



SAFE WORK



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SAFE Work and the Supervisor – Your Responsibilities

The first few days on a new job are particularly important for new or young workers. Statistics show that the majority of serious incidents occur during a worker's first year on the job. Do you, as an employer or a supervisor, know what you must do to prevent those from happening?

What is a supervisor?

Supervisors are known by many names – lead hand, charge hand, foreman, team leader, etc. But for the purposes of ensuring the safety and health of workers, The Workplace Safety and Health Act (WSH Act) has added a definition that applies, no matter what the title might be. And along with the definition, there are specific legal responsibilities.

The WSH Act says that a supervisor is someone who is:

- In charge of a workplace
- In charge of or has authority over a worker

Supervisors are in the best position to implement management's policies, they are pivotal to the success of a company and safety and health is a large part of that responsibility.

Do Workers Look to Supervisors for Information?

A national study by Ipsos Reid in 2003 determined that the person most relied on for training and direction concerning safety and health is a worker's immediate supervisor. In addition, the WSH Act requires an employer to ensure that all workers are competently supervised and trained to deal with the hazards of the workplace. Many times, that task falls to the supervisor.

What Must a Supervisor Do – Legal Responsibilities

For workers under his/her supervision, a supervisor has a legal obligation to ensure that:

- all precautions are taken to protect the safety and health of those workers
- workers perform their work in accordance with procedures and safety and health laws
- workers use all devices and wear all personal protective equipment as required
- workers are advised of the safety and health risks for the area in which they are working. And if they move to another area or different activity, workers must be trained before they begin the new work.

What's the Employer's Role in Effective Supervision?

- **Training** - An employer has to ensure supervisors are competent (combination of education, experience, knowledge) and that supervisors themselves receive adequate training and education. Sometimes supervisors are appointed to the position because they are good at what they do. That does not necessarily mean a person will make a good supervisor and know how to instruct and manage the day-to-day activities of others, particularly issues of workplace safety and health.

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- **Training (cont'd)** - The specific skills and knowledge required to be an effective supervisor should be taught in order to not only increase comfort level but to ensure they are equipped to train other workers on safe work procedures for the tasks they supervise.
- **Strong safety and health policies** will support supervisors in their work. It is critical that a company have a strong safety and health policy to support the supervisor's work and that supervisors fully understand and put into practice the company's policies and procedures
- **Senior management commitment** is something that supervisors have to know is there if it is expected that training and safety and health policies will be effective. Top level management need to take the time to make safety and health visible in the organization and show that they are serious when it comes to the safety and health of workers.

Considering A Supervisory Position? Already in One?

- Be aware that anyone considering or already in a supervisory position has the right to ask their employer for information. Ask for a written safety and health orientation program that can be used with all new workers so that the basics are covered in a consistent fashion.
- What you need to know will vary with your job or the kind of industry you are in. Considering the newly legislated legal requirements for supervisors, asking questions about specific hazards and written safe working procedures will allow more effective training of new workers.
- Be aware that different people learn differently and the same approach with all workers may not be effective.
- Check back to ensure workers understand the task – observe them doing the task. Remember, most new workers are also trying to “fit in” with their new co-workers and can only absorb so much information.
- Encourage all workers to ask questions – many new workers are trying to impress their supervisor and don't want to appear as though they didn't understand.
- Strongly consider assigning a mentor to a new worker – this can help ease the transition to “fitting in” and allow workers to focus on the safety and health aspects of their new job. Keep in mind that experienced, professional workers don't always follow the rules – they have often integrated them into their day-to-day activities and are not even aware they are doing them.
- Ask for a copy of your workplace's written safety and health program (required in workplaces with 20 or more workers) and become familiar with its contents. The written program codifies your employer's commitment to safety and health.

Bottom Line

YOU have direct responsibility for the safety and health of the workers you supervise, but also a unique opportunity to be a role model for young workers just starting out. Be a part of creating tomorrow's safe and healthy workforce.