

Protection of workers during remediation of illegal fentanyl labs

OHS information for workers and employers

KEY INFORMATION

- **Signs of fentanyl on site might include:**
 - loose or green powder
 - packaging
 - scales
 - other paraphernalia that depicts drug manufacturing
- **Workers should only participate in remediation activities after they have completed a hazard assessment and have appropriate training, and personal protective equipment (PPE).**

THE HAZARDS: What are the hazards of fentanyl remediation activities?

Hazards depend on work environment and location; therefore, a risk assessment should be completed with every situation. Hazards may be:

- **physical:** violence, sharps, confined space, debris, heat;
- **chemical:** fentanyl (inhalation, ingestions, skin contact), airborne particulates and fumes;
- **biological:** blood and bodily fluids; and
- **psychological:** workplace stress, violence, extended hours and working alone.

It is the responsibility of the employer to complete a hazard assessment and identify controls to ensure the safety of the workers.

Safe Entry: Is the area or building where the lab is located safe to enter?

Identify the hazards associated with:

- the building;
- the neighborhood and environment;
- debris;
- signs of inhabitation;
- other illicit drug manufacturing activities and associated chemicals; and
- current manufacturing and distribution of illicit drugs.

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- A worker should be aware of their surroundings before engaging in and during remediation activities
- A worker engaged in remediation activities should know the signs and symptoms of fentanyl exposure and poisoning, and be aware of emergency procedures to take in such a scenario
- If naloxone kits are provided; ensure workers are competent to administer the medication

THE EFFECTS: What health effects could workers experience from fentanyl exposure?

Fentanyl is a chemical hazard and exposure to a very small amount of drug can have immediate adverse health effects such as:

- nausea and/or vomiting;
- confusion;
- altered heart rate;
- difficult, slow breathing or respiratory arrest;
- reduced level of consciousness; and
- cardiac arrest.

Fentanyl exposure occurs through absorption via skin contact, ingestion and inhalation. Exposure to fentanyl is a high risk during remediation activities.

What should you consider for personal protective equipment (PPE)?

PPE should be considered, when elimination, engineering and administrative controls are not alone effective hazard controls.

- The employer must conduct a hazard assessment and ensure that the appropriate controls are available. If PPE is used, it must be appropriate to the identified hazard, and provisions in the OHS Code related to PPE must be adhered to. If using controls, follow the hierarchy of controls as follows: engineering controls, administrative controls and PPE.
- The employer must ensure that workers have a way to properly decontaminate themselves, their PPE, tools, and equipment before they leave the work site.

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The Alberta Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Act, Regulation and Code apply to most employers and workers in Alberta. The employer has an overall obligation to protect the health and safety of all their workers.

The employer must:

- conduct a hazard assessment and ensure that the appropriate controls are available.
- develop safe work procedures and provide training to workers regarding the procedures and competencies required to perform remediation of fentanyl labs.
- ensure that all equipment used at the work site is in proper working condition and used in accordance with the manufacturer's specifications.
- ensure the proper maintenance, inventory and storage of naloxone kits and training for workers on their use, if the employer chooses to supply naloxone at the worksite.
- identify controls to reduce the risk of exposure to hazards in the workplace.
- if workers are required to use respiratory protective equipment (RPE) as part of their PPE, ensure the RPE is appropriate and workers have been fit-tested.

The worker must:

- participate in training provided by the employer.
- be competent to perform the duties associated with remediation activities.
- be aware of the hazards associated with remediation activities as well as hazards that are present in the work environment.

Depending on the nature of the work or changes in work environments, the OHS legislation may have additional requirements that must be followed. Employers should anticipate that there may be laws and legislation associated with naloxone administration that are separate from the OHS Act, Regulation, and Code.

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Contact Us

OHS Contact Centre

Edmonton & Surrounding area

- 780-415-8690

Throughout Alberta

- 1-866-415-8690

Deaf or hearing impaired:

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

Website

work.alberta.ca/ohs

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- Naloxone bulletin
<http://work.alberta.ca/whs-pub-ch076.pdf>
- NIOSH; fentanyl: Preventing Occupational Exposure to Emergency Responders
<https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/fentanyl/default.html>
- Protection of Workers during Remediation of Marijuana Grow Operations
<http://work.alberta.ca/documents/ohs-bulletin-bh020.pdf>

Get Copies of OHS Act, Regulation and Code

Alberta Queen's Printer

www.qp.gov.ab.ca

Occupational Health and Safety

work.alberta.ca/ohs-legislation

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