

Incident reporting and investigation

OHS information for employers and prime contractors

This bulletin describes incidents that prime contractors – or employers, if there is no prime contractor – must report to Alberta Occupational Health and Safety (OHS). It includes how and when to notify OHS, and incident investigation requirements.

KEY INFORMATION

- The *OHS Act*, section 33, describes incidents that must be reported to OHS as soon as possible. These are:
 - Serious injuries, illnesses or incidents, including fatalities.
 - Radiation overexposures.
 - Incidents at a mine or mine site.
- Section 33 also sets out other required actions related to all reportable incidents, including potentially serious incidents. These include carrying out an internal incident investigation and providing the results of that investigation to OHS.
- All section 33 prime contractor requirements fall to the employer, if there is no prime contractor.
- If you have any questions about incident reporting and investigation, call the OHS Contact Centre (1-866-415-8690).

Notifying OHS

Call as soon as possible

Prime contractors must call the OHS Contact Centre (1-866-415-8690) as soon as possible if a worker has died at work or from an illness connected to the work site. If there is no prime contractor, this obligation falls to the employer.

You must call the OHS Contact Centre as soon as possible if you believe a worker has been or will be admitted to hospital as a result of a workplace injury, illness or incident. Note that hospital admission doesn't include being treated and released from an emergency room or urgent care centre.

You must also call the OHS Contact Centre as soon as possible if:

- A person has been injured or becomes ill from an unplanned or uncontrolled explosion, fire or flood; a crane, derrick or hoist collapse or upset; a (full or partial) building or structural collapse or failure.
- A worker has been exposed to radiation above the limits set out in Schedule 12 of the OHS Code. (This commonly includes exposure to X-rays or gamma rays, but may also include other forms of radiation such as alpha or beta particles or high energy radiofrequency.)

Report online as soon as possible

Prime contractors – or if there is no prime contractor, the employer – must report certain incidents online as soon as possible at airportal.labour.alberta.ca. These are:

- Cases where no injury or illness is involved; use the online option to report unplanned or uncontrolled explosions, fires or floods; crane, derrick or hoist collapses or upsets; and (full or partial) building or structural collapses or failures.
 - However if you're notifying OHS about this type of incident on a weekend, statutory holiday, Government of Alberta closure day or on a weekday between 4:30 p.m. and 8:15 a.m., you must call the OHS Contact Centre.)
- Mine or mine site incidents described in section 544 of the OHS Code. (But if a death, serious injury, illness or incident has occurred at a mine or mine site, call the OHS Contact Centre as soon as possible.)
 - See [page 6](#) for the complete list of section 544 incidents.

Don't disturb the scene

You cannot disturb the scene of any injury, illness or incident described in section 33(2) of the *OHS Act*. These are:

- Incidents that result in a worker fatality, or result or may result in a worker being admitted to hospital.
- An unplanned or uncontrolled explosion, fire or flood.
- A crane, derrick or hoist collapse or upset.
- A (full or partial) building or structural collapse or failure.

The *OHS Act* describes the scene as the immediate area where the injury, illness or incident occurred.

You also cannot alter, move or remove equipment, documentation or other information related to the injury, illness or incident.

When it's okay to disturb the scene

From the *OHS Act*, you can disturb the scene of an injury, illness or incident described in section 33(2) of the *OHS Act* if any of the following apply:

- An OHS officer or police officer gives you permission to do so.
- You need to attend to a person who is ill, injured or killed.
- You need to prevent further injuries, illnesses or incidents.
- You need to protect property endangered by the incident.

The *OHS Act* does not prohibit disturbing the scene of radiation overexposures, mine or mine site incidents or potentially serious incidents. (But if a death, serious injury, illness or incident has occurred at a mine or mine site, or because of a radiation overexposure, these fall under the 'Don't disturb the scene' rules above.)

By [Director of Occupational Health and Safety Order](#) you may disturb the scene of an unplanned or uncontrolled explosion, fire or flood; a crane, derrick or hoist collapse or upset; a (full or partial) building or structural collapse or failure if:

- There is no injury or illness involved.
- You haven't been directed otherwise by an OHS officer or police officer.

Investigate the incident

The prime contractor of the work site is required to complete their own internal investigation of reportable incidents, including potentially serious incidents. If there is no prime contractor, the employer must carry out the investigation. (See [page 4](#) of this bulletin for more about potentially serious incidents.)



IDENTIFYING CAUSES

Identifying the direct and indirect causes of an incident can reveal its root cause – the ultimate reason why the incident occurred – and the changes that are needed to prevent the incident from happening again.

