Workers Responsibilities Safety Talk

WHAT’S AT STAKE?

Under the Occupational Health & Safety Act (OHSA) workers and employers share responsibility for occupational health and safety. This concept of an internal responsibility system is based on the principle that workplace parties are in the best position to identify health and safety problems and to develop solutions.

Keep Employees Safe

It sounds obvious to say that employers have a responsibility to keep employees safe, but that responsibility wasn’t always so important to employers. The passage of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) in 1970 spelled out employer responsibilities. The provisions of OSHA apply to any employer with even one employee.

You must provide all workers with a safe, healthy place in which to work under the provisions of the law, which applies to all employers.

If your employees are under 18, you have responsibilities to keep them safe based on child labor laws.

WHAT’S THE DANGER?

EMPLOYERS/SUPERVISORS

Employers have the most **Responsibility** for ensuring a safe and healthy workplace and must:

- keep a safe and well-maintained workplace.
- provide hazard information, proper safety equipment, training and competent supervision.

- have worker representation for health and safety.
- follow proper procedures in case of injury.

Supervisors have **Responsibility** to provide:

- a safe workplace and assign safe work.
- training and information.

ADDITIONAL EMPLOYER RESPONSIBILITY

- Make sure that health and safety responsibilities are built into each person’s job description.
- Make sure that workers have proper safety equipment and are trained to use it safely.
- Make sure supervisors and workers are aware of any known hazards in the work and that supervisors are competent (e.g. that they understand the Occupational Health and Safety Act and are prepared to ensure the work is carried out safely).
- Take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances to protect workers.
- In a workplace with more than five workers, have a written health and safety policy and program and post the policy where everyone can read it.
- Establish a fully-functioning joint health and safety committee (or health and safety representative where required).
- Post the names and work locations of health and safety committee members or the worker representative where it can be seen.

EMPLOYEE RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

You have a legal right as a worker to:

- A safe and healthful workplace
- Any information your employer has about any exposure you may have had to hazards such as toxic chemicals or noise. You also have a right to any medical records your employer has concerning you.
- To ask your employer to correct dangerous conditions.

- To file a complaint about workplace hazards:
- To participate in enforcement inspections.
- To not be discriminated against for exercising your health and safety rights. Your employer may not fire you, threaten you, harass you, or treat you differently for exercising your health and safety rights.
- To refuse work that puts you in immediate danger of serious harm. Before you refuse unsafe work, request that your employer eliminate the hazard and make it clear that you will accept an alternate assignment. The OSHA regulation only protects you if the danger can be proven to exist; if you refuse to work because you believe a condition is hazardous, but are proved wrong, OSHA does not protect you.
- To information on hazards in your workplace; chemicals used in your workplace; tests your employer has done to measure chemical, noise and radiation levels; and what to do if you or other employees are involved in an incident or are exposed to other toxic substances.
- To information from your employer about OSHA standards, worker injuries and illnesses, job hazards and workers' rights.

Training from your employer:

- on chemicals you are exposed to during your work and information on how to protect yourself from harm.
- on other health and safety hazards and standards that your employer must follow.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

GENERAL

A properly functioning internal responsibility system can help your business

The internal responsibility system involves everyone in health and safety, from the company chief executive officer to the worker. How well the system works depends upon whether there is a complete, unbroken chain of responsibility and accountability for

health and safety. Safe work contributes to efficiency, profitability and lower WSIB premiums.

EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES TO EMPLOYERS

Employees have responsibilities to an employer. Most companies expect employees to recognize the following responsibilities:

- Obeying rules, policies, and work directions and commands is a basic part of what it means to be an employee.
- **Dealing honestly with the employer.** That means not lying or stealing from the employer, and honestly representing themself in an employment application.
- **Working with reasonable care and skill.** In other words, the employee gives full value of the time for which they are being paid.
- **Not disclosing information to others, confidential employer**
- **Disclosing any possible conflict of interest.** This can include work for a competitor or a relationship that could compromise the employer.
- **Caring for the employer's property, equipment, and facilities.**
- **Complying with safety rules,** including OSHA standards, rules, regulations, and orders.

Reduce the Responsibilities to Writing

You have responsibilities to employees. Include them in your employee handbook, along with other policies and procedures. Write a section of your handbook that describes these responsibilities and includes responsibilities employees have to you as their employer.

WORKER RESPONSIBILITY HI-LITES

Workers have the responsibility to:

- Read the workplace safety and health poster at the jobsite.
- Comply with all applicable OSHA safety standards.
- Follow all lawful employer safety and health rules and regulations, and wear or use required protective equipment

while working.
- Report hazardous conditions to the employer.
- Report any job-related injury or illness to the employer, and seek treatment promptly.
- work safely and not take risks.
- report unsafe conditions.
- wear the right safety equipment for the job.
- ask their employers about concerns regarding health and safety.

FINAL WORD

Safety and health in the workplace is not a “one-way street”. It is compact on a deeply human level where management and labour strive to achieve the same goals of productivity, growth and safety. If there is not positive buy-in by both partners, the safety and health objectives will fail.