

Prevention Initiative for Alberta's

Occupational Health and Safety System

2019-20 Annual Update

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Introduction

Every year, hard working Albertans are killed, become ill or are injured on the job. Keeping workplaces and workers healthy and safe is the ultimate goal of the Prevention Initiative for Alberta's Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) System (the Prevention Initiative).

The OHS system is composed of many stakeholders, including employers, workers, associations and government. We need to take strategic action together to have the greatest impact on illness and injury reduction. This includes using data driven approaches to raise awareness of disease and injury areas where workers are most affected and/or have the greatest risk.

In its first year, the Prevention Initiative's strategic steering committee (SSC) and three working groups have focused actions, aligned resources and created linkages to enhance communication among system stakeholders. These groups have discussed how to evaluate progress and continuously improve OHS efforts to more systematically achieve goals.

This annual update reviews actions taken from March 2019 to March 2020 and outlines the path the Prevention Initiative had set for the fiscal year. While, the department recognizes the COVID-19 pandemic was present in the early 2020, results and targets were not captured as part of this review. In the upcoming 2020/2021 year, the Prevention Initiative has made the necessary adjustment to address the ongoing occupational health and safety needs.

Establishing the Prevention Initiative

System priorities

In 2019, Alberta Labour and Immigration identified and validated through stakeholder engagements three priority areas that occur in all industries in Alberta. These are:

- musculoskeletal disorders (MSD) due to repetitive use, overexertion and heavy lifting;
- slips, trips and falls; and
- psychosocial hazards (i.e., workplace violence, harassment, and mental health).

These priority areas were identified by reviewing several data sources – including, cost and total number of claims made to the Alberta Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) (Appendix 1).

In addition, Alberta Labour and Immigration identified priority workforces that are known to be at higher risk of disease and injury. These are:

- small businesses – private sector employers who have less than 20 workers; and
- vulnerable workers – individuals who have one or more of the following characteristics: are young (aged 24 or less), are older (aged 55 or more), are Indigenous, have a short tenure (employed in temporary, seasonal or casual work contracts/arrangements - up to six months) of work, are seasonal workers, have multiple jobs, or are temporary foreign workers and/or migrants.

For additional background and data on these priority areas, see the March 2019 "[Prevention](#)

[Initiative for Alberta's Occupational Health and Safety System](#)" document.

Prevention Initiative principles

Related to the internal responsibility system¹, the foundation principles for the initiative are:

- all system stakeholders have a responsibility to reduce the rate of occurrence of OHS incidences;
- OHS system stakeholders will look for ways to collaborate and partner with each other to increase their reach for the goal of positive OHS outcomes; and
- the priorities identified allow OHS system stakeholders to develop specific actions based on work site needs while still being aligned to the system.

Stakeholder engagement

Alberta Labour and Immigration held multiple engagement sessions with OHS system stakeholders throughout 2019 to validate system priorities and principles, and to start framing the initiative.

Participating stakeholders included:

- business and industry associations;
- employers;
- health and safety associations;
- Certifying Partners (from the provincial Certificate of Recognition program);
- labour organizations and unions;
- not-for-profit sector organizations; and
- WCB.

From these sessions, a strategic steering committee and three working groups began their work to improve coordination and alignment of the OHS system.

Strategic steering committee

The SSC is chaired by Alberta Labour and Immigration. Members of this committee have a mandate to steward the implementation and integration of the Prevention Initiative and OHS system priorities.

The purpose and scope of the SSC are to:

- set the strategic vision and direction for the Prevention Initiative to improve the OHS system and advise on other system priorities as they arise;
- develop recommendations for, and facilitate implementation of, activities to support strategies related to the Prevention Initiative;
- provide oversight of working groups established to develop actions for priorities identified within the Prevention Initiative;
- address OHS system coordination and alignment issues through identification of, and acting upon, opportunities for collaboration with OHS system stakeholders; and
- provide guidance and facilitate work that has a province-wide (system-level) scope.

