Joint Health and Safety Committees and Health and Safety Representatives

Most workplaces are required to have a joint health and safety committee (JHSC) or a worker health and safety representative, depending on the size of the company. This focus on health and safety is a basic part of Ontario’s workplace health and safety structure.

The internal responsibility system (IRS) is a health and safety philosophy. It is based on the principle that every individual in the workplace is responsible for health and safety. This includes the CEO, executives, management and workers. The concept of a workplace IRS relies on the effectiveness of the joint committee or the worker health and safety representative, as does the partnership to improve health and safety.

The JHSC is an advisory group of both worker and management representatives. The JHSC meets regularly to discuss health and safety concerns, review progress, and make recommendations to improve health and safety conditions in the workplace.

A health and safety representative is someone chosen by the workers to represent them in health and safety matters. The representative must have non-managerial duties. By bringing forward worker concerns and working with management, the representative can help improve health and safety in the workplace.

**When must a workplace have a joint health and safety committee?**
- If there are 20 or more workers employed on a regular basis
- In construction projects where 20 or more workers are regularly employed and if the project is expected to last three months or longer
- In any workplace (other than a construction project) where a designated substance regulation applies, even if fewer than 20 workers are regularly employed.

**When must a workplace have a health and safety representative?**
- If more than five workers are employed on a regular basis in a workplace and that workplace does not require a JHSC.

**Who is responsible for establishing the JHSC or H&S Rep?**
The employer is responsible for establishing a JHSC or a H&S Rep. The employer provides support by
- allowing for a means of membership selection
- setting aside time for meetings, inspections or other prevention work in the workplace.

**Who should be on the JHSC?**
The size of the JHSC depends on the number of workers employed. When there are fewer than 50 workers regularly employed, the committee must have at least two members. There must be one representative from management and one representative from among the workers. When 50 or more workers are employed, four (4) members are required.

There are few basic rules for JHSC composition.
- At least half the members on the committee must be worker representatives.
- The members representing workers must be chosen by the workers or, where it applies, by the trade union(s) that represent the workers.
- The employer chooses management members of the committee.
- At least one worker member and one management member of the JHSC must receive training and be a certified member.
**How does a JHSC or H&S Rep function?**
The rep or committee itself decides how to do its work, which includes:

- determining frequency of meetings, (there is a minimum of once every three months)
- identifying hazards: including things like machinery, substances, production processes, and working environment, work practices or situations that can endanger the health and safety of workers
- conducting monthly workplace inspections
- acting on the right to get information from the employer that relates to the health and safety of the workplace
- obtaining an annual summary of compensable injuries and illnesses relating to all workplaces of the employer in Ontario (from the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board) and
- making recommendations to the employer on ways to improve workplace health and safety.

**Benefits of having a JHSC or health and safety representative**
Benefits include a forum for employees to participate in health and safety, and better attitudes and working relationships for solving health and safety problems. Health and safety representatives and workers on JHSC's identify workplace specific knowledge on health and safety concerns while management members can foster communications about company policies and procedures. Together, the workers and management can develop practical and workable solutions for improving health and safety on the job.

**For more information about joint health and safety reps and committees**
- Contact your health and safety association
- The WSIB Prevention Hotline at (416) 344-1016 or 1-800-663-6639.

**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