Direct causes are the unsafe/unhealthy conditions, events or behaviours that led up to the incident (e.g. slippery floors due to a spilled liquid, standing on a box instead of using a proper step stool or ladder, lifting too heavy of a load).

Indirect causes are the contributing factors leading up to the outcome (e.g. no one was available to mop up the spill, there was no step stool, a delivery came in through the store front instead of the loading dock).

The **root cause** is the underlying or basic condition that allowed each of the direct and indirect causes to occur (e.g. a lack of housekeeping or cleanup procedures, proper equipment is not available on the work site, workers are not trained on proper shipping/receiving procedures). The root cause is not always obvious. Finding the root cause and taking corrective actions is the best way to prevent future incidents.

You must investigate workplace incidents to figure out the cause of the incident and to prevent similar incidents in the future.

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An investigation is a fact-finding mission that collects information about the incident to analyze and determine how it happened. Some ways to collect information include:

- Taking pictures of or sketching the scene.
- Interviewing workers and witnesses.
- Listing equipment and materials being used.
- Reviewing health and safety records, such as inspection reports, training summaries and/or past incident reports.

Use the information collected to paint a complete picture of the incident. From there, you can start to look at why the incident happened and how to prevent recurrence.

The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS) has more information on how to conduct an effective incident investigation. Read more at [ccohs.ca](https://www.ccohs.ca).

Investigation reports

Investigation reports should not include any personal information, such as the names or identity of workers, witnesses and investigators.



Privacy laws govern information sharing. If you believe personal information is necessary in your report, make sure it is authorized under privacy law.

The *OHS Act* requires the prime contractor at the work site – or the employer, if there isn't a prime contractor – to prepare and distribute a report that outlines the circumstances of the injury, illness, incident or worker exposure and the corrective actions taken, if any, to prevent a recurrence.

Report distribution

You must provide a copy of the investigation report to the health and safety committee (HSC) or representative (HS representative), if applicable.

If there is no HSC or HS representative, you must make the report available to your workers.

Providing an investigation report to OHS

You must provide your fatality, serious injury, illness or incident investigation report to an OHS officer on request.

When you notify the OHS Contact Centre of a radiation overexposure, the OHS Contact Centre will direct you on how to submit your incident investigation report.

In cases where you must notify OHS online, you must also submit your investigation report online (oirportal.labour.alberta.ca).

You must submit your potentially serious incident investigation report online, when your investigation is complete.

Report retention

You must keep a copy of your incident investigation report readily available for at least two years.

OHS follow up

After an incident is reported, OHS may contact the employer, prime contractor or anyone else that has information related to the incident. An officer's investigation authorities include:

- Visiting the scene of the injury, illness or incident.
- Collecting information, including electronic documents that relate to the health and safety of workers, and asking questions or taking statements from people as needed.
- Seizing or taking samples of any substance, material, product, tool, appliance or equipment that was present at, involved in, or related to the incident.
- Entering any place at the work site where the incident occurred or where the officer believes related information exists.
- Using the employer's data storage, information processing or retrieval devices and systems to examine electronic information.

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- Requiring documentation from anyone who has information related to the incident.
- Exercising any inspection authority.

OHS officers also have authority to enforce compliance with legislation in a number of ways, including issuing orders, writing tickets, issuing administrative penalties or making referrals to prosecution.

For more information, read [Roles and duties of an OHS officer](#).

Don't interfere

It is against the law to interfere with or hinder an officer performing their duties and functions. For example, you cannot:

- Deny an officer access to all or part of a work site.
- Tell an officer that they must make an appointment to complete their work.
- Refuse to let an officer interview a worker in private.
- Fail to provide an officer with any documents or information that they require.

Understanding potentially serious incidents

Section 33(5) of the *OHS Act* gives the two criteria that define a reportable potentially serious incident. These are:

- The incident had a likelihood of causing a serious injury or illness.
- There is reasonable cause to believe that corrective action may be needed to prevent recurrence.

A potentially serious incident does not need to involve an injury and is not limited to workers. If someone who isn't a worker is involved, it's a potentially serious incident if it resulted from work activities at the work site or could have happened to a worker. (See examples 10 and 11 in [Table 1](#)).

Details collected from potentially serious injury reports are used for information and education purposes. OHS may follow up if there is evidence of a current or ongoing serious health and safety concern.

The Figure 1 decision tree below and [Table 1](#) examples can help you determine if an event is a potentially serious incident.

Visit the [Report potentially serious incidents](#) web page to learn more.

