

Ministry tackles occupational health hazards on construction sites

One of the Ministry of Labour's (MOL) priorities this year is to tackle occupational health hazards that may lead both to occupational illness and to infectious diseases. Through its construction-sector plan for 2012, the MOL will continue to target sanitation on construction projects and its effects on the spread of infectious disease.

IHSA is helping spread awareness of this issue by conducting information sessions in association with the Ontario Association of Sewage Industry Services (OASIS).

On construction sites, workers are often exposed to infectious diseases because of unsanitary conditions in and around toilets and clean-up facilities.

Employers, owners, constructors, suppliers of equipment, and supervisors can all help to ensure that workers have access to toilets and clean-up facilities. Under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, they must maintain a clean worksite and make sure that facilities are available for workers to clean themselves if they have been exposed to any infectious diseases.

Everyone on a worksite should be trained in—and follow—safe procedures for maintaining good hygiene. Under the Act, workers must also have access to the following facilities:

Toilets

- water-flush toilets that are connected to a sanitary sewer, or chemical flush toilets
- a specified minimum number of toilets—including separate facilities for female workers unless the facilities are intended to be used by only one person at a time
- a specified minimum number of urinals.

Clean-up facilities

- clean-up facilities equipped with no fewer wash basins than half the number of toilets; hot and cold running water where reasonably possible; and either paper towels and waste receptacles or a hand dryer
- a hand cleanser that can be used without water and paper towels or a hand dryer if it is not possible to provide running water.

Clean-up and toilet facilities are probably the last place you would think to look for workplace health hazards. But when you're planning a job,





infectious diseases should actually be an important consideration.

When infectious diseases are acquired in a workplace from biological agents such as bacteria and viruses, they are considered occupational illnesses. The following are some of the hazardous agents that workers can be exposed to on a worksite due to poor sanitary conditions.

- Bacteria such as Salmonella, Escherichia coli (E. coli), and Listeria
- Viruses, including rotavirus and norovirus, the hepatitis A virus, and poliovirus
- Parasites such as *Cryptosporidium*, *Echinococcus* (tapeworm), and *Giardia*
- *Ascaris* (roundworm)

A well-maintained hand-washing facility not only helps eliminate infectious diseases, but also can keep workers safe from some of the toxic dusts and chemicals often found on construction sites. Hand washing helps remove toxic materials from the skin,

thereby preventing workers from developing skin reactions and ingesting hazardous chemicals.

Workers should remember to wash their hands after using the toilet; before eating, drinking, handling food, or smoking; after coughing or blowing their nose; and after contact with chemical agents.

Even if hand sanitizer is provided on a construction project, soap and water also need to be available to remove dirt, grease, and any hazardous chemicals.

In order to help spread the word on combatting these health hazards, IHSA is working with both the MOL and OASIS.

IHSA hosted free awareness seminars last fall and this spring so that companies in the construction sector could learn more about the requirements for sanitation facilities. Additional seminars may be held in the summer. For more details, visit www.ihsa.ca and click on News & Events at the top of the page. Or contact your IHSA consultant to indicate your interest in arranging a seminar in your area.

