

Are volunteers and students workers?

OHS information for employers and non-profit agencies

This publication explains when volunteers and students are considered to be workers under Alberta's occupational health and safety (OHS) legislation.

KEY INFORMATION

- Most unpaid volunteers are considered workers under OHS legislation.
- Students are considered to be workers:
 - when engaged in learning activities for which they are paid, or
 - when engaged in a work program with an employer or organization other than their educational institution.

Volunteers

Volunteers who perform or supply services to an organization or employer without being paid are defined as workers in Alberta's *OHS Act* (with the exception of farm and ranch volunteers).

For example, volunteers who are engaged by an organization to help clean up roadside litter, teach a seminar, run a bake sale fundraiser, or help build houses, are all considered workers.

Volunteers are only not considered to be workers of an organization if the organization has not formally or informally accepted the use of their volunteered services. For example, a person who is fundraising without the knowledge of the organization benefiting from the funds would not be considered a worker of that organization.

When people volunteer without the knowledge of an organization, they may still have obligations under OHS legislation to ensure the health and safety of themselves and any others who are providing assistance.

Students

Students are not considered to be workers when they are involved in learning activities conducted by a school without being paid (i.e. when they are simply being a student). Examples of such learning activities include regular classroom studies, as well as activities such as high school woodworking classes, trade school automotive repair courses, university chemistry laboratory courses, etc.

However, students are considered to be workers under OHS legislation if they are engaged in learning activities for which they are paid, or are in a work program with an organization other than their own school. Examples include:

- Receiving monetary compensation for teaching a lab or tutorial, or conducting research for a university, professor, or instructor.
- Doing work placement at a social assistance agency, or working as part of an apprenticeship program.

Rights and responsibilities

Volunteers and students who are considered to be workers have all of the same health and safety rights and responsibilities as other workers under OHS legislation. For more information, see [Guide to OHS: Workers](#).

In situations where volunteers or students are considered to be workers, the organization for which they are performing work is considered to be an employer, and therefore must fulfill all employer obligations specified in OHS legislation. The organization's supervisors must also fulfill their OHS obligations in this case. For more information, see [Guide to OHS: Employers](#) and [Guide to OHS: Supervisors](#).

Health and safety committees, representatives, and programs

Employers with certain numbers of "regularly employed workers" must have a health and safety committee, a health and safety representative, and/or a health and safety program.

- Volunteers who are considered workers under OHS legislation are not counted as "regularly employed workers" for the purpose of determining whether an employer needs a health and safety committee or a health and safety representative.
 - Volunteers can still serve on a health and safety committee, and can also serve as a health and safety representative.
- Volunteers are counted as "regularly employed workers" for the purpose of determining whether a health and safety program is needed.

For more information, visit [Health and safety committees and representatives](#) and [Health and safety programs](#).

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-incidents.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

Guide to OHS: Employers (LI009)

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/li009

Guide to OHS: Supervisor (LI010)

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/li010

Guide to OHS: Workers (LI008)

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/li008

Health and safety committees and representatives (LI060)

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/li060

Health and safety on Alberta farms and ranches (BP029)

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/bp029

Health and safety programs (LI042)

ohs-pubstore.labour.alberta.ca/li042

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