures are completed. It's everyone's responsibility to ensure legislation and site-specific rules are followed.
- **End of contract debrief:** this feedback session creates the opportunity to improve on existing healthy and safe work practices, and strengthen the contractor management system moving forward.

# Contractors and your health and safety responsibilities

## When someone else is in charge

Your employer may not always be the prime contractor on a work site. If a written agreement is in place authorizing another party to act as prime contractor, or if a second work site is introduced within the first (i.e. a work site within a work site), the scope of your role as supervisor can change.

What doesn't change is your responsibility to the workers you supervise. You remain obligated to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of your workers on site. If a contractor puts your workers in danger, you must intervene immediately to protect them from harm. That may include stopping the work until the risk is either eliminated or controlled.





# Supervisor's checklist

To be a competent supervisor,  
I need to:

- ☐ Know and understand my employer's occupational health and safety program, policies and procedures.
- ☐ Know and tell workers about their health and safety rights and responsibilities.
- ☐ Conduct a formal hazard assessment for the work site.
- ☐ Identify (with help from my workers) hazards and their related controls.
- ☐ Communicate all hazards and related controls to my workers (and management).
- ☐ Complete my required inspections.
- ☐ Communicate relevant safe work practices to my workers.
- ☐ Confirm that my workers have the training, tools and equipment necessary to perform their jobs.
- ☐ Wear/use required personal protective equipment when on site.
- ☐ Ensure my workers are wearing/using required personal protective on site.
- ☐ Ensure my workers know where to find information on occupational health and safety at the work site, including related legislation.
- ☐ Do everything in my power to ensure the health and safety of my workers.
- ☐ Lead by example.

To be updated

# Qualities of an effective supervisor

To be updated

# Qualities of an effective supervisor

Supervisors have a lot of responsibility within an organization. Workers look to them for advice and support in the performance of their jobs. Employers rely on them to mentor, monitor and help motivate their workers to uphold adopted standards. Alberta legislation requires that direct supervision be carried out by a competent worker.

There are a number of qualities and skills that combine to make someone a good supervisor. You'll want to consider these when promoting a worker into the role, or hiring someone new.

## Supervisors need to understand the role as it is defined by the organization.

They need to know what's expected of them and what's expected of the workers they will supervise. This includes understanding their employer's occupational health and safety program, and demonstrating the skills needed to support it.

## Supervisors need leadership skills.

Your workers will be looking to their supervisor for leadership. It's up to the supervisor to earn their trust and respect. "Do what I do" is easier for workers to follow than "Do what I say." Supervisors should demonstrate the attitude and behaviours that they expect from others. Lead by example.

## Qualities of an effective supervisor

### Supervisors need strong communication skills.

Supervisors are the direct conduit of information between the organization and its workers. That information flows both ways, keeping the workers up to speed on management's expectations, and keeping management up to date on what's happening on the front line.

Supervisors must be able to communicate expectations and provide clear instructions. They must also be good listeners, able to grasp and summarize situations effectively, and provide an accurate account of what they hear.

### Supervisors have to be able to organize and prioritize.

Overseeing multiple workers, worker schedules and work activities is a big responsibility. Supervisors have to be able to organize and prioritize effectively. They need this skill set for performing hazard assessments as well, involving workers in the process of identifying hazards, ranking risk and prioritizing controls.

### Supervisors need to demonstrate strong attention to detail.

Taking care of workers on the job involves keeping them safe and helping them keep one another safe. Workplace hazards aren't always obvious. Sometimes they are the result of something that's supposed to be there but isn't (e.g. personal protective equipment). A supervisor should always be on the lookout for anything that could pose a risk. This role requires a keen eye and a broad focus.

# Setting them up for success

Hiring the right people for the job is important, but it's just the first step in making sure your workers have competent supervision.

Alberta's occupational health and safety legislation requires supervisors to be competent before they start the job.



A worker who is not competent to perform work that may endanger the worker or others must not perform the work except under the direct supervision of a worker who is competent to perform the work.

*Occupational Health and Safety Regulation, Section 14(1)*

It's your responsibility as the employer to make sure supervisors have the training they'll need to be successful.

