



A How-to Guide for an Occupational Health and Safety Policy and Program



Introduction

This brochure explains two major parts of the Nova Scotia Occupational Health and Safety Act that are important for employers with five or more employees.

Employers, contractors, and constructors who regularly employ five or more people must develop an occupational health and safety policy. The first part of this guide describes policies.

An organization regularly employing 20 or more employees in Nova Scotia must develop an occupational health and safety policy and program to comply with Section 27, Requirement for Policy, and Section 28, Requirement for Program. The second part of this brochure describes occupational health and safety programs.

What is an occupational health and safety policy?

An occupational health and safety policy is the statement of an employer's commitment to preventing accidents and illness in the workplace. It describes how the employer and employees can work together to prevent workplace accidents and illness.

The Occupational Health and Safety Act requires that employers with more than five employees have an occupational health and safety policy.

Why is a policy needed?

The act requires that workplaces have a written policy to:

- state clearly that the employer is committed to and plans to support accident and illness prevention at work
- declare what the employer intends to do to eliminate the causes of accidents and illness
- state how the employer will integrate at all levels, the organization's internal responsibility system in accident and illness prevention
- direct human and financial resources to the issues
- help achieve the organization's health and safety objectives

How to write a health and safety policy

A policy is a statement of the employer's commitment to employees' health and safety. Some important points to consider when writing the policy are:

- promoting health and safety at work
- protecting employees from hazards, such as fire, noise, slips and falls, violence, and hazardous products
- complying with health and safety laws.

Policy statements should include:

- the employer's clear commitment to providing a healthy and safe work environment and to integrating health and safety in everyday work activities
- the employer's responsibility to take reasonable precautions to prevent illness and injury. An example is training employees in safe work procedures and supervising and re-enforcing safe work procedures
- the responsibility of a senior management person to sign the document and ensure that the policy is carried out
- the employer's commitment to co-operation and consultation with all levels of the organization to implement the occupational health and safety policy effectively
- everyone's responsibility in maintaining a healthy and safe workplace
- the need to review the policy at least once a year to update it, so that it is current with workplace changes and legislation
- the requirement that all employees be held accountable for their health and safety responsibilities.

These references are just suggestions. Your organization may need a broader version. Each organization is unique and local conditions will dictate the specifics of your policy.

How should you communicate the policy?

The policy should be written in clear language that is easily understood by all employees. The policy must be posted in a prominent area of the workplace and made available on request to an employee or to the Department of Environment and Labour.

What does a policy look like?

Here is a sample of an occupational health and safety policy.

Scope

This policy applies to Company/Organization and all of its locations.

Policy

Company/Organization is committed to providing a healthy and safe work environment for our employees and to integrating that commitment into our everyday activities. The following occupational health and safety policy will help us fulfill our commitment.

Company/Organization is responsible for the health and safety of its employees while they are at work. Company/Organization will make every effort to provide a healthy and safe work environment.

Managers and supervisors will be trained and held responsible for ensuring that

- the employees under their supervision follow this policy
- employees use safe work practices and receive adequate training to protect their health and safety
- equipment and the facilities are safe.

Company/Organization, through all levels of management, will cooperate with the Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee, the health and Safety Representatives and employees to create a healthy and safe work environment. Cooperation will also be extended to others such as contractors, owners, inspectors, etc.

The employees of Company/Organization must support the health and safety policy and must cooperate with the joint occupational health and safety committee, the health and safety representatives and others exercising authority under the applicable laws.

It is the duty of each employee to report to the supervisor or manager, as soon as possible, any hazardous conditions, injury, accident, or illness related to the workplace. Also, employees must protect their own health and safety by complying with applicable laws and by following policies, procedures, rules and instructions as prescribed by Company/Organization.

Company/Organization will, where possible, eliminate hazards and the need for personal protective equipment. If that is not possible, and where there is a need, employees must use personal protective clothing, equipment, devices, and materials.

Company/Organization recognizes the employees' duty to identify hazards and supports and encourages employees to play an active role in identifying hazards and to offer suggestions or ideas to improve health and safety.

To ensure that this policy continues to meet our needs, Company/Organization will ensure that our joint occupational health and safety committee, health and safety representatives, and employees will review it each year.

