

# Violence and harassment in the workplace

## OHS information for employers, supervisors and workers

This publication explains Alberta occupational health and safety legal requirements related to workplace violence and harassment, including [new rules](#) that came into effect in December 2024. Until March 30, 2025, work site parties can follow the new rules or the previous rules. (A resource explaining the previous rules is available [here](#).)

### KEY INFORMATION

- Violence and harassment are workplace hazards.
- Employers must develop a violence and harassment prevention plan.
- Employers and supervisors must ensure workers are not subject to or participate in workplace violence or harassment.
- Workers must not cause or participate in violence or harassment.

Violence and harassment can take place at any work site and may range from disrespectful remarks to physical aggression. Addressing issues early on can prevent acts of bullying and harassment from progressing to acts of physical violence. Alberta's occupational health and safety laws include requirements to prevent and address workplace violence and harassment.

## Workplace violence

### Defining workplace violence

Workplace violence is defined in Alberta's *Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Act*.

"Violence", whether at a work site or work-related, means the threatened, attempted or actual conduct of a person that causes or is likely to cause physical or psychological injury or harm, and includes domestic or sexual violence.

OHS Act, Section 1(rr)

Violence is a workplace hazard that can put workers at risk of physical or psychological harm. It must be addressed during a [hazard assessment](#).

### Examples of workplace violence

- Physical attack or aggression (for example, hitting, shoving, pushing or kicking a worker, throwing an object at a worker, kicking an object the worker is standing on, such as a ladder).
- Threatening behaviour (for example, shaking a fist in a worker's face, wielding a weapon at work, trying to hit a worker, trying to run down a worker using a vehicle or equipment such as a forklift, destroying property or throwing objects).
- Verbal or written threats (for example, verbally threatening to attack a worker, leaving threatening notes or sending threatening emails to express an intent to inflict harm on a worker).
- Domestic violence.
- Sexual violence.

### Domestic violence

When an employer is aware that a worker is or is likely to be exposed to domestic violence at a work site, the employer must take reasonable precautions to protect the worker and any other persons at the work site likely to be affected.

OHS Code, Part 27, Section 390.3

Domestic violence is a pattern of behaviour used by one person to gain power and control over another with whom the person has (or has had) a personal relationship, including dating, marriage, adult interdependent partnerships, custody, blood relationships and adoption.

Behaviours can range from subtle, intimidating behaviours to violent acts that result in physical harm or death. Domestic violence can include physical violence, sexual abuse, financial control, emotional

and psychological intimidation, verbal abuse, stalking or using electronic devices to harass and control.

Domestic violence becomes a workplace hazard, not a limited personal issue, when it occurs at, or spills over into, the workplace. It may put the targeted worker at risk and may pose a threat to co-workers.

Read [Domestic violence in the workplace](#) to learn more.

### Sexual violence

Sexual violence as a workplace hazard includes any sexual act or attempt to obtain a sexual act by any person (regardless of their relationship to the victim) whether at the work site or work-related.

## Workplace harassment

### Defining workplace harassment

The definition of harassment in the OHS Act includes a broad range of harassing behaviours that could involve or affect workers.

“Harassment” is any single incident or repeated incidents of objectionable or unwelcome conduct, comment, bullying or action by a person that the person knows or ought reasonably to know will or would cause offence or humiliation to a worker, or adversely affects the worker’s health and safety, and includes

- (i) conduct, comment, bullying or action because of race, religious beliefs, colour, physical disability, mental disability, age, ancestry, place of origin, marital status, source of income, family status, gender, gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation, and
- (ii) a sexual solicitation or advance,

but excludes any reasonable conduct of an employer or supervisor in respect of management of workers or a work site.

OHS Act Section 1(n)

Workplace harassment is behaviour intended to intimidate, offend, degrade or humiliate a particular person or group. It is a serious issue and creates an unhealthy work environment resulting in psychological harm to workers.

Harassment is a workplace hazard. It must be addressed during a [hazard assessment](#).