Supervisors must understand and accept:

- The authorities they are given by their employer.
- The organization's health and safety management system, which should meet or exceed the minimum standards required by law.
- The organization's health and safety standards and operational procedures.
- The responsibility to eliminate or control any known or potential hazards related to the workplace.
- Their responsibilities related to occupational health and safety.

## Setting them up for success

You need to support your supervisors on the job. They will only be as effective as you allow them to be. Give them the authority to do their work and the time, training and resources they'll need to do it well.

And remember, you can talk about health and safety all you want as an organization, but it's your supervisors who directly influence your workers on a day-to-day basis. They can either build up the corporate health and safety culture with a positive attitude and proactive behaviour, or they can let it down. Make sure workplace health and safety remains top of mind so your supervisors are committed to sending the right message to the workers.

At the end of the day, the success of the supervisor is determined by the organization's commitment to health and safety. Your training of a supervisor affects the safety performance of everyone within your organization. Include occupational health and safety measures as a regular part of supervisors' performance reviews.

The supervisor's role is essential to keeping Alberta's workers healthy and safe on the job.



# Resources

To be updated

To be updated

# Resources

## Occupational Health and Safety Legislation

A copy of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, Regulations and Code, and OHS Code Explanation Guide, together with this handbook can provide an excellent basis from which to begin understanding supervisor roles and responsibilities.

This handbook is current to March 2015. It references:

*Occupational Health and Safety Act*, Chapter O-2, R.S.A. 2000 (current as of October 1, 2013)

Occupational Health and Safety Regulation, AR 62/2003 (with amendments up to AR 182/2013)

Occupational Health and Safety Code 2009

Occupational Health and Safety Code Explanation Guide 2009

The current OHS legislation is available online at:

**[work.alberta.ca/ohs-legislation](http://work.alberta.ca/ohs-legislation)**

## Resources

Official printed versions of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, Regulations and Code Handbook and OHS Code Explanation Guide may be purchased from Alberta Queen's Printer:

**qp.alberta.ca**

7th floor Park Plaza Building  
10611 – 98 Avenue NW  
Edmonton, AB T5K 2P7

**Phone: 780-427-4952**

**Fax: 780-452-0668**

**Email: qp@gov.ab.ca**

## Additional resources

Government of Alberta – OHS Legislation

**[work.alberta.ca/ohs-legislation](http://work.alberta.ca/ohs-legislation)**

Government of Alberta –

OHS Legislation Awareness eLearning Program

**[work.alberta.ca/elearning/Legislation/legislation.htm](http://work.alberta.ca/elearning/Legislation/legislation.htm)**

Government of Alberta –

Hazard Assessment eLearning Program

**[work.alberta.ca/elearning/hazard/Hazard.htm](http://work.alberta.ca/elearning/hazard/Hazard.htm)**

Government of Alberta –

Hazard Assessment and Control:

a handbook for Alberta employers and workers [BP018]

**[work.alberta.ca/documents/ohs-best-practices-BP018.pdf](http://work.alberta.ca/documents/ohs-best-practices-BP018.pdf)**

Government of Alberta –

Leading Indicators for Workplace Health and Safety:  
a user guide [BP019]

**[work.alberta.ca/documents/ohs-best-practices-BP019.pdf](http://work.alberta.ca/documents/ohs-best-practices-BP019.pdf)**

Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety  
(CCOHS) – Job Safety Analysis

**[ccohs.ca/oshanswers/hsprograms/job-haz.html](http://ccohs.ca/oshanswers/hsprograms/job-haz.html)**

# Contact us

## Province-wide OHS Contact Centre

For general information or to order publications:

### **Edmonton and surrounding area**

**780-415-8690**

### **Throughout Alberta**

**1-866-415-8690**

For the deaf or hard-of-hearing (TDD/TTY)

### **In Edmonton**

**780-427-9999**

### **Throughout Alberta**

**1-800-232-7215**

## Website

**[work.alberta.ca/OHS](http://work.alberta.ca/OHS)**

## Workers' Compensation Board (WCB)

Employers must report any visit to a doctor for a work-related injury or illness to the Workers' Compensation Board. Call **780-498-3999** or toll-free **1-866-922-9221**.

## Feedback survey

**[work.alberta.ca/ohsresourcesurvey](http://work.alberta.ca/ohsresourcesurvey)**

To be updated

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