FIGURE 1. POTENTIALLY SERIOUS INCIDENT DECISION TREE

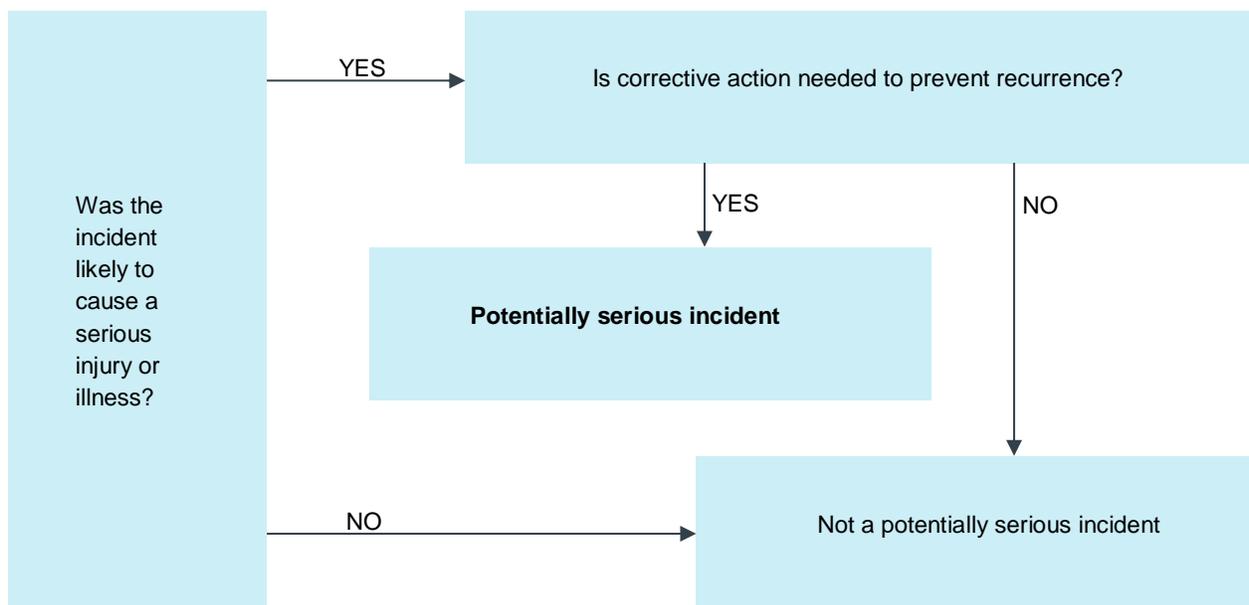


TABLE 1. POTENTIALLY SERIOUS INCIDENT EXAMPLES

| Potentially serious incident | | Not a potentially serious incident |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|
| 1 | A worker wearing a hard hat is struck on the head by a falling object and although stunned, recovers without injury. Several more, larger and heavier objects fall near the worker. If the worker had been in a slightly different position, they may have experienced a serious injury. | Workers are working overhead on a platform. There is netting in place to catch falling objects and the ground below work area is quarantined with barriers. A worker drops a hammer and it falls into the netting. |
| 2 | An armed person storms onto a work site and threatens workers with death. The armed person robs the work site and leaves. Workers are not physically injured but experience psychological harm. The potential for serious incident in this example is high, given the many factors involved – any change in one factor may have led to a different outcome. | Two workers get into an argument at work. The work site has violence and harassment policies and a manager observes the argument and quickly de-escalates the situation. |
| 3 | A worker sweeping up and cleaning debris in a publicly accessible part of the work site received a needlestick injury from a needle of unknown origin. The worker is sent to an urgent care centre to be assessed and for follow-up care. The hazards associated with the needle are unknown. | A restaurant worker is preparing food and cuts their finger. They are treated with first aid. |
| 4 | A resident at a group home becomes aggressive towards their support worker but does not injure workers physically or psychologically. The employer was aware of the resident's tendency towards aggressive behaviour but failed to inform workers. | A resident is known to be aggressive and all staff are made aware and trained to deal with aggressive residents. A resident is aggressive with staff and the staff implement training and controls appropriately. |
| 5 | During an arrest, a police officer is assaulted by a perpetrator. Personal protective equipment failed to protect the officer and they sustained a small non-serious cut to their throat. Under slightly different circumstances the officer could have been seriously injured. | During an arrest, a police officer is assaulted by a perpetrator. Personal protective equipment and training allows the officer to de-escalate the situation. |
| 6 | A flag person controlling traffic at a highway construction project. They step beyond the safety barrier and are almost hit by a passing car. | A flag person is standing behind a barrier while controlling traffic at a highway construction project. Vehicle operators respect the barriers and the posted speed limit. A person in a passing vehicle tosses a cigarette from their vehicle and almost hits the flag person. |
| 7 | A chemical substance is unexpectedly discharged into the open air at a product processing site when no persons were present. This was not a planned event. If a person was present, they would have sustained serious injury. | A chemical release at a plant is planned and all persons present are wearing appropriate personal protective equipment. |