### Examples of workplace harassment

- Unwelcome conduct, comments, gestures or contact that cause offence or humiliation (for example, name-calling, harassing phone calls, spreading rumours).
- Deliberate misgendering (for example, referring to a person using terms or pronouns that do not align with the person's affirmed gender).
- Physical or psychological bullying that creates fear or mistrust or that ridicules or devalues the individual (for example, fist shaking, yelling).
- Exclusion or isolation of individuals.
- Intimidation (for example, standing too close or making inappropriate gestures/comments).
- Cyberbullying (for example, posting or sending offensive or intimidating messages through social media or email).
- Deliberately setting the individual up to fail (for example, making unreasonable demands, setting impossible deadlines, interfering with work).
- Intentionally withholding information or giving the wrong information.
- Taking away work or responsibility without cause.
- Displaying or circulating offensive pictures or materials in print or electronic form.

### What’s NOT workplace harassment?

It is not considered harassment when an employer or supervisor takes reasonable actions while managing and directing workers.

Reasonable actions considered to be part of a manager’s or supervisor’s work functions include changing work assignments; scheduling, assessing and evaluating work performance; inspecting workplaces; implementing health and safety measures; and taking disciplinary action such as dismissing, suspending, demoting or reprimanding with just cause. When done reasonably and fairly, these actions are not workplace harassment.

Differences of opinion or minor disagreements between co-workers are also not considered workplace harassment. However, these situations can turn into harassment if steps aren’t taken to resolve the conflict. Similarly, difficult conditions of employment, such as professional practice limitations,

organizational changes or financial restrictions, are not considered harassment.

Work-related stress on its own doesn't constitute harassment. However, an accumulation of stress factors resulting from harassing behaviours such as those described earlier may result in a harassment situation.

## Work site party obligations

Social expectations about workplace health and safety have changed over time. Issues such as psychological health (particularly workplace harassment and bullying) are included in occupational health and safety legislation. As part of the roles of individuals at the work site, the OHS Act and OHS Code define specific duties employers, supervisors and workers must follow to address violence and harassment at the workplace.

The OHS Act states:

- Employers must, as far as reasonably practicable, ensure their workers are not subject to or participate in violence or harassment at the work site.
- Supervisors must, as far as reasonably practicable, ensure workers under their supervision are not subject to or participate in violence or harassment at the work site.
- Workers must refrain from causing or participating in violence or harassment.

## Hazard assessment

Hazard assessment and control is a documented approach to preventing work-related illness or injury.

Employers must identify situations that could put workers at risk of violence or harassment at the workplace. Recognizing these real and potential hazards, employers must take steps to eliminate or control them and prevent harm to workers.

Learn more in [Hazard assessment and control: a handbook for Alberta employers and workers](#).

## Violence and harassment prevention plan

Employers must develop and implement a violence and harassment prevention plan.

The plan must be in writing and readily available to workers at the work site, as well as (if there is one) the

health and safety committee or representative. Both paper and digital formats are acceptable.

### What the plan must include

Section 390(1) of the OHS Code states the minimum requirements for a violence and harassment prevention plan. These are:

- Measures to eliminate or (if that isn't reasonably practicable) control violence and harassment hazards.
- Procedures to inform workers about the nature and extent of violence and harassment hazards, including specific or general threats.
- Reporting procedures for violence or harassment
- Investigation procedures for violence or harassment complaints and incidents.
- Provisions to protect the confidentiality of work site parties involved in a complaint or incident, except where disclosure is required by law or necessary to:
  - investigate the complaint or incident,
  - take corrective action,
  - inform involved parties about investigation results or corrective action, or
  - inform workers of a specific or general threat of violence or potential violence.
- Where applicable, additional requirements for retail fuelling outlets and convenience stores.
  - See the [Fuel and convenience section](#) for more about these requirements.

### Reviewing the plan

Employers must review their violence and harassment prevention plan if any of these circumstances apply:

- An incidence of violence or harassment indicates a review is needed.
- A change in the work or work site could affect the potential for violence or harassment.
- The health and safety committee or representative requests a review.
- There hasn't been a review in three years.

Employers must revise the harassment and violence prevention plan as needed following a required review.

### Involving workers

When developing, implementing or reviewing a violence and harassment prevention plan, employers must consult with:

- The health and safety committee, if there is one.
- The health and safety representative, if there is one.
- Affected workers, as far as reasonably practicable, if there is no health and safety committee or representative.