Signed:

President/ CEO/ Owner/ Operator

Company/organization

Date

What will make the policy work?

Putting your policy in place

A key element in making sure your occupational health and safety policy works in your organization is to involve everyone in the process. That means your policy is drafted with input from all levels of the company. Also, your policy should be flexible enough to adapt to the needs of diverse company applications.

To make implementation of your policy easier, make sure that:

- everyone in the workplace knows about your policy
- everyone understands their roles and responsibilities
- accountability is clearly established
- adequate human and financial resources are provided
- a process for setting up and reviewing procedures and programs is established.

What is a program?

An organization's occupational health and safety program contains the elements that make it possible to realize its policy objectives. Each program will be unique to the company that develops it, but some elements are needed to make them comply with the laws and to meet general health and safety standards. Overall, a program should have the following:

- clear responsibilities and lines of accountability for health and safety for each job classification in the organization
- a process to ensure that employees take part in the program
- a system to identify, assess, and control hazards
- a schedule to make sure that all staff have ongoing training
- a method for establishing standards
- periodic audit and assessment of the program.

What must a program contain?

An occupational health and safety program must have:

- a method of ensuring that employees are trained on how to protect themselves when dealing with hazardous materials or situations and that the employees are supervised
- a method to establish and write safe work procedures and to make sure that employees use them
- a description of how a joint occupational health and safety committee and the health and safety representatives fit within the program. The program must outline how the committee and the representatives gain access to a manager with adequate authority to address health and safety problems
- a system for identifying hazards, including:
 - evaluating/ inspecting the work areas regularly
 - a reporting method, with someone given the job of ensuring that the problems are fixed
 - a clear idea of what, when, and how the employer will report to the committee or representative about workplace hazards
- a monitoring, follow-up, and control system for hazards that may be identified in the workplace
- a system to keep all records concerning health and safety and any reports of inspections or orders written by the Department of Environment and Labour, or tests performed on the workplace.
- a method for monitoring the implementation and effectiveness of the program.

Please note: The information in this booklet represents summary requirements based on the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*. It should serve only as an example and may be used as a guide to develop a policy and a program to suit your own work environment.

Workplace Safety and Insurance System

Partners

The **Workplace Safety and Insurance System** includes workers, employers, the agencies – Workers’ Advisers Program (WAP), Workers’ Compensation Appeals Tribunal (WCAT), Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) and the Workers’ Compensation Board of Nova Scotia (WCB) – and others who provide service in the System.

Our **vision** is safe, healthy workplaces for Nova Scotians, and sustainable safe and insurance services.

Our **mission** is to work together to help keep people healthy and safe at work, insure against loss and to support workers’ rehabilitation. We strive to be fair, and responsible in everything we do.

Our strategic **goals** are to:

- improve outcomes for workers and employers
- improve service delivery
- ensure effective governance of the System; and
- ensure financial sustainability of the System

As part of our services, additional information is available on workplace health and safety policy and programs. The Workers’ Compensation Board of Nova Scotia has developed a guide in these areas.



The purpose of this Guide is to assist employers and employee groups to understand and implement the elements of an effective Health and Safety Program. Implementing the elements of an Occupational Health and Safety Program is mandatory for employers with 20 or more employees in their organization, but all employers should consider developing a program appropriate for the nature, size and complexity of their workplace(s). Experience has shown that effective management of occupational health and safety is the key to reducing the number and severity of workplace injuries and illnesses. A well-managed health and safety program uses proven methods and techniques to identify potential hazards and either prevent the exposure, or control the hazard. Reduction in injuries, illnesses and lost time can be in the range of 60 to 80% compared with not taking effective steps to manage health and safety.

The Guide is available at:

http://www.wcb.ns.ca/downloads/pdf/pwi/pwi_manual.pdf

or by contacting the Workers' Compensation Board of Nova Scotia, Prevention Division, as noted on the back cover.



Additional information on the preparation of a policy and program is available from the Workers' Compensation Board of Nova Scotia and can be accessed at:

Workers' Compensation Board of Nova Scotia

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This information has been prepared by the Occupational Health and Safety Division. For clarification on the material or any other parts of the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* or Regulations, please contact us at:

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