Understanding Indigenous Workers' Occupational Health and Safety Needs

Tips for Indigenous Training and Employment Organizations

Health and Safety in the Workplace

Alberta's Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Act affects workers you help provide training and employment services. Creating a healthy and safe work environment is a team effort and everyone has a role to play.

This means everyone (such as workers, supervisors and employers) is responsible for protecting health and safety in the workplace. Each must rely on the other to ensure they are doing their part. For this to work, everyone must know – and do – what's expected of them in their role.

Workers need to know their rights and responsibilities. They should also know that there are supports available, like training and employment organizations, that can help create OHS awareness. Training and employment organizations that specifically work with First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples are a trusted source for information. Indigenous workers may turn to these organizations for health and safety guidance, advice and support.

As a training and employment organization, you may have specific responsibilities under the OHS Act as service providers and temporary staffing agencies.

Indigenous workers may need support to:

- become aware of their OHS rights and responsibilities.
- navigate potential issues of health and safety in their workplace.
- address health and safety concerns or situations. Some workers may be hesitant to express concerns feeling they'll not be heard or taken seriously, that they won't fit in with their co-workers or may fear losing their job.

Workers should never have to compromise their own health and safety. Your training and employment organization has the ability to empower and protect Indigenous workers.

Indigenous workers' OHS needs

Understanding the distinct needs Indigenous workers have for OHS information can help keep them healthy and safe at work. Here are some common issues, or topics, Indigenous workers identified as the information they should know.

Lateral violence (harassment and violence)

Indigenous workers may be at higher risk of exposure to harassment and violence in the workplace. Harassment and violence are hazards that could harm workers' mental and physical health, create apathetic or disengaged workers, and increase workplace absenteeism or resignation from their job.

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Indigenous workers may refer to harassment and violence as lateral violence. Lateral violence has similar outcomes and impacts on the health and safety of workers.

Every employer must develop and implement a harassment prevention plan and a violence prevention plan at the workplace. These must contain policies that clearly set expectations that harassment and violence are not tolerated in the work environment.

Health and safety training

OHS training is required for all workers. Indigenous workers, in particular, benefit from information and training on health and safety topics like understanding their rights and responsibilities, how to refuse dangerous work, how to report dangerous work, what the hazards of their job are and ways to stay safe.

Accessing OHS information

Indigenous workers should know that they can report unsafe or unhealthy conditions at their workplace, injuries or incidents, and ask general health and safety questions to the Alberta OHS Contact Centre. Serious injuries or incidents must be reported as soon as possible to the OHS Contact Centre. The OHS Contact Centre is free, confidential and respects anonymity.

Workers are also encouraged to report workplace injuries to the Alberta Workers' Compensation Board (WCB).

How can you help?

- include OHS topics in conversations or training sessions with the workers you are helping.
- provide workers with links to OHS information.
- encourage workers to actively participate in the health and safety initiatives of their workplace – health and safety is everyone's responsibility.

For more information

Alberta OHS resources
alberta.ca/ohs-resources.aspx

Worker's guide to occupational health and safety
https://ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/li008

Worker participation in health and safety
https://ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/LI041

Workplace violence and harassment webinar recording
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wibQ66PD84g

Report an injury with WCB
https://www.wcb.ab.ca/claims/report-an-injury

For province-wide OHS Contact Centre

1-866-415-8690 (Throughout Alberta)

780-415-8690 (Edmonton)

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

1-800-232-7215

Ask health and safety questions online at
alberta.ca/ask-expert

Workers should also know what the rules are for Employment Standards.

If the workers you help have any questions that focus on pay, hours of work, overtime, vacation time, general holidays and other rules for employment standards, including information about filing a complaint or making an anonymous tip, contact Employment Standards Contact Centre at alberta.ca/EmploymentStandards or call **1-877-427-3731** toll free in Alberta.

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