Managing health and safety in small business

Injury or illness to a worker, owner or customer can have serious effects on a small business. It can hurt a firm’s reputation and put future earnings at risk.

What are the costs of workplace injuries and illnesses?
Besides the compensation costs, there is the:
- impact on the worker and family
- time spent on first aid or going to hospital or doctor
- disruption to production or customer service
- possibility of prosecution or fines for the company and the owner
- downtime for other workers
- lower employee morale and productivity
- time spent completing paper work, and
- time spent finding and training replacement workers

How are these costs recovered? By selling more goods and services. The smaller the profit margin, the greater the sales needed to replace the losses.

What does the law say?
The Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) sets standards for preventing workplace injuries and illnesses. It applies to all types of businesses, regardless of size or complexity.

Under OHSA, everyone in the workplace has a role in preventing injury and illness. Owners, managers and supervisors must prove due diligence that they are meeting their responsibilities under OHSA and taking every reasonable precaution to protect workers. If found guilty of neglecting these legal responsibilities, the penalties can be:
- fines up to $500,000 for the company and
- fines up to $25,000 for principals of the company or one year in jail or both.

There could also be charges under the Criminal Code of Canada:
- individuals can be jailed up to 10 years for an injury and jailed for life if a worker dies
- companies can face unlimited fines.

How to manage health and safety
Managing health and safety effectively requires that jobs are done in a safe way, in a healthy and safe environment. Here are some ideas on how to get started.

Management commitment It starts with your commitment to health and safety. Put it in writing and tell everyone in the workplace what you expect. Your commitment should show in every decision made and the way work is done.
**Be informed.** Know about all the hazards in the workplace and how to control them. Make a list of all known hazards. Suppliers can provide advice on the hazards associated with the goods and services they provide. Ontario’s Health and Safety Associations can provide health and safety information specific to the risks and industry of every business. Visit the WSIB’s website at www.wsib.on.ca for contact information.

**Train workers.** Training programs reinforce safe practices and procedures. Workers must be trained on how to do their jobs properly and in a safe way. Set standards on how the job should be done and ensure the training covers those standards as well as those set in law and the regulations that apply to the job. Make sure trainers are competent, and, if necessary, arrange for training through a health and safety association. Regularly evaluate the program to ensure it is effective.

**Make people responsible and accountable for health and safety.** Assign duties for managing the health and safety program. Give the people responsible the authority to resolve safety issues or to bring them to management. Make sure that all employees are accountable for maintaining a safe workplace.

**Get employees involved.** This is an excellent way to encourage and improve communication in the organization. Often, the people doing the jobs can give valuable information about potential hazards. A workplace health and safety committee can keep people involved.

**Have regular inspections.** Inspecting for hazards is an effective way to keep workplaces healthy and safe. Prepare an inspection checklist and train someone to do inspections. Examples of checklists are available through the health and safety associations. A workplace inspection should include:

- identifying hazards,
- reviewing the way hazardous materials are handled
- inspecting equipment, and
- reviewing safe work procedures.

Make sure hazards are recorded and then corrected as soon as possible. Assess the findings against what’s expected in safety regulations and in the company rules. Then, decide the best way to eliminate or control the hazard.

**Build and evaluate the program.** The ideas above will help create a workplace health and safety program. Regularly review the program to see what is working well and what needs improving. Gradually add more health and safety standards and rules to the program. Your health and safety association and the WSIB can help.

**Workplace Safety and Insurance Board**

Ontario’s Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) plays a key role in the province’s occupational health and safety system. Funded by employers, the WSIB is one of the top 10 disability insurers in North America. In addition to a strong prevention mandate, the WSIB provides insurance for injuries and illnesses incurred in workplaces covered under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act* and supports early and safe return to work for injured workers.

---

**This information is available in several languages by calling our information hotline at 416-344-4999 …. toll-free 1-800-465-5606 or Telephone Service for the Deaf (TTY): 1-800-387-0050**

Pour obtenir un exemplaire en français, composez le 1-800-465-5606.