

# PREVENTING WORKPLACE INJURIES

Getting Started



**WORK SAFE. FOR LIFE.**  
WORKERS' COMPENSATION BOARD OF NOVA SCOTIA

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# AS AN EMPLOYER, YOU HAVE A KEY ROLE TO PLAY IN MAKING NOVA SCOTIA SAFER.

**NOVA SCOTIA HAS AN UNACCEPTABLY HIGH RATE OF WORKPLACE INJURY.** Every day, more than two dozen Nova Scotians are injured and every month someone dies on the job. More needs to be done to reduce the human and economic toll of workplace injuries. We need to create a workplace safety culture in our province.

As an employer, you have a key role to play in making Nova Scotia safer. Every workplace injury is avoidable. Employers have a legal responsibility to create a safe work environment and ensure their employees go home safe. Senior management sets the tone and expectations of an organization. Without your commitment and support, safety and disability management programs will have a limited effect.

This booklet offers steps you can take to make your workplace safer, whether your business has a handful of employees or many. The steps aren't complicated, but ensuring the well-being of your employees requires your time and commitment. For example, when safety is discussed and decisions are made, involve your employees and set clear rules. You will soon find that your workplace is safer and more productive.

The information in this guide does not provide all the answers to your questions. It is only an introduction to workplace safety. More information is available by calling the WCB prevention department toll-free at **1 800 870-3331** or contacting the Occupational Health and Safety Division of the Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Workforce Development at **1 800 952-2687**.

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**WORKPLACE  
INJURIES  
OCCUR EACH DAY**

**SAFETY STARTS WITH AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING.** A written company safety policy shows your commitment to a safe workplace and lets your employees know that safety is a priority throughout the organization and unsafe practices are not acceptable.

### YOUR SAFETY POLICY SHOULD INCLUDE

- A statement about your commitment to the health and safety of your employees;
- Your approach to health and safety in your workplace;
- The objectives of your safety program;
- The responsibilities of management and employees with regard to safety;
- A statement that safe behaviour will be encouraged and expected.

A safety policy doesn't need to be long or complicated – it just needs to make sense for your business and employees. Once you have a clear and concise policy, make sure every employee reads it, understands it and reflects it in the way they work. Then review the policy annually and update it whenever necessary.

### SAMPLE POLICY

ABC Company will make every effort to provide a healthy and safe work environment. All supervisors and employees must be dedicated to reducing the risk of injury and illness. As an employer, ABC Company is ultimately responsible for the health and safety of our employees.

Supervisors will be held accountable for the health and safety of employees under their supervision. Supervisors also are responsible to ensure that machinery and equipment are safe, and that employees follow established safe work practices and procedures. Employees must protect their own health and safety and that of others by following the law, and the company's safe work practices and procedures. It is in the best interest of all of us to consider health and safety in every activity. Commitment to health and safety must be demonstrated at every level of this company.

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President, ABC Company

# STEP 2

## KNOW YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES

As an employer, you are legally required to maintain a safe work environment. Employees also share a responsibility to act safely in the workplace.

### MANAGERS' RESPONSIBILITIES

- Ensure equipment, materials and the work environment is safe
- Establish safe work policies and procedures for hazardous work and ensure they're followed
- Provide orientation to the company's safety policy and provide safety training on hazard information, equipment use and operational procedures
- Consult with employees on workplace health and safety issues
- Establish a health and safety committee (if you have 20 or more employees, it is required by law) or a safety representative (if you have five or more employees, it is required by law)
- Make everyone accountable for their safety performance

### EMPLOYEES' RESPONSIBILITIES

- Comply with company rules and procedures;
- Wear personal protective equipment as required;
- Use machinery, equipment, and materials, only as authorized;
- Follow job procedures;
- Report all incidents and near misses;
- Know your rights:

**The Right To Know** – Employees are entitled to information on issues that affect their health and safety or that of another person in the workplace.

**The Right To Refuse** – Employees have the right to refuse unsafe or unhealthy work.

**The Right To Participate** – Employees can participate on Occupational Health and Safety Committees or be a Safety Representative, report unsafe conditions, and voice concerns or opinions on any issue that affects their health and safety, or that of the workplace.

Employers have moral, legal and financial reasons to keep their employees healthy, safe and productive. The direct cost of an incident may be easy to determine (injuries, damage, wages, etc.), but indirect costs (lost productivity, employee morale, insurance ratings, sales quotas, etc.) are less apparent and often far exceed the more obvious costs.

