

Understanding Indigenous Workers' Occupational Health and Safety Needs

Tips for Employers

Health and Safety in the Workplace

Employers have many responsibilities under Alberta's Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Act. Employers must make sure that they maintain a healthy and safe workplace for workers. They must also ensure that workers are aware of their OHS rights and responsibilities. Creating a healthy and safe work environment is a team effort and everyone has a role to play.



This means everyone (such as workers, supervisors and employers) is responsible for protecting health and safety in the workplace. Each must rely on the other to ensure they are doing their part. For this to work, everyone must know – and do – what's expected of them in their role.



Although workers have the responsibility to protect their own health and safety, they may be unaware of their own rights, responsibilities and other health and safety topics. Employers that specifically work with Indigenous (First Nations, Métis and Inuit) Peoples could provide specific OHS information that would positively impact these workers ability to fulfill their OHS responsibilities and engage in healthy and safe work.

Indigenous workers may turn to their supervisors or employers for guidance, advice and support.

They may need support to:

- become aware of their OHS rights and responsibilities.
- navigate potential issues of health and safety in their workplace.
- address health and safety concerns or situations. Some workers may be hesitant to express concerns feeling they'll not be heard or taken seriously, that they won't fit in with their co-workers or may fear losing their job.

Workers should never have to compromise their own health and safety. Employers can help empower and protect all their workers with specific OHS information, processes and procedures.

Indigenous workers' OHS needs

Understanding the distinct needs Indigenous workers have for OHS information can help keep them healthy and safe at work. Here are some common issues, or topics, Indigenous workers identified as the information they should know.

Lateral violence (harassment and violence)

Indigenous workers may be at higher risk of exposure to harassment and violence in the workplace. Harassment and violence are hazards that could harm workers' mental and physical health, create apathetic or disengaged workers, and increase workplace absenteeism or resignation from their job.

Indigenous workers may refer to harassment and violence as lateral violence. Lateral violence has similar outcomes and impacts on the health and safety of workers.

Health and safety training and information

OHS training is required for all workers, Indigenous workers, in particular, benefit from information and training on health and safety topics like understanding their rights and responsibilities, how to refuse dangerous work, how to report dangerous work, what the hazards of their job are and ways to stay safe.

Accessing OHS information

Indigenous workers should know that they can report unsafe or unhealthy conditions at their workplace, injuries or incidents, and ask general health and safety questions to the Alberta OHS Contact Centre. Serious injuries or incidents must be reported as soon as possible to the OHS Contact Centre. The OHS Contact Centre is free, confidential and respects anonymity.

Workers are also encouraged to report their workplace injuries to the Alberta Workers' Compensation Board (WCB). Employers are required by law to report the injury to WCB within 72 hours.

How can you help?

- implement OHS topics in conversations or training sessions with your workers.
- provide supervisors with OHS information - Indigenous workers often go to their supervisor for OHS information.
- ensure you are properly identifying, eliminating or controlling all hazards and involve Indigenous workers in the process.
- start a health and safety conversation with workers.
- provide workers with OHS information, legislation and the violence prevention plan and policy.
- encourage workers to actively participate in the health and safety initiatives of their workplace – health and safety is everyone's responsibility.



For more information

Alberta OHS resources
alberta.ca/ohs-resources.aspx



Worker's guide to occupational health and safety
<https://ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/li008>

Worker participation in health and safety
<https://ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/LI041>

Workplace violence and harassment webinar recording
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wibQ66PD84g>

Report an injury with WCB
<https://www.wcb.ab.ca/claims/report-an-injury/>

For province-wide OHS Contact Centre

1-866-415-8690 (Throughout Alberta)

780-415-8690 (Edmonton)

For the deaf or hard-of-hearing (TTY)

1-800-232-7215

Ask health and safety questions online at
alberta.ca/ask-expert

Workers should also know what the rules are for Employment Standards.

If the workers you help have any questions that focus on pay, hours of work, overtime, vacation time, general holidays and other rules for employment standards, including information about filing a complaint or making an anonymous tip, contact Employment Standards Contact Centre at alberta.ca/EmploymentStandards or call **1-877-427-3731** toll free in Alberta.