## Worker training

It's important that workers know what to do and what is in place in relation to violence and harassment prevention at their workplace.

Employers must ensure workers are trained in violence and harassment prevention. This training must include:

- How to recognize violence and harassment.
- The employer's violence and harassment prevention plan, and any revisions.
- Appropriate responses (including how to get help).
- Reporting, investigation and documentation procedures for violence and harassment complaints and incidents.

## Incidents

Section 391.1 of the OHS Code states that Sections 33(6) (a) to (c), 33(7), 33(8) and 36 of the OHS Act apply to incidents of violence or harassment.

### Employer investigations and reports

A prime contractor – or if there isn't one, the employer – must investigate any incident of violence or harassment. They must also prepare an investigation report, outlining the circumstances of the incident and any corrective action taken to prevent recurrence.

Certain rules apply to the report:

- The prime contractor or employer must retain the report for at least two years after the incident.
- The prime contractor or employer must ensure the report is readily available and provide a copy of the report to Alberta Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) on request.

### Worker support

An employer must ensure that a worker reporting an injury or adverse symptom resulting from an incident of violence or harassment is advised to consult a health professional (of the worker's choice) for treatment or referral.

Some employers provide an employee assistance program at the workplace. An employee assistance program is a confidential, short term, counselling service for employees that offers help in resolving personal problems that are affecting their work. Workers affected by violence or harassment may wish to access these services.

### Entitlement to pay

A worker is deemed to be at work when treated by a physician (or further to a physician's referral) during regular work hours, in relation to an incidence of violence or harassment at the employer's work site.

## Fuel and convenience

Retail fuelling outlets and convenience stores are defined in the occupational health and safety laws.

**Retail fuelling outlet** means “a retail outlet at which gasoline or other fuels are sold and pumped into the fuel tanks of motor vehicles.” (Section 1 of the OHS Code.)

**Convenience store** means “convenience stores or other retail outlets that offer limited quantities of general goods for sale such as food and household items, but (does not include) pharmacies, liquor stores, cannabis stores or other retail outlets that focus on a narrow category of goods for sale.” (Section 392.1(b) of the OHS Code.)

Employers and workers at these work sites have additional responsibilities related to violence and harassment prevention. These are set out in Sections 392.2, 392.5 and 392.6 of the OHS Code.

### Additional prevention plan requirements for fuel and convenience work sites

The OHS Code requires that employers with retail fuelling outlets or convenience stores must ensure the following, and include these in their violence and harassment prevention plan:

- Safe cash-handling procedures, including limits on the amount of cash workers can readily access.
- Good visibility into and out of the work site.
- Limits on public access to building interiors.
- Video surveillance monitoring.
- Visible signs indicating that the work site is monitored by video surveillance.

- Each worker working alone is provided with a personal emergency transmitter that the employer or their designate monitors.
- Requirements that apply when a work site is open to the public between 11:00 p.m. and 5:00 a.m.
  - A time lock safe that workers can't open between those hours.
  - Limited quantities of high-value items including cash and lottery tickets.
  - Remaining high-value items are securely stored.
  - Visible signs indicating time lock safe, and limited high value items, are in place.

Learn more about the role and duties of an OHS officer in the [Role and duties of Alberta OHS officers](#) and [What to expect in an OHS inspection: information for employers](#) publications.

### **Worker obligation**

Workers must wear their personal emergency transmitter when they are working alone.

### **Prepay requirement**

Employers must require the prepayment of fuel sold at retail fuelling outlets unless another method of ensuring payment is approved by an OHS Director.

Learn more about fuel and convenience requirements in the [Fuel and convenience store employer guide: violence and harassment prevention plan](#) and [Fuel prepay requirement](#) resources listed in “For more information”.

## **Alberta OHS inspections**

OHS officers carry out inspections and investigations to enforce occupational health and safety legislation. If officers believe a work site is unhealthy or unsafe, they can take a variety of enforcement actions.

Officers may also provide employers and workers educational resources to help them understand their occupational health and safety rights and responsibilities.

