
Taking Action for Healthy and Safe Workplaces

Five reasons to take action for healthier and safer workplaces

Saskatchewan has one of the highest workplace injury rates in Canada. In 2003, almost 5% of our workers, 15,000 in total, suffered an injury serious enough to be off the job.

Employers, workers and agencies committed to workplace safety are renewing their efforts to create healthier and safer work conditions. In September 2003, the provincial *Action Plan* outlined five effective strategies to prevent workplace injuries and illnesses. In recent months, there have been some modest improvements in Saskatchewan injury rates.

Let's consider five reasons **WHY** taking action is so important by looking at what's happened in Saskatchewan workplaces over the last five years.

1. **127 workers killed on the job – or from the job**
 - 49 workers died from injuries on the job, such as falls
 - 41 workers killed from motor vehicle crashes while working
 - 37 workers died from work-related health problems, such as cancer and asbestosis
2. **2,234 workers permanently impaired from workplace injuries**
3. **73,598 workers injured seriously enough to be off the job**
4. **1,878,877 workdays lost from workplace injuries and illnesses**
5. **\$1,017 million dollars in compensation claims alone**

The above statistics do not include the work-related fatalities and injuries on Saskatchewan farms and ranches not covered by the Saskatchewan Workers' Compensation Board (WCB). A future *Action Update* will focus on what's happening in Saskatchewan's most hazardous sector.

Note: The fatality information is based on WCB data from the last five years of the 'Day of Mourning' periods – April 29, 2000 to April 28, 2005; other statistics are from the 2004 WCB Annual Report for the 2000-2004 period.

Why are so many workers dying or being injured on the job?

Those committed to workplace health and safety see work-related "accidents" to be predictable and preventable. There is a story behind each tragedy. Although the details will vary, there are common reasons why so many are injured or even die from work.

Way of life - or not – at our workplaces and in our communities, health and safety is not the priority it should be. Recognizing and reducing risks must be a bigger part of our culture.

Standards – far too often, we don't understand or practice the safety and health standards that have proven to prevent workplace injuries or poor health.

Support- we need to have a better understanding of how work conditions, processes and substances affect worker health in the short and long term – and how to eliminate or at least minimize the risks from these hazards.

Training – all workers, and especially new and/or young workers, need proper training and supervision to do the job safely.

Responsibility – we must own up to our shared responsibility for our own safety and the safety of those we work with – those with the most authority have the most responsibility.

Five ways employers and supervisors can take action for healthier and safer workplaces.

Good companies have good safety programs. Studies show that the most important factors driving excellence in health and safety are management commitment, line ownership and worker involvement.

1. **Taking responsibility** - if you have a workplace of 10 or more workers, ensure that you have an effective worker/employer occupational health committee to help identify and reduce workplace hazards (for higher risk workplaces with 5-9 workers, ensure that you have an occupational health and safety (OHS) representative). If you have fewer workers, consider implementing a similar worker/employer system to encourage a shared approach in making your workplace safer and healthier.
2. **Meeting standards** - review the health and safety legislated standards that apply to your work and ensure that these standards are fully met. Please note that these are 'minimum' standards and the better workplaces exceed these health and safety standards.
3. **Getting help** - contact a safety association, private consultant or the OHS Division for more information an ensuring your working conditions are as good as they can be - common issues are ergonomics (work design) and chemical substances (WHMIS)
4. **Training workers** - ensure that all workers are properly trained and supervised by competent personnel to work safely. Young and/or new workers tend to have more workplace injuries, largely due to inadequate training and supervision.
5. **Changing workplace culture** - demonstrate a genuine commitment to workplace health and safety at all levels of the organization, starting at the top. Make health and safety an integral part of company meetings, hiring, promoting, objectives, publications and reviews.

Five ways workers can take action for healthier and safer workplaces.

Everyone has responsibility for workplace health and safety. When it comes to workplace health and safety, workers have the most to gain ... or lose. These action steps help workers exercise their fundamental rights and responsibilities ...to know, to participate, and to refuse unusually dangerous work.

1. **Getting involved** - if you are employed at a workplace with 10 or more workers, support/join your worker/employer occupational health committee to help identify and reduce workplace hazards (higher-risk workplaces with 5-9 workers, consider being the occupational health and safety representative). If you have fewer workers, support a shared approach in making your workplace safer and healthier.
2. **Meeting standards** - know the health and safety legislated standards that apply to your work and your workplace. Cooperate with your employer and fellow workers in meeting health and safety standards. And since the legislated standards are 'minimum' standards, support initiatives to exceed these standards where possible.
3. **Getting help** - contact health and safety web sites like the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS) site at www.ccohs.ca, OHS Division staff or other reliable sources for more information on working conditions. Be mindful of not only shorter-term safety issues, but also longer-term health issues related to the work you do.
4. **Being trained** - get the proper training for any job you do so that you can do the tasks without endangering your safety or health - or the health and safety of your

fellow workers. Proper training includes demonstrating to your supervisor or employer that you have the required knowledge and skills to do the job safely. Young and/or new workers tend to have more workplace injuries, largely due to inadequate training and supervision.

5. **Walking the talk** - demonstrate a genuine commitment to health and safety - on and off the job. Make health and safety an integral part of your way of life ... and support others in protecting their health and safety.

Five ways the Saskatchewan Government is taking action for healthier and safer workplaces (as of March 31, 2005)

Employers and workers effectively working together make the biggest difference in health and safety conditions at their workplaces. Government has a responsibility to ensure the development, education and enforcement of legislated standards for all workplaces. For more information, visit www.labour.sk.ca.

1. **Taking responsibility** - helping workplaces establish effective ways for employers and workers to identify and reduce workplace hazards, including:
 - Helping 324 more workplaces develop occupational health committees, bringing the total worker/employer committees to over 4,281
 - Providing 202 training sessions to 4,195 committee members, occupational health and safety representatives and supervisors
2. **Meeting standards** - helping ensure that the health and safety of Saskatchewan workers are protected through compliance to effective workplace standards, including:
 - Conducting 4,477 workplace inspections, with particular focus on higher risk sectors and workplaces with numerous injuries
 - Assisting the provincial Occupational Health and Safety Council to review and make recommendations on updating Saskatchewan workplace standards, based on over 100 submissions in 2004;
 - Initiating 26 prosecution cases for violations of health and safety standards that contribute to worker injury or death.
3. **Providing support**-helping workers and employers with advice and information to identify and reduce the wide-range of workplace hazards, including:
 - Providing over 4,861 technical support services such as assessing exposure to chemical and biological substances, air quality testing, ergonomics, radiation monitoring, workplace presentations as well as web site and print publications on specific hazards and their control
 - Supporting SIAST in delivering the new *Applied Certificate for Occupational Health and Safety Practitioners* for workers and employers
4. **Reaching new workers** - young and/or new workers suffer significantly more injuries than older or more experienced workers. More education about health and safety is provided to high school and postsecondary students, including:
 - Providing Ready for Work resources in core curriculum and other courses for students in Grades 10 to 12
 - Providing health and safety resources for SIAST post-secondary programs.
5. **Increasing awareness** - increasing public awareness about health and safety problems as well as solutions, including through the *WorkSafe Saskatchewan* program as well as the new *Safe Saskatchewan* initiative that promotes a comprehensive, community approach to all injury reduction.