



What is a health and safety management system?

A health and safety management system is a process put in place by an employer to minimize the incidence of injury and illness at the workplace. This is accomplished through identifying and assessing workplace hazards and controlling the risks and potential risks to workers in all workplace operations. The scope and complexity of a health and safety management system varies depending on the type of workplace and the nature of work performed.

To be effective, the following components are considered essential and form the basis of a health and safety management system:

Clearly stated employer health and safety policy and management commitment

- A written policy stating the employer's commitment to health and safety, the overall goals and objectives of the program and the health and safety responsibilities of management, workers, visitors and contractors.
- The policy should be dated and signed by the senior operating manager and/or CEO for the workplace.

Identification and analysis of health and safety hazards at the workplace

- Evaluation of all equipment, machinery, work areas and work processes to identify and analyze all potential sources of harm to workers. A record of all hazards should be kept, along with the degree of risk and level of potential exposure for workers.

Control measures to eliminate or reduce the risks to workers from identified hazards

- Control measures should be developed for each hazard identified. Records of safe work practices and procedures for hazardous operations should be readily available and all workers trained accordingly. Typical control methods include: engineering, administrative and personal protective equipment.

Worker competency and training

- Worker competency and training is an essential component of an effective health and safety management system.
- Workers need to know how to do their jobs safely and without risk to their health.
- New and/or young workers need special consideration. Orientation of new workers should be completed within the first week on the job and critical information must be covered on the first day.
- Training effectiveness needs to be measured. All training and worker competency should be documented.

Inspection program

- To ensure that risk control measures are in place and effectively protecting workers, a regular inspection program is important.
- Inspection tours provide important information about hazards or potential hazards that have not been identified before and act as a check that controls are in place and working to eliminate or reduce risks of known hazards.
- Records of all inspections should be kept on file.

Incident reporting and investigation

- When a workplace incident occurs it is important to investigate the causes in order to:
 - ensure previously uncontrolled risks are brought under control.
 - prevent the recurrence of similar incidents.
 - determine if training or changes in control methods (such as procedures and personal protective equipment) are required to make the workplace safer or healthier.
- All incidents should be investigated as soon as possible once the injured worker has been cared for and potential hazards to investigators have been controlled.
- An investigation form will help gather necessary information in an organized format. Samples of investigation forms can be obtained from Certifying Partners or from any Workplace Health and Safety (WHS) field office. Where the injury is serious, an Occupational Health and Safety Officer may also conduct an investigation and may ask to see employer documents such as investigation records.

Emergency response planning

- A serious emergency (such as an explosion, fire or flood) could put an employer out of business. Even the best health and safety management system cannot protect against the effects of natural or unexpected disasters. However, a solid, well-rehearsed emergency plan can reduce the risk of loss.
- Questions to ask include:
 - is there an emergency response procedure for each workplace appropriate to the potential risks for that operation?
 - is everyone at the site aware of the procedure?
 - are all workers trained in emergency response procedures?
 - are periodic drills conducted to test the emergency response plan?
 - is there a system in place to ensure that people can communicate during an emergency?
 - are records kept of emergency drills and actual response situations?
 - are the required number of first-aiders on site?

Program administration

- Program administration ensures that all parts of a health and safety management system are properly documented and communicated to workers. A record of each of the steps previously outlined helps to ensure that the program remains on track and is effective in reducing the risk of injury and illness at the workplace.
- Keeping records is critical to monitoring improvements and overall program effectiveness. When preparing for a health and safety management system audit, having the following records on hand will help expedite the process:
 - health and safety policy.
 - hazard assessment and control records.
 - workplace inspection records.
 - incident investigation reports.
 - employee training records.
 - maintenance records.
 - safety meetings/safety committee meeting records.
 - safe work practices and procedures.

To obtain the most current information, contact the Workplace Health and Safety Contact Centre (780) 415-8690 (toll free 1-866-415-8690) or visit our website at industry.alberta.ca/whs-partnerships