Once your safety policy has been prepared as in Step 1, a safety program is required to put that policy into effect. A safety program demonstrates your commitment to the well being of your employees. Employers who employ more than 20 people are required by law to have a safety program in place.

Safety programs differ from one company to the next, depending upon factors such as organizational structure, nature of the operation and risk levels. But most programs focus on what is needed to comply with legal requirements and to meet the employer's moral and financial reasons to keep workers healthy and on the job.

### WHEN DEVELOPING A SAFETY PROGRAM

- Develop a plan for implementing your safety program;
- Assign and communicate health and safety responsibilities;
- Set measurable standards;
- Involve employees in the program;
- Identify, assess, and control hazards;
- Identify procedures to investigate and resolve incidents;
- Provide on-going training and communication;
- Audit and assess the results of the program;
- Implement continuous improvements.

**1 PERSON  
DIES  
ON THE JOB  
EVERY TWO WEEKS**

Employers build a safety culture in their organization by generating a high degree of safety awareness, participation and commitment. Many businesses in Nova Scotia establish a Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee (JOHSC) to address workplace health and safety issues. A JOHSC is required by law if you employ 20 or more people in a workplace.

The advantage of a joint committee is that people with in-depth practical knowledge of specific tasks (labour) are brought together with people who have a larger overview of company policies and procedures (management). Working together on a committee also can enhance the spirit of cooperation needed to address a company's health and safety issues.

### JOHSC ACTIVITIES COMMONLY INCLUDE

- Helping develop and implement health and safety programs;
- Helping establish and promote safety awareness;
- Reviewing employee complaints or suggestions concerning safety or health;
- Participating in hazard inspection, assessment and control;
- Making recommendations to management to improve safety;
- Participating in injury and incident investigations;
- Monitoring whether safety programs are effective;
- Keeping minutes of all meetings, highlighting recommendations.

For some smaller businesses, a Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee may not be possible. In those situations, having your employees select a Safety Representative to perform a similar role to the JOHSC is an option. A Safety Representative is mandatory if you employ five or more people in a workplace.

# STEP 5

## CONTROL HAZARDS

For many businesses, hazards in the workplace are an unavoidable reality given the nature of the work. Businesses committed to safety identify these hazards and do everything possible to control them to minimize the risk of personal injury and property damage.

Conducting workplace inspections with your Safety Committee or Representative on a regular basis is a good way to identify potential hazards. You can create a checklist of common hazards to help focus your efforts. Some common workplace hazards include:

<b>People</b>	<b>Materials</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Not wearing appropriate safety gear</li><li>• Not following proper safety procedures</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Improper handling of hazardous materials</li></ul>
<b>Equipment</b>	<b>Environment</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Inadequate machine guards or barriers</li><li>• Defective equipment</li><li>• Wrong tools or equipment for the job</li><li>• Inadequate warning systems</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Poor walkway maintenance</li><li>• Overcrowding</li><li>• Poor ventilation</li><li>• Poor lighting</li><li>• Extreme temperature or noise levels</li><li>• Untidy workplace</li></ul>
<b>Process</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Problems created by the design, pace and type of work</li></ul>	

You also should review individual jobs to determine potential hazards and procedures to control them. The basic stages in conducting a job hazard analysis are:

- Select the task to be analyzed;
- Break the tasks down into a sequence of steps;
- Observe an experienced worker perform the job;
- Identify potential hazards;
- Eliminate the hazard, contain the hazard, revise the work process and reduce the exposure;
- Write the steps in a procedure to do the work safely and communicate it to the employees affected

Learning from the past can prevent incidents from happening again. Rarely is there a single isolated cause for an incident. By finding the causes and taking steps to control or eliminate them, similar occurrences can be avoided. Always keep in mind that effective incident investigation means fact-finding, not fault-finding.

Collect and analyze information on events that happened before, during, and after the incident. The recurrence of particular types of incidents or those with common causes are areas needing special prevention emphasis.

A witness to an incident can provide valuable information. It's important to separate facts from opinions and assumptions. Interviews are best done separately and help determine:

- Identity of people involved in the incident;
- Identity of people with possible knowledge of the incident;
- Events that occurred before, during, and after the incident;
- Timing and sequence of events;
- Location and direction of actions and events;
- Possible causes of each action and event;
- The witness' suggestions for preventing similar incidents.