¹ In Canada, the internal responsibility system is the foundation that OHS legislation is built on. Everyone in the workplace is responsible, each according to their authority and control, to ensure a healthy and safe workplace. Because control and authority may not be shared equally at workplaces, responsibilities for health and safety may not be shared equally. In an internal responsibility system, employers are usually seen as having the most responsibilities, but all work site parties including workers have responsibilities

- Champion solutions that extend beyond individual organizations and will have a positive impact on the OHS system for all workers and employers for identified priority areas.

Working groups

Three working groups have been created and are chaired by Alberta Labour and Immigration. Guided by the SSC, each working group has primary responsibility to develop recommendations and implement coordinated activities related to one of the three illness and injury priority areas.

In addition, working groups:

- define and frame issues and challenges for priorities areas and populations;
- undertake research and analysis to support development of programs and activities that advance the priority area and the Prevention Initiative;
- identify key areas of focus within priority areas where common OHS system issues exist and highlight where issues may diverge;
- recommend and develop a range of options for coordinated actions among working group organizations;
- align activities to address gaps in OHS system;
- identify and act upon opportunities for collaboration with OHS system stakeholders;
- leverage resources among working group and other organizations to bring focused attention on a priority area;
- ensure activities are measurable and achievable;
- champion solutions that extend beyond specific organizational focus that have a positive province-wide impact for all employers and workers on the OHS priority area; and
- assist Alberta Labour and Immigration in identification of new or emerging issues.

Initiative activities: Year one

Working group activities

The working groups have examined issues within each priority area to gain deeper understanding about why, despite considerable efforts, illness and injury rates continue to be high. This critical analysis has allowed each working group to frame issues in ways that provide context surrounding the problem and give new ways to help understand them.

The working groups have also identified specific priority audiences that may require additional resources to improve illness and injury outcomes. This included examination of data to understand who is being affected by the priority area illness and injuries. The working groups also considered industry sectors, job tenure, and age groups as potential relevant factors to focus efforts where they are most needed.

As preliminary steps, the working groups have examined preferences among different types of audiences through surveys feedback and have used data to learn about the formats suited to priority audiences. Going forward, these preferences will be applied to future planning on how to effectively engage audiences with prevention related information products.

A focus on improved prevention outcomes has played a central role in planning. Working groups

and the SSC needed a clear understanding of what they were trying to achieve and a way to measure whether they are on the right track. Through the development of a logic model, the working groups were able to build plans that consider short, medium and long term outcomes and progress of the Prevention Initiative from one year to the next. Working groups have incorporated ideas for the building blocks of behaviour change and considered those as indicators that can be measured, evaluated and calibrated based on what is observed in the future.

OHS inspections

Each year, OHS proactively inspects employers to monitor compliance with legislation. OHS chooses employers and sectors with relatively high injury and illness rates, high frequency of incidents or complaints, persistently low rates of compliance, or emerging trends. Inspection programs help work site parties identify health and safety hazards and actions to mitigate the hazards.

As part of this program, OHS officers proactively inspect employers before there are problems or complaints. These proactive programs use WCB and other data as evidence to identify industry sectors and employers who have poor performance. Alberta OHS included the Prevention Initiative priority areas in planning for proactive programs and training officers on what compliance issues commonly occur in the priority areas, psychosocial hazards, musculoskeletal disorders and slips, trips and falls. A summary of actions is included in Table 1.

