

Guideline for Health & Safety Representatives

What is a Health and Safety Representative?

A worker at the workplace who

Represents the health and safety interests of workers

Helps identify potential or actual dangers at the workplace

Has been chosen by fellow workers or by the worker's union

Has powers and duties under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*





When is a Health and Safety Representative needed?

When more than 5 and less than 20 workers are regularly employed at the workplace

OR

When more than 5 workers are regularly employed at a construction project and the work is expected to last less than 3 months

A Health and Safety Rep is needed

Note: If a company uses designated substances, the MOL may request a H & S Rep or JHSC regardless of the number of workers.

The employer must make sure that the workers (or their union) select at least one Health and Safety Representative (H & S Rep) from among the workers regularly employed at the workplace who do not have managerial duties.

If the workplace has 20 workers or more (and, in the case of a construction project, the work is expected to last longer than 3 months), the employer must establish a Joint Health and Safety Committee (JHSC) with representatives from both workers and management.



What does a Health and Safety Representative do?

Duties

The main duty of a H & S Rep is to inspect the workplace at least once a month, as required by the *Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA)*. These inspections help the H & S Rep identify hazards at the workplace.

If a monthly inspection of the entire workplace is not practical, then the law allows the H & S Rep to inspect part of the workplace each month, with the whole workplace covered at least once a year.



Powers

H & S Reps have the power to do the following:

- Identify potential hazards at the workplace.
- Make recommendations or report findings about these hazards to the employer, other workers, and any trade union representing workers.
- Be present during an investigation of a work refusal.
- Inspect the scene of a critical injury or death, and report the findings to a Ministry of Labour (MOL) Director.
- Get information from the employer about testing of equipment or materials at the workplace. (When a hazard is suspected at the project, it is often necessary to carry out tests.)
- Be consulted about testing and be present to ensure test results are valid.

H & S Reps can become involved in other activities related to health and safety such as the following:

- Help the employer develop the company's health and safety policy and program.
- Promote employee support of the company's health and safety policy and program.
- Help develop health and safety rules and standards.
- Perform job safety or job hazard analyses.
- Assess the safety of new equipment, procedures, or materials.
- Train workers on health and safety.

The employer may want to make these powers and activities a part of the H & S Rep's regular work duties and may even include them in a collective agreement.

The constructor or employer must ensure that a H & S Rep receives training that enables them to exercise their powers and perform their duties effectively (OHSA, s.8(5.1)).

As a Health and Safety Representative, what are my three main tasks?



Recognizing hazards

Hazards are not always obvious, but recognizing them is the first step in controlling them. Here are some things that can help you:

- Experience
- Health and safety training
- Knowledge of the OSHA and regulations that are specific to the workplace
- Asking workers and supervisors what they think
- Being alert and using all of your senses.



Talking to other workers can help H & S Reps identify hazards



Assessing hazards

Once you have identified a hazard, you need to evaluate its severity. Hazards that are more likely to happen or are more likely to cause a serious injury should be dealt with more urgently.

- Identify any best practice safety rules that apply to the hazard.
- Find out things such as: How many workers may be exposed to the hazard? How long could they be exposed? What are the exposure limits? What are the effects of prolonged exposure? What precautions are recommended in the safety data sheet (SDS)?
- Determine whether the hazard could be made worse because of other factors such as weather, backing vehicles, or a busy workplace.

Remember that although health hazards such as exposure to asbestos or silica may seem less urgent than safety hazards, they can have more serious outcomes if you do not control them.



Recommending controls

Finding the best solution to control the hazard sometimes depends on where you would apply the control. The best place is "**At the Source**". If you can't do that, control it "**Along the Path**" to the worker. If that is not possible, control it "**At the Worker**".

- **At the Source**
 - Eliminate the hazard (e.g., change the work process).
 - Use a safer substitute (e.g., change the tools or equipment).
 - Enclose or isolate the hazard (e.g., use barriers).
- **Along the Path**
 - Prevent the worker from getting to the hazard (e.g. use guardrails).
 - Prevent the hazard from getting to the worker (use ventilation, welding screens, lockout and tagging, etc.).
- **At the Worker**
 - Use personal protective equipment (PPE) (e.g., fall arrest, protective eyewear, respirator).
 - Use warning signs or devices.
 - Train workers on the hazard and put safety rules in place.
 - Rotate job tasks between multiple workers to reduce exposure.

How IHSA can help

✓ **Get informed**

- Learn more about the powers and duties of a H & S Rep by reading sections 8 and 43 of the OHSA. Order it from IHSA or read it online at ihsa.ca or ontario.ca/laws
- Learn how to achieve a safe and healthy workplace by visiting the ihsa.ca website. In the **Tools and Resources** section, you'll find policy and program templates such as inspection checklists, hazard reporting forms, safe job procedures, and incident investigation forms.
- IHSA offers a wealth of free or low-cost products for IHSA members to order or download*
 - *Health and Safety Representative Poster (P029)*—This will help you meet your legal obligation to identify the H & S Rep.
 - *Safety Talks (V005)*—Delivered by supervisors or H & S Reps, a safety talk is a hands-on way to reinforce health and safety on the job.
 - *Supervisor Log Book (RF008)*—Keep a daily record of health and safety activities at the workplace.
 - *Construction Health and Safety Manual (M029)*—This is the main reference guide for preventing injury and illness in the construction industry.
 - *Training Requirements Chart (W001)*—This downloadable booklet compiles all the training required by Ontario health and safety legislation for construction jobs and hazards.
 - *Occupational Health and Safety Act and Regulations for Construction Projects (Q005)*—The “Green Book” covers Ontario’s health and safety legislation and outlines the legal duties for all workplace parties.
 - *IHSA.ca Magazine*—Subscribe to our magazine for free. It will be sent to you four times a year.
 - *2-Minute News*—Sign up for our free monthly e-mail newsletter.



✓ **Get trained**

Upgrading your knowledge will make you a more effective H & S Rep and satisfy your legal requirements to receive training (OHSA, s. 8(5.1)). IHSA offers a variety of courses on general health and safety as well as sector-specific topics. Members get much of this training for free or at a reduced cost.*

- *Health and Safety Representative Basic Training E-learning Program* is a one-day e-learning course that can be a starting point for H & S Reps to begin their training.
- *JHSC Certification - Part One* covers the essentials of your role as H & S Rep and includes modules on legislation, health and safety hazards, workplace inspections, and incident investigations.
- *JHSC Certification - Part Two* is additional training that is more sector-specific. Separate courses are offered for Construction, Aggregates, Transportation, and Utilities.

Other helpful courses include the following.

- *Occupational Health and Safety Act*
- *Workplace Inspection and Hazard Recognition*
- *Incident Investigation and Reporting*
- *Introduction to Hazard and Risk Management*
- *Basics of Supervising*
- *Communication Skills for Supervising Health and Safety*

*You're a member of IHSA if your company pays premiums to Ontario's Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) in a rate group related to construction, electrical, utilities, transportation, or aggregates.