

# What supervisors need to know

A recent series of IHSA Safety Podcasts dug deep into the many responsibilities of jobsite supervisors. We asked the experts for their best practices on everything from training to hazard identification to communicating with workers.

## Q What attributes make for a competent supervisor in an Ontario workplace?

**A Jody Young:** A supervisor has to know the jobs their workers are performing, and ensure those jobs are done safely and effectively. Keeping up to date with new training opportunities is a key component. As is being familiar with all equipment their workers need to use. And they must also be familiar with the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (OHSA), as well as the regulations that apply to their workplace. A competent supervisor is someone who is able to leverage their knowledge, training and experience, and regulatory familiarity to ensure they're aware of any potential or actual danger to health and safety in the workplace—and then communicate those issues to their workforce.

## Q What are some things a supervisor can do to contribute to workplace health and safety?

**A Jody Young:** The supervisor needs to be present and in control of the workplace. They need to be responsive to what's happening—and be part of an open communication system, so that workers feel free to alert them to any potential or existing hazards. Similarly, supervisors must ensure workers are aware of any potential hazards, what they may need in the form of training and written instructions, and that personal protective equipment has not only been provided to them, but is properly used. Conducting regular workplace inspections also makes an enormous impact: spotting any issues before they develop can save lives, without a doubt.



*Jody Young is Assistant Deputy Minister of the Employment and Training Division at the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training, and Skills Development.*

**Learn more from IHSA Safety Podcast episode 22: [ihsa.ca/competent-supervisor](https://ihsa.ca/competent-supervisor)**

## Q Is there specific training that supervisors need?

**A Alex Hernandez:** A competent supervisor should have a high level of knowledge about their field, which you usually get through years of experience as a worker. But you can start to become a better supervisor by taking IHSA's Basics of Supervising course. It's a two-day program where, first of all, you become more familiar with the OHSA and the regulations. Then you are introduced to the skills supervisors need to work with workers: how to plan, organize, direct, and control activities on the jobsite. And through a series of discussions and exercises, you learn how to inspect the workplace, communicate hazards, and investigate incidents. The idea is to help improve your knowledge with regard to your health and safety responsibilities, provide you with the skills to meet those legal responsibilities, and gain some new skills to have a positive influence on worker attitudes toward creating a healthy and safe workplace.



*Alex Hernandez is a Health and Safety Consultant with IHSA.*

**Learn more from IHSA Safety Podcast episode 26: [ihsa.ca/supervisor-training](https://ihsa.ca/supervisor-training)**

**Q** In section 27 of the OHSA, the first duty of a supervisor is to “ensure that a worker works in the manner and with the protective devices, measures, and procedures required by [the] act and the regulations.” How does a supervisor get to know these requirements?

**A** **Alain Leger:** In part, it’s about having years of experience in the field, taking courses like IHSA’s Basics of Supervising training, and just really knowing the kinds of tasks that are being done on the jobsite. But you also need to spend time with the legislation—the Green Book [i.e., the OHSA], the construction regulations or the industrial regulations or even the electrical utility safety rules, depending on the work your company does. The more time you spend looking through the regulations, the better you’ll be at knowing where to find the information you need to make sure your crews are following the rules that apply to the work they’re doing.



*Alain Leger is IHSA’s Manager of Powerline Apprenticeship and Training.*

Learn more from IHSA Safety Podcast episode 24: [ihsa.ca/supervisor-duties](https://ihsa.ca/supervisor-duties)

**Q** How can a supervisor ensure that work is planned to maximize safety?

**A** **Alana Stewart:** A formal hazard assessment should be part of any pre-job planning. You analyze every hazard, apply risk ratings, consider controls, and then develop safe-work practices and procedures in order to perform each task safely. But it doesn’t end with planning. You also have to monitor the work. Once you’ve put controls and procedures in place, you can’t just say, “Okay, now go to it.” You have to make sure each worker is properly following the procedures. And then you have to talk to them. Ask, “Is this working for you? Can you think of a better way? Has the process created any new hazards that we didn’t think of?” Worker feedback is very important.



*Alana Stewart is a Health and Safety Consultant at IHSA.*

Learn more from IHSA Safety Podcast episode 23: [ihsa.ca/addressing-hazards](https://ihsa.ca/addressing-hazards)

**Q** Why should supervisors keep a daily record of events in the workplace?

**A** **Jennifer McKenzie:** Accurately recording your daily discussions, concerns, and information about workplace conditions on a regular basis can provide you with a due diligence defense if an unforeseen event occurs. It’s easier to prove the conditions, concerns, and the actions you took if it has all been logged during the workday. It can also assist you with jogging your memory about non-health and safety matters, such as project planning and oversight.

**Q** What about communication between supervisors and workers?

**A** **Jennifer McKenzie:** Supervisors must talk to their workers about the hazards of their tasks as well as the expectations for working safely with or around those hazards. The best and most effective way to know and communicate these hazards is with a pre-job safety meeting. During that meeting, you would provide written documentation of the task to be completed, the hazards associated with each task, and the controls that must be put in place. This is mainly done at the start of each workday, but you also have to do it when workplace conditions change—like if the weather, personnel, or tasks change. And supervisors have to ensure that any new workers complete a health and safety orientation, going over their rights and responsibilities, emergency procedures, hazards and incident reporting, and company-specific policies and procedures.



*Jennifer McKenzie is IHSA’s Manager, Regional Operations North & East.*

Learn more from IHSA Safety Podcast episode 25: [ihsa.ca/documentation-communication](https://ihsa.ca/documentation-communication)



## For the record

IHSA’s Supervisor Log Book makes it easy for supervisors to do their due diligence, with daily reporting templates, risk analysis forms, and much more.

Order yours today: [ihsa.ca/products/RF008](https://ihsa.ca/products/RF008)

Q

**Historically, supervisors have mainly focused on physical hazards. But their responsibilities have expanded considerably in the past decade or so. What other types of hazards are supervisors now expected to address?**

A

**Bruce Christianson:** Health and safety legislation now requires supervisors to deal with more intangible hazards, such as harassment, violence, and psychological hazards. Protecting employees from these hazards will make for workplaces that are psychologically healthy and safe. Supervisors need to be aware of the resources available in their organization to achieve this. Furthermore, the current global pandemic shed light on how important it is to address invisible biological hazards, such as COVID-19. In the last two-plus years, supervisors in all industries have had to put plans in place and develop procedures to prevent exposure to and transmission of COVID-19, inform workers about these control measures, and make sure that workers comply with the procedures.

Q

**How is a supervisor involved when a health and safety inspector visits the workplace?**

A

**Bruce Christianson:** Inspectors interact with workplace supervisors usually in two situations. The first is when an inspector arrives to investigate a complaint, work refusal, or a serious injury or fatality. Second, an inspector may make an unscheduled inspection at the workplace. In both scenarios, ideally, the supervisor cooperates fully with the inspector. They are there to gather the information to determine if there are compliance issues that could affect health and safety in that particular workplace. In some circumstances, the inspector will need to contact the supervisor after the initial visit to determine whether the workplace is compliant. In those situations, it's also important for the supervisor to be responsive—by email and/or phone. Ultimately, the inspector and the workplace supervisor have the same goal: to protect the health and safety of the employees.



*Bruce Christianson is the Ontario Regional Director for the Federal Labour Program.*

**Learn more from IHSA Safety Podcast episode 27: [ihsa.ca/supervisor-federal](https://ihsa.ca/supervisor-federal)**

Q

**Most Ontario workplaces fall under the jurisdiction of the OHSA, but about 10% of businesses are federally regulated—their health and safety duties are outlined in the Canada Labour Code and legislation like the Canada Occupational Health and Safety Regulations. What is the difference?**

A

**Doug Heintz:** It's like Coke and Pepsi: they're fairly similar. Keeping people safe in terms of following occupational health and safety requirements, having policies and procedures in place, and understanding workplace specific hazards, those things are universal.

For supervisors, one of the differences is the very specific nature of some of the requirements under the *Canada Occupational Health and Safety Regulations* (COHSR). For example, part 14 of the COHSR is about materials handling. It gets into requirements around manual lifting, depending on where you are in the company. Are you working in an office? Are you working in a warehouse? What are the weights you'll be lifting? It gets into some very prescriptive requirements. Another example is part 15, about hazardous occurrence investigation, recording, and reporting. Federally regulated companies still have reporting requirements to a provincial entity—in Ontario, that's the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board. But depending on the situation, they also have reporting requirements to the labour program of Employment and Social Development Canada.



*Doug Heintz is IHSA's Vice President of High Risk Training and Operations.*

**Learn more from IHSA Safety Podcast episode 28: [ihsa.ca/supervisor-federal-2](https://ihsa.ca/supervisor-federal-2)**

## Basics of Supervising

IHSA's *Basics of Supervising* training program provides supervisors with the skills to manage their health and safety duties as described by the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (OHSA). Participants learn what Ontario's OHSA requires a supervisor to do as it relates to workplace health and safety.

**Learn more by visiting [ihsa.ca/bos](https://ihsa.ca/bos)**