Table 1 - Proactive inspections in the 2019/2020 fiscal year and Prevention Initiative priority areas

Initiative	Number of inspections	Time frame	Psycho-social hazards	Musculo-skeletal disorders	Slips, trips, falls	Small business	Vulnerable workers
Selected Industry							
Trucking	62	Sept – Dec	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Steel/metal fab	178	Nov – Mar	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Restaurants and catering	296	Oct – Jan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Healthcare	256	Sept – Mar	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Focused Inspections							
Care workers	62	Feb – Mar	✓		✓	✓	✓
Exhibitions	65	July – Aug	✓		✓	✓	✓
Emerging Trends							
Liquor retailers	46	Jan - Mar	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Vaping retailers	8	Jan - Mar				✓	✓
Stone retailers	15	Jan - Mar		✓	✓	✓	
Selected Employer	662	Aug – Mar	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Selected industries

Selected industries are sectors with higher injury and incident rates than others in the province. These selected industries were:

- steel metal fabrication - the leading cause of injury in this industry is being struck by objects; however, common injuries are strains, sprains, wounds, fractures and dislocations;
- restaurants and catering - the leading causes of injury in this industry are falls and exposure to extreme temperatures; however, common injuries include strains, sprains, wounds and scalds;
- trucking - falls are the leading cause of injury in the trucking industry; however, common injuries are strains, sprains, wounds, fractures and dislocations;
- health care - the leading causes of injury in the healthcare industry are overexertion, exposure to harmful substances, assaults, violent acts, falls and bodily reactions.

Focused inspections

Focused inspections are used to monitor compliance within an industry sector for a concentrated period of time. Two focused inspections occurred over the 2019/2020 fiscal year and included:

- care workers - those who support and supervise vulnerable, infirmed or disadvantaged Albertans. Some employers or sites that employ care workers have relatively high numbers of violence-related worker injuries; and
- exhibitions - employ relatively large numbers of vulnerable workers including young workers, who are more likely to be injured than older workers.

Emerging trends

Emerging trends are identified using data that monitors health and safety issues within the year. Health and safety issues that emerge require inspections to determine next steps and appropriate courses of action.

Selected employers

Selected employers is a program that prioritizes inspecting employers with high WCB claim rates and poor compliance histories with OHS legislation.

Working through COVID-19

The world has changed significantly in 2020 and the system requires agility to make the necessary adjustments to promote healthy and safe working conditions. The working groups have re-examined each of the priority areas to ensure that resources developed are meaningful and provide guidance for issues currently being experienced in Alberta's workplaces. It was and will continue to be necessary to provide timely responses to these needs, and the working groups and the SSC have been agile while maintaining focus on the overall intent and the short, medium and long terms goals of this initiative.

The path forward

For 2020/2021, the Prevention Initiative will focus on achievable actions. Through the SSC, the working groups recommend creating a suite of resources for the upcoming year that allows for a coordinated and aligned approach for each of the three priority areas. The suite of resources will give job creators, workers, supervisors and those with interest in OHS accessible, effective and credible information that raises awareness, enhances understanding and stimulates the ability to take positive OHS actions to prevent illness and injury.

Based on the level of awareness, resources will be developed in order for audiences to take actions that will keep them healthy and safe. The resources will exist in a variety of formats to suit audience preferences.

Taking a user-centred approach means seeking feedback from our intended audiences. To make sure this happens, the working groups will involve OHS system stakeholders who have existing connections to these audiences.

Alberta OHS continues to plan proactive compliance monitoring around the priority areas of the Prevention Initiative. This will provide data for future Prevention Initiative programming.

Summary

For the past year, the Prevention Initiative for Alberta's OHS System has established priorities, principles and structure, and is focusing on the most current evidence about effective ways to generate positive change.

For 2020/2021, the Prevention Initiative will continue to collect data and develop resources to support health and safe workplaces. The collection of data will occur through proactive compliance monitoring planned around Prevention Initiative priorities, and strategic stakeholder engagement. The collected data will help ensure the prevention initiative can develop a suite of resources that give job creators, and workers information they can effectively use to reduce workplace injuries and illnesses.

The past year has been one of engaged and creative conversations, learning, and beginning to understand the preferences and needs for information of the audiences that we would like to reach and serve. The Prevention Initiative has had to adapt to rapid changes in early 2020 including the COVID-19 pandemic and will continue to be agile as it works strategically to achieve the goal of healthy and safe workplaces and workers.