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# **EFFECTIVE HEALTH AND SAFETY PROGRAMS**

**The key to a safe workplace  
and due diligence**



**WORKERS'  
COMPENSATION  
BOARD** OF BRITISH  
COLUMBIA

# Effective Health and Safety Programs

## *The key to a safe workplace and due diligence*

According to the *Workers Compensation Act* and the *Occupational Health and Safety Regulation*, it's the employer's responsibility to implement an occupational health and safety (OHS) program to prevent workplace injury and disease.

OHS programs must meet certain standards. These standards can be met if the employer adheres to the *due diligence standard of care*. OHS programs that meet this standard establish a defence when the requirements of the Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) of B.C. have allegedly been violated.

Using a question-and-answer format, this pamphlet:

- Defines due diligence
- Describes how the WCB applies due diligence
- Explains how the WCB assesses compliance with requirements
- Identifies the elements of an OHS program
- Explains how OHS programs help establish due diligence

This pamphlet is mainly for employers and supervisors who must ensure that their OHS programs meet a standard acceptable to the WCB.

If you are a worker, you will find the pamphlet useful because you must also act with reasonable care — or due diligence — when performing your job. It will also help you understand your employer's health and safety responsibilities.

## What is the *standard of due diligence*?

“Due diligence” simply means taking all reasonable care to protect the well-being of employees or co-workers. To meet the standard of due diligence, you must take all precautions that are reasonable in the circumstances so that you can carry out your work and your health and safety responsibilities. This is the standard of care required to comply with the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation and orders made under the B.C. *Workers Compensation Act* and enforced by the WCB.

## What is the *defence of due diligence*?

In prosecutions for violations of health and safety laws, the prosecutor must prove that the accused committed a prohibited act. To be acquitted, the accused must then establish that on a balance of probabilities *all reasonable precautions to comply were taken in the circumstances*. This is the defence of due diligence.

The standard the courts apply to determine whether an employer has acted with due diligence isn't absolute — as an employer, you aren't expected to anticipate and prevent every possible accident. You must take all the precautions that a reasonable and prudent person would take in the circumstances.

## Does the WCB recognize due diligence?

The WCB recognizes due diligence in its administration of the *Workers Compensation Act* and the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation. The WCB may relieve employers of monetary penalties for violations of regulatory requirements if it is satisfied that the employers were duly diligent.

## How does the WCB encourage compliance with its requirements?

The WCB encourages compliance with the *Workers Compensation Act* and the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation through consultation and education and by issuing orders to correct violations of the Regulation.

The WCB has the legal authority to levy monetary penalties, known as administrative penalties, on employers for failing to comply with the *Act*, with the Regulation, or with orders. The WCB can also stop hazardous work and levy administrative penalties on employers who use work practices that pose a high risk of death, serious injury, or disease.

Examples of high-risk work practices include:

- Working on equipment that isn't locked out
- Working in an excavation over 1.2 metres (4 ft.) deep without adequately supporting or sloping the sides of the excavation
- Failing to fall danger trees (snags) and using domino falling procedures in logging

- Permitting workers to be exposed to situations or conditions that are immediately dangerous to life or health

## Can orders be issued to employers and workers?

Consider the example of a WCB officer who, while inspecting a worksite, finds a piece of machinery missing a guard. The officer needs to determine the cause of the violation. Was it due to a failure to inspect the worksite regularly? A lack of training or supervision? The isolated act of one worker?

If the officer finds that the violation occurred because the instruction, training, or supervision provided to the worker was inadequate, the employer will be issued an order. If the officer finds that a worker — despite adequate training and supervision — *deliberately* violated a requirement or violated it because of *carelessness or neglect*, WCB policy requires the officer to issue a report on the worker.

## How does the WCB apply due diligence to administrative penalties?

When a WCB officer recommends an administrative penalty, the employer is notified and is given the opportunity to make submissions to a reviewing officer, or officers, in writing or at a meeting.

Reviewing officers consider many factors that indicate whether an employer took reasonable precautions in the circumstances and therefore exercised due diligence. These factors are set out in the WCB's published policies. They include:

- Whether a violation occurred
- The degree of hazard associated with the violation
- The employer's past history of compliance
- Whether the employer deliberately violated WCB requirements
- Whether the employer has a complacent attitude toward compliance
- The adequacy of the employer's OHS program, and evidence that the employer is actively pursuing a program of compliance with the *Act* and the Regulation
- The training and instruction workers receive on how to perform their jobs safely
- The training provided to supervisors and managers about their health and safety duties
- Whether workers were properly supervised
- The disciplinary policy and practices for workers, supervisors, and managers who don't follow safe work procedures

The policies relating to administrative penalties are published in the *Prevention Manual*. This is available online at [www.worksafebc.com](http://www.worksafebc.com) or can be purchased in print from Publications and Videos (see page 15).

## **In what circumstances does the WCB consider prosecutions?**

The WCB considers prosecutions of employers, supervisors, and workers when:

- Violations could or did result in the death or serious injury of a worker
- WCB officers are deliberately obstructed in performing their duties
- Employers knowingly (or recklessly) expose workers to significant hazards without taking reasonable measures to ensure their well-being
- Workers continue to be exposed to a hazard despite repeat orders from a WCB officer, warning letters, or penalties

## **Why is the OHS program critical to showing due diligence?**

An ongoing OHS program that controls specific hazards in your workplace forms the basis of due diligence.

If you, as an employer, have all the OHS program elements required by the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation in effect and working well, you will generally be acting with due diligence.

You will also have to take special steps to control specific hazards in order to show that you are exercising due diligence in particular circumstances. Generally, the greater the risk, the greater the need for specific policies, practices, and other measures to control the hazard.

## Why is documentation important?

Records provide a history of the activities of, and improvements to, the OHS program. They are evidence that you have a program that is working as intended.

However, a written program won't amount to due diligence *unless you have implemented it*. Similarly, copies of written safety rules and procedures won't amount to due diligence *unless they are understood and followed by workers*.

Documentation can show that you took steps to control or eliminate specific hazards. It can also show that you have provided workers with adequate instruction, training, supervision, and discipline to work safely.

## What kinds of records are part of an effective OHS program?

Examples of the types of records you should keep include:

- Worker orientation records
- Records of worker and supervisