

# Occupational health and safety and the internal responsibility system

## OHS information for all Alberta work site parties

This bulletin gives basic information about the internal responsibility system that is the basis of Alberta's *Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Act*, Regulation and Code.

### KEY INFORMATION

- Everyone in the workplace shares responsibility for health and safety.
- As authority and control increase, so do health and safety responsibilities.

### What is an internal responsibility system?

An internal responsibility system is a way of sharing responsibility for health and safety between everyone in the workplace. Responsibility is shared according to each person's legal obligations, which are often based upon that person's authority and control at the work site.

Because control and authority may not be shared equally at workplaces, responsibilities for health and safety may not be shared equally.

In an internal responsibility system, employers are usually seen as having the most responsibilities, but all work site parties, including workers, have responsibilities.

### Internal responsibility systems and legislation

In Canada, OHS legislation relies on the foundation of the internal responsibility system.

In some jurisdictions, such as Nova Scotia and Ontario, the internal responsibility system is written into or directly referenced in OHS legislation.

In other jurisdictions, including Alberta, the internal responsibility system is not included explicitly in legislation, but is a defining concept – especially in regards to legislated roles and responsibilities for work site parties.

Internal responsibility systems are also evident in Canadian legislation through requirements for worker participation in

workplace health and safety, such as joint health and safety committees and health and safety representatives. These legislated functions serve as an internal observer of OHS issues and a forum for shared problem solving.

The *OHS Act* defines roles and responsibilities of work site parties including employers, supervisors, workers, suppliers, service providers, contracting employers, owners, prime contractors and temporary staffing agencies.



### The internal responsibility system in action

An internal responsibility system is working if everyone participates in work site health and safety, health and safety is integrated into all work site activities, and these efforts are effective in identifying ways to prevent injury and illness and promote worker health.

The internal responsibility system also needs to be responsive in order to be effective. When a problem is identified, there has to be a timely response within the organization. This promotes self-reliance – that is, the internal system can identify and address its own issues.

Here are some examples of the internal responsibility system in action.

- A worker wiping up someone else's spill.
- A supervisor checking, in routine daily activities, whether workers are wearing appropriate personal protective equipment – and making sure they do so, if they were not.
- An employer keeping records of worker certifications and training, and checking regularly to make sure they are current.
- A supplier arriving at a new site following any posted signage, parking safely in a designated area, and checking in with the site office or front desk – where they receive an orientation and run through of site safety rules.

The questionnaire attached at the end of this bulletin can help evaluate your internal responsibility system, and identify strengths and areas for improvement.

The questionnaire addresses:

- commitment, participation, roles and responsibilities
- reporting and records management
- hazard assessment and controls
- training and information
- monitoring and evaluation

Internal responsibility systems are also the basis of well-built health and safety programs, or health and safety management systems. In Alberta, employers with 20 or more workers must have a health and safety program. Alberta employers can also register for a voluntary Certificate of Recognition (COR) if they have a health and safety management system that meets standards developed by the Government of Alberta and Certifying Partners.

For more on health and safety program requirements or the voluntary COR, read the bulletins [Health and safety programs](#) and [Certificate of Recognition 2019](#).



## Contact us

### OHS Contact Centre

Anywhere in Alberta

- 1-866-415-8690

Edmonton and surrounding area

- 780-415-8690

Deaf or hearing impaired

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

**Notify OHS of health and safety concerns**

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

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

### Website

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

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

Alberta Queen's Printer

[qp.gov.ab.ca](https://qp.gov.ab.ca)

### OHS

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

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## Internal responsibility system questionnaire

The questions below will help you assess how well the internal responsibility system is working in your organization. This questionnaire is a starting point and does not address all legislated work site party obligations.

To get the best picture,

- Ask a variety of people in a variety of roles at your work site – managers, supervisors, workers or other work site parties if present – to complete the questionnaire.
- Make sure the questions can be answered and returned anonymously.

YES	NO	N/A	COMMITMENT, PARTICIPATION, ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you understand the main concepts of the internal responsibility system?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you understand your rights under OHS legislation?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do you understand your OHS roles and responsibilities as they apply to your work?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are you familiar with your organization's health and safety policies, practices and procedures?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is there an established OHS program for your workplace?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do workers have meaningful participation in health and safety activities?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Does everyone hold themselves accountable for their health and safety responsibilities?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is your health and safety committee or representative active and engaged?
YES	NO	N/A	REPORTING AND RECORDS MANAGEMENT
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are workers given the opportunity to report health and safety concerns?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do workers feel comfortable expressing their concerns?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Does management respond promptly to OHS issues raised by workers?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are procedures in place to address work refusal of dangerous work, reporting of unsafe equipment or practices and complaint resolution?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are records kept as required by OHS legislation?
YES	NO	N/A	HAZARD ASSESSMENT AND CONTROLS
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are all jobs and tasks assessed for hazards?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are the individual(s) conducting hazard assessments trained and competent?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are workers involved in assessing hazards at the workplace and implementing control measures?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is there a system to track identified hazards, unsafe conditions/issues and the corrective action taken?
<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>TRAINING AND INFORMATION</b>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is instruction and training sufficient for the level of responsibility of each work site party?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is there access to health and safety information and resources, including current OHS legislation?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do work site parties demonstrate skills and knowledge necessary to perform their job in a healthy and safe manner?
<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>MONITOR, EVALUATE, AND IMPROVE</b>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is the OHS program reviewed regularly?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are work site inspections conducted at regular intervals?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is there a system in place to ensure follow-up action for deficiencies identified from work site inspections?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Are workplace incidents investigated?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Do the incident investigation procedures include measures to implement corrective actions?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Is the effectiveness of your organization's health and safety performance monitored to support continue improvement?