

Occupational health and safety (OHS) hazardous footwear

OHS information for workers and employers

KEY INFORMATION

- Employers must assess all work site hazards including those related to footwear.
- An employer may not require a worker to wear footwear that may harm the worker.
- Workers may still wear distinct footwear (e.g. high heels) if it is safe for them to do so.

Occupational health and safety (OHS) changes

Recent changes to the OHS Code clarify that employers **cannot** require workers to use footwear that may pose risks to their health and safety.

What is hazardous footwear?

Certain kinds of footwear, like high-heeled shoes, can put workers at an increased risk of injuries from slips, trips, and falls.

Employers are prohibited from mandating footwear that poses a risk to workers' health and safety.

What safety or health effects could workers experience from hazardous footwear?

Some types of footwear (e.g. high-heeled shoes) can put workers at an increased risk of slips, trips, falls, and musculoskeletal injuries (MSIs). In most cases, this footwear is not necessary for workers to perform their work.

This hazard can be more prevalent in work such as serving food, which requires workers to navigate busy spaces while carrying food.

For some workers, prolonged use may result in additional health issues, such as joint pain or back problems. These effects are most likely to occur when footwear is not well suited to the work environment where it is used.

Are high-heeled shoes prohibited in the workplace?

Employers are prohibited from requiring that workers use footwear that poses a health and safety hazard.

In addition, workers are required to take reasonable steps to protect their health and safety, which extends to their footwear choices.

The change is not intended to interfere with a worker's choice of footwear. If the work environment is suitable and it is safe for them to do so, workers can voluntarily wear high-heeled shoes or other forms of footwear.

How can workers be protected from harm?

Employers must consider footwear-related hazards when performing their required hazard assessment. In assessing the potential harm to workers from footwear, the employer must consider hazards such as:

- slipping
- tripping
- uneven terrain
- abrasion
- ankle protection and foot support
- potential for MSIs
- crushing potential
- temperature extremes
- chemical hazards
- puncture hazards
- electrical shock
- other applicable hazards specific to the environment or type of work

Following a hazard assessment, the employer could alter the work environment to eliminate hazards such as from tripping or uneven terrain, and ensure that workers' footwear allows workers to perform their work safely. A worker's footwear must be of a design, construction, and material appropriate to the protection required.

The employer must determine the appropriate protection required for the feet and ankles based on the work assigned to each worker, and ensure each worker wears appropriate footwear.

In some circumstances, workers may have specialized training or experience that might allow them to use distinct footwear more safely. For instance, performers in arts and culture are trained in specialized dance shoes.

How do footwear requirements apply to actors, models, and other performers?

Assessments are based on the work procedures and arrangements that exist in the workplace at any given time. An employer may adjust the work procedures and arrangements to reduce or remove the hazard.

For example, an employer may limit the number of workers doing tasks that cause a risk of foot injury, or change the way the tasks are done. Performance is the focus of actors', models', and performers' work. These workers will have specific training and rehearsal time with their performance, which can include the footwear they would be using. This training and experience with distinct footwear may limit the risks that these workers face (e.g. from slipping and tripping) while rehearsing and performing.

When determining the requirements for appropriate protective footwear, an employer should not consider training and supervision as a substitute for protective footwear, or as a reason to allow unsafe footwear to be worn.

Contact Us

OHS Contact Centre

Throughout Alberta

- 1-866-415-8690

Edmonton & surrounding area

- 780-415-8690

Deaf or hearing impaired:

- 1-800-232-7215 (Alberta)
- 780-427-9999 (Edmonton)

PSI Online Reporting Service

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

Website

alberta.ca/occupational-health-safety.aspx

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Hazard Assessment and Control: a handbook for Alberta employers and workers (BP018)

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/bp018

Safe Stages Best Practices (BP027)

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/bp027

Worker's guide to occupational health and safety (LI008)

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/li008

Employer's guide to occupational health and safety (LI009)

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/li009

Get Copies of OHS Act, Regulation and Code

Alberta Queen's Printer

qp.gov.ab.ca

Occupational Health and Safety

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

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