Surveying the incident scene as soon as possible after the event is also important. Use a measuring tape, camera and sketches to record the scene. Your investigation will help to identify the “root causes” of the incident so they can be prevented in the future.

In cases of serious injury, an incident scene cannot be disturbed except to attend to the injured person or to prevent further damage to property. In some cases, the Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Workforce Development, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, or the police may want to investigate the incident.

Sort and analyze the information gathered and use this knowledge to put measures in place to prevent the incident from happening again.

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CRUSHINGS,  
CONTUSIONS,  
OR SERIOUS BRUISES  
EVERY MONTH

Senior managers can help instill a safety culture in a workplace by coaching their employees. Leaders set the direction, assign resources and most importantly, motivate people to make safety a fundamental part of the way business is done. That doesn't mean one person needs to do it all. In fact, your approach to safety should be customized to meet the needs of your business and employees. But at the end of the day, a safety program requires a strong champion, committed resources and a shared vision for a safe workplace.

A safe workplace is a partnership between employers and employees. Safety training gives your employees the knowledge and tools they need to make smart and safe decisions on the job. Every employee should have relevant training that allows them to do their job safely. In addition, employees should understand the company's commitment to safety and their rights and responsibilities. Many employers also offer courses in First Aid and Workplace Hazardous Material Information System (WHMIS).

You can build on your training success by communicating and promoting clear safety rules for your workplace. Some common safety rules include:

- Unsafe work conditions or injuries are reported immediately to a supervisor;
- Illegal drugs, alcohol, firearms and horseplay are prohibited in your workplace;
- Employees must always wear appropriate safety gear such as steel-toe boots, hard hats, hearing protection and safety goggles;
- Safety rules are enforced.

An important part of any safety program is consistent, accurate record-keeping. The kinds of things that should be recorded include:

- Notes of all safety inspections and audits;
- Documentation of regular maintenance on machinery;
- Safety training activities (who took what course and when);
- Injury, illness and incident reports;
- Safety committee meeting minutes.

A simple but disciplined approach to communication, training and record-keeping will help create and maintain a safety culture in your workplace.

# STEP 8

## ESTABLISH A RETURN TO WORK PROGRAM

**BOTTOM LINE, WORKPLACE INJURIES ARE COSTLY.** While preventing injuries is the best outcome for everyone in the workplace, implementing an effective Return to Work program can reduce the human and financial toll of an injury should one occur.

Helping an injured worker return to work as soon as safely possible is in everyone's best interest. It helps the employee return to the life they knew before the injury and helps employers by returning an experienced employee to their operations.

The key to a successful Return to Work program is a strong partnership between employers, workers, health care providers, unions, and the WCB. This, coupled with a shared commitment to returning injured workers to safe and suitable employment, will ensure your program's success.

Many employers create their own customized Return to Work program. It does not need to be elaborate. The goal is to have a clearly understood way to help an injured worker return to work at either full or modified duties.

### SOME KEY STEPS TO CREATING A SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM ARE

- Involving your employees in the process;
- Organizing a formal return to work committee;
- Selecting a Return to Work coordinator;
- Defining a return to work policy and program scope;
- Developing suitable alternative jobs;
- Creating an information package and promoting it.

# GET STARTED

**CREATING A SAFETY CULTURE IN YOUR COMPANY** doesn't need to be complicated. It takes commitment from you and your employees to doing things right. By taking the steps outlined in this booklet, you will begin to make your workplace safer and ensure your employees go home safely to their families when the workday is over.

If you would like further information on any of the information in this booklet, please contact us.

## **WORKERS' COMPENSATION BOARD OF NOVA SCOTIA**

**1 800 870-3331** (mainland Nova Scotia)

**1 800 880-0003** (Cape Breton).

Please visit our website at **wcb.ns.ca**, or take advantage of interactive workplace safety tools at **worksafeforlife.ca**

## **NOVA SCOTIA DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT, OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY DIVISION**

**1 800 952-2687**

**gov.ns.ca/lwd/**

For additional information on workplace health and safety, contact:

## **CANADIAN CENTRE FOR OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY**

**1 800 668-4284**

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**WORK SAFE. FOR LIFE.**  
WORKERS' COMPENSATION BOARD OF NOVA SCOTIA

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**INTERACTIVE PREVENTION TOOLS**

[worksafeforlife.ca](http://worksafeforlife.ca)

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