

Applying health and safety best practices to your small business



The first steps to meeting your legal obligations and improving your workplace.

If you own a small business, you won't have all of the same requirements as a larger firm, but you must still protect yourself and your employees from workplace hazards by following the law and your industry's best practices.

In fact, you may need to be more aware of standard health and safety practices because you may not have a dedicated health and safety representative or supervisor.

No matter your industry, trade, or the number of workers you manage, recognizing hazards and implementing controls is a big part of improving workplace health and safety. Here are some steps you can take to meet your health and safety responsibilities—and how IHSA can help.

Know the hazards

As a professional, you know your job and you have your job plans prepared. You also know what can go wrong. Part of your job plan should be to think about the dangers you and your workers might face while doing those jobs. The top hazards for the industries IHSA serves are:

Once you know the most likely hazards your workers will face, you can figure out how to prevent them. As a best practice, do a job safety analysis (JSA).

- 1 Write down the steps of the job, as well as any working conditions that could affect safety.
- 2 Identify any hazards associated with each step of the job or working condition.
- 3 Determine if any or all of the hazards can be eliminated.
- 4 For hazards that can't be eliminated, use controls (following the hierarchy of controls) to reduce them.
- 5 Discuss the JSA with your workers, or give them copies.



Musculoskeletal hazards

Repetitive strain injuries, improper lifting techniques, etc.



Struck-by

Being hit by falling or flying objects, moving equipment, or backing vehicles.



Falls

Improper fall protection, falling from heights, falling through floor openings, falling while mounting/dismounting a vehicle, etc.



Motor-vehicle incidents

Collisions, distracted driving, fatigue, traffic control, etc.

Know the rules

Small business owners need to know and understand the health and safety rules and regulations that apply to their company, industry, and workers. Most small businesses are provincially regulated and must abide by the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (OHSA). Firms that operate inter-provincially, however, may be federally regulated—and required to follow the *Canada Labour Code, Part II* (CLC).

These two sets of laws outline the rights and duties of all workplace parties when it comes to maintaining health and safety. They share the same goals, but their requirements can differ. For example, the CLC requires every employer to develop, implement, and monitor a workplace hazard prevention program. On the other hand, the provincial OHSA requires every workplace with more than five employees to have a written health and safety policy and a program to implement that policy.

Get the training

Depending on the work you do, you and your workers may need specific training in order to comply with health and safety legislation. Broadly, training falls into two categories:

- Awareness training ensures that workers have the general knowledge and understanding to recognize health and safety risks in a typical workplace. In Ontario, most workers are required to undergo training on basic occupational health and safety, workplace violence and harassment, and the Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS).
- Workplace-specific training ensures that workers understand the particular methods, machinery, tools, or applications that they will use on the job. It is often required for high-risk work such as working at heights, working on overhead powerlines, or operating large trucks or heavy equipment.

In addition, orientation training is critical for new workers, who are more likely to be injured than experienced workers. A new worker may be a young worker, but they can also be someone who is simply new to a particular job or jobsite.

Appoint a supervisor

If you appoint a supervisor, you are required by law to ensure that the supervisor is a “competent person.”

The OHSA defines a competent person as someone who is qualified because of knowledge, training, and experience to organize the work and its performance. For many small businesses, one of the supervisors may be the employer.

Supervisors need to be proficient in four main health and safety tasks:

- Inspecting
- Investigating
- Enforcing
- Communicating

Training such as IHSA’s free-for-members Basics of Supervising course can help ensure that supervisors meet the legal requirement for competency and develop the skills to do their jobs effectively. An additional course, Communication Skills for Supervising Health & Safety, builds on the teachings of Basics of Supervising to help supervisors become workplace health and safety leaders.

Build health and safety into your business

If you talk about health and safety, and put up signs and posters around the jobsite, it shows workers that you care about their well-being. This can help improve morale. By making it clear that safety is important to you, your employees will be more likely to follow your lead. Before long, safety will become routine, not something that you have to keep reminding your workers about.

Starting the workday with a five-minute safety talk is a great way to reinforce healthy and safe work practices.

Of course, actions speak louder than words. It’s important to correct any unsafe working conditions as soon as they are identified. Reward employees who are carrying out their duties safely and discipline those who are not. Workers need to see that there are consequences to their actions.



FREE TOOLS YOU CAN USE RIGHT NOW



DOWNLOAD a sample job safety analysis form: ihsa.ca/small-business-resources



ACCESS resources to build or update your health and safety policies and programs: ihsa.ca/policies-programs



PRINT IHSA’s task-specific training requirements chart: ihsa.ca/training-chart



REVIEW more than 150 safety talks to deliver to your workers: ihsa.ca/safetytalks



SIGN UP for our Basics of Supervising course and other classes: ihsa.ca/training



VISIT ihsa.ca/smallbusiness for even more free guides and tools designed with your company in mind.