Officers do not resolve disputes at work sites or advocate for any work site party. Officers also do not have authority to:

- Impose disciplinary action (for example, reprimands or termination) on work site parties.
- Dictate how an employer manages their work schedule, worker placement or training.
- Oblige an employer to compensate workers affected by an incident.

## Contact us

### OHS Contact Centre

#### Alberta toll-free

- 1-866-415-8690

#### Edmonton region

- 780-415-8690

#### Deaf or hard of hearing (TTY)

- 1-800-232-7215 (Alberta toll-free)
- 780-427-9999 (Edmonton region)

### Notify OHS of health and safety concerns

[alberta.ca/file-complaint-online](https://alberta.ca/file-complaint-online)

Call the OHS Contact Centre if you have concerns that involve immediate danger to a person on a work site.

### Report a workplace incident to OHS

[alberta.ca/ohs-complaints-incidents](https://alberta.ca/ohs-complaints-incidents)

#### Website

[alberta.ca/ohs](https://alberta.ca/ohs)

#### OHS Resource Portal

[ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca](https://ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca)

## Get copies of the OHS Act, Regulation and Code

### Alberta King's Printer

[alberta.ca/alberta-kings-printer](https://alberta.ca/alberta-kings-printer)

### OHS

[alberta.ca/ohs-act-regulation-code](https://alberta.ca/ohs-act-regulation-code)

## For more information

Alberta Human Rights Commission

[albertahumanrights.ab.ca](https://albertahumanrights.ab.ca)

Domestic violence in the workplace (LI059)

[ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/li059](https://ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/li059)

Fuel and convenience store employer guide: violence and harassment prevention plan (BP031)

[ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/bp031](https://ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/bp031)

Fuel prepay requirement (LI072)

[ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/li072](https://ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/li072)

Hazard assessment and control: a handbook for Alberta employers and workers (BP018)

[ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/bp018](https://ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/bp018)

Health and safety committees and representatives (LI060)

[ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/li060](https://ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/li060)

Role and duties of Alberta OHS officers (LI046)

[ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/li046](https://ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/li046)

Violence and harassment prevention plan (template) TMP005

[ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/TMP005](https://ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/TMP005)

What to expect in an OHS inspection: information for employers (CI007)

[ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/ci007](https://ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/ci007)

## Let us know what you think!

To provide feedback on this publication, visit [ohs-pubstore.labour.ab.ca/LI045](https://ohs-pubstore.labour.ab.ca/LI045) and click "Give resource feedback". For more OHS resources, visit the [OHS Resource Portal](https://ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca).

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## Appendix: Violence and harassment prevention plan (template)

This template is for example purposes. A link to an MS Word version that you can customize for your work and work site is provided in “For more information” on the previous page. **If you choose to use this template, make sure you customize it to your work and work site.** Note that this template addresses Section 390(1), OHS Code requirements only. There are other requirements in Part 27 of the code. It’s recommended that you include those in your violence and harassment prevention plan as appropriate.

**Employer name:**

**Date:**

**Next scheduled review date:** *(Maximum of three years.)*

**Health and safety committee or representative consulted (if there is one):** Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ N/A \_\_\_

**Affected workers consulted (if there is no committee or representative):** Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ N/A \_\_\_

### Required prevention plan content

#### Measures the employer will take to eliminate or control violence and harassment hazards

*(These must comply with all hazard assessment and control requirements in Part 2 of the OHS Code. If you are a retail fuelling outlet or a convenience store, you must also include the controls required in Section 392.2 of the code.)*

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#### Procedures for informing workers about the nature and extent of violence and harassment hazards, including information about specific or general threats that exist or may exist:

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#### Violence and harassment reporting procedures:

*(These must include procedures for reporting incidents where required under Section 33(1) of the OHS Act.)*

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#### Procedures for investigating complaints and incidents of violence and harassment:

*(These must include your internal complaint resolution process, as well as the investigations requirements of Section 33(6)(a) to (c) of the OHS Act.)*

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#### Provisions to protect the confidentiality of all parties involved in a complaint or incident, except where disclosure is either required by law or necessary to investigate the complaint or incident; take corrective action; or inform involved parties about investigation results and any corrective action taken:

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