

# Health and Safety Guide for Human Resources Professionals



## Health & Safety Policy

The management is  
committed to providing  
a safe and healthy  
working environment  
for all employees

Prepared by the Canadian Centre for  
Occupational Health and Safety



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## Summary

Human resources professionals play an important role in ensuring employee health and safety, as they know the workplace, the employees and their job demands. While human resources professionals are not expected to know the technical aspects of workplace health and safety, they should know when and how to use existing resources to respond to employee concerns.

In many organizations, health and safety responsibilities are within the human resources department. In order to meet these responsibilities, human resources professionals must:

- Understand the health and safety responsibilities of employers, managers, supervisors and employees within the organization;
- Implement personnel management policies to ensure that everyone in the workplace is aware of his/her responsibilities;
- Establish effective ways of meeting health and safety responsibilities; and
- Ensure that employees fulfill their health and safety responsibilities as outlined in the organizational policies and programs.

This guide provides general guidelines for integrating workplace health and safety in human resources management practices which include:

- Preventing work related injuries and illnesses;
  - Fostering a workplace safety culture in which employees and their supervisors work together to ensure workplace safety;
  - Establishing administrative procedures that encourage employees to report unsafe conditions and unsafe practices to their supervisors without fear of being disciplined;
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- Developing appropriate hiring, training and performance appraisal practices;
  - Recruiting and retaining the best employees who care about their own well being and the well being of co-workers.
  - Ensuring that the health and safety policies and procedures conform with the applicable occupational health and safety legislation and accepted best practices in similar organizations;
  - Establishing procedures for enforcing company safety rules;
  - Helping reduce costs associated with losses due to absenteeism injuries, Workers' Compensation, disability, and health care;
  - Maintaining records of injuries, illnesses and workers' compensation;
  - Coordinating first aid training and the provision of first aid to employees;
  - Providing advice to employees and the employer in matters of occupational health and safety.

We hope this guide will assist human resources professionals in carrying out their OHS responsibilities effectively and in conformity with the applicable health and safety legislation. The presentation of the subject matter is in a non-technical and plain language.

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## Health Safety and Environmental Responsibilities Related to Human Resources Management

Examples of human resources activities	Relevance to workplace health and safety
Compliance with various regulations regarding personnel and management practices	Health and safety of employees with special needs.
Coordinating health and safety activities	Supervision of health and safety personnel, coordination of health and safety committee activities
Managing employee benefits and compensation	Modified work assignment, "Early Return to Work policy"
Maintaining employee records	Special needs of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pregnant and nursing employees</li> <li>- Employees with illness or injury</li> <li>- Employees with disabilities</li> </ul>
Ensuring that employees are aware of new and existing human resources policies	Orientation, training and ongoing communication with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- New employees</li> <li>- Transferred employees</li> <li>- Promoted employees</li> <li>- Entire workforce</li> <li>- Volunteers and students</li> </ul>
Career development, training, and organizational development	Training needs arising out of changing work practices, equipment and relocation
Promoting leadership in management and supervision	Health, safety and environmental responsibility of employees at all levels
Promoting safety culture	Recognizing safe behaviour

The following table summarizes symptoms of some common injury types.

<b>Symptoms of Common Injuries</b>		
<b>Type of Injury</b>	<b>Example of Disorder</b>	<b>Symptoms</b>
Muscle	Sprains Strains, torn muscles	Pain; difficulty in turning, bending and moving the muscle.
Nerve	Carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS)	Compression of the median nerve as it enters the palm of the hand through the "carpal tunnel". The symptoms are pain and numbness in the index and middle fingers and weakness of the abductor muscles of the thumb (difficulty in gripping things).
	Thoracic Outlet Syndrome	Pain, arm weakness, and numbness in the arms and fingers as a result of the squeezing of the nerves and blood vessels between the neck and shoulders.
Tendon	Tendonitis	Pain mainly in the hands and wrist due to inflammation of the tendon as a result of overuse. Tendons are fibre bundles that attach muscles to bones.
	Tenosynovitis	Pain due to inflammation of the tendon sheath, producing pain and swelling. It may result from loss of lubricating system of the bone joints as a result of repetitive and excessive hand movement.
	Ganglion Cyst	An inflamed tendon sheath may swell with lubricating fluid. This swelling causes a bump under the skin called a ganglion cyst.
	Bursitis	Restriction and pain in joint movement as a result of deficient lubrication at a bone joint, for example at the shoulder.



# 10. Employee Health and Safety Records

Employment health & safety records are useful in determining:

- Employment history and occupational exposure records;
- Injuries and illnesses on the job; and
- Workers' compensation records.

Many occupational illnesses (cancers) can occur decades after the employee retires. Employment records help in assessing the work relatedness of such illnesses.

Records must be maintained with accuracy, relevance, timeliness, and completeness. Appropriate and reasonable safeguards must be established to ensure security and confidentiality of the records. Useful summary and trend information should be provided to health and safety committees in order to assist in making recommendations.



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### 3. Guidelines for Forming a Health And Safety Committee

#### *Selection of committee members*

The employer appoints management members of the committee. In a unionized workplace, the union selects employee members. If not specified in the legislation, selection is to be made according to the terms of reference established by your workplace.

The health and safety legislation generally states that a health and safety committee must:

- Consist of at least one-half worker (employee) representatives who have been elected or selected by the employees or their union;
- Meet regularly - consult your legislation about the frequency of meetings. Some jurisdictions require committee meetings at least once every three months while others require monthly meetings;
- Two co-chairpersons- a management chairperson and a employee chairperson.

In practice, most Health and Safety Committees have equal numbers of management and worker members.



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## 3. Health and Safety Program

A Health & Safety Program consists of clearly defined actions to implement the health and safety policy. The numbers of elements depend on organizational needs. Following are common elements of a health and safety program:

- Leadership and administration
- Management training
- Workplace inspections
- Task analysis and procedures
- Accident/incident investigation
- Task observation
- Emergency preparedness
- Organizational rules
- Accident/incident analysis
- Employee training
- Personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Program evaluation system
- Engineering controls
- Personal communications
- Group meetings
- General promotion
- Hiring and placement
- Purchasing controls
- Off-the-job safety
- Evaluation and continuous improvement