| Potentially serious incident | | Not a potentially serious incident |
|------------------------------|---|--|
| 8 | A vehicle is left unattended overnight on a slight slope at a work site with no parking brake engaged. No workers are at the work site. A mechanical failure results in the vehicle rolling down-slope. Workers arrive the next day to find that the vehicle has crashed into fencing. No one was injured. If a person was in the wrong place, at the wrong time, they may have sustained serious injury. | An unattended vehicle's parking brake fails, and the vehicle rolls three feet into a parking lot guard rail scratching the front head light. |
| 9 | While hoisting a motor, the weld on the lifting eye breaks. The area around and below the electric motor is not secured with appropriate controls. The motor falls. No one was injured. If a person was in the wrong place, at the wrong time, they could have sustained serious injury. | While hoisting a motor, the area around and below is secured with the appropriate controls. One of the hoisting straps inadvertently releases and the motor shifts. |
| 10 | A pedestrian is walking in a sidewalk-closed area. A manhole cover is removed and there are no barriers placed around the open sewer. The pedestrian does not notice the hole and falls in. This incident could have just as easily happened to a worker. | A sidewalk is under construction and barriers are placed to restrict access to this section of the sidewalk. A pedestrian tripped over the corner of the barrier and stumbles. |
| 11 | Workers set up a fence surrounding a work site. After hours, a gust of wind blows the fence onto the adjacent sidewalk. No persons were injured. Reinforced posts have been installed on the fence to prevent re-occurrence. A non-worker had the potential to be seriously injured from the fencing (from a work activity at the work site). | Workers set up a fence surrounding a work site with reinforced posts. After hours, a wind storm goes through the work site. A small section of the fence leaned over. |

TABLE 2. REPORTABLE MINE OR MINE SITE INCIDENTS

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| OHS Code section 544(1) | For the purposes of section 33(3) of the Act, an employer must notify a Director as soon as possible if any of the following occur: |
| (a) | an unexpected major ground fall or subsidence that endangers or may endanger workers, equipment or facilities; |
| (b) | an unplanned stoppage of the main underground ventilation system, if it lasts more than 30 minutes; |
| (c) | a vehicle that goes out of control; |
| (d) | ignition of flammable gas, combustible dust or other material underground; |
| (e) | workers are withdrawn from a hazardous location under emergency conditions; |
| (f) | electrical equipment failures or incidents that cause, or threaten to cause, injury to workers or damage to equipment or facilities; |
| (g) | any other unusual incident or unexpected event that could have caused serious injury to a worker; |
| (h) | outbursts and inrushes; or |

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| (i) | an incident involving a hoist, sheave, hoisting rope, shaft conveyance, shaft, shaft timbering or headframe structure. |
| OHS Code section 544(2) | An employer must notify a Director as soon as possible if any of the following occur and the integrity of a dam or dike is affected: |
| (a) | cracking or evidence of weakening or subsidence of a dam or impoundment dike; |
| (b) | unexpected seepage or the appearance of springs on the outer face of a dam or dike; |
| (c) | the freeboard of a dam or dike is less than adequate; or |
| (d) | there is a washout or significant erosion to a dam or dike. |

Contact us

OHS Contact Centre

Anywhere in Alberta

- 1-866-415-8690

Edmonton and surrounding area

- 780-415-8690

Deaf or hard of hearing (TTY)

- 1-800-232-7215 (Alberta)

- 780-427-9999 (Edmonton)

Notify OHS of health and safety concerns

alberta.ca/file-complaint-online.aspx

Call the OHS Contact Centre if you have concerns that involve immediate danger to a person on a work site.

Report a workplace incident to OHS

alberta.ca/ohs-complaints-incident.aspx

Website

alberta.ca/ohs

Get copies of the OHS Act, Regulation and Code

Alberta Queen's Printer

qp.gov.ab.ca

OHS

alberta.ca/ohs-act-regulation-code.aspx

For more information

CCOHS: Incident investigation

ccohs.ca/oshanswers/hsprograms/investig.html

Director of Occupational Health and Safety Order – Disturbing the Scene

open.alberta.ca/publications/ohs-director-order-disturbing-the-scene

Personal exposure monitoring for ionizing radiation (dosimetry) (RAD008)

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/rad008

Report potentially serious incidents

alberta.ca/report-potentially-serious-incident.aspx

Roles and duties of OHS officers (LI046)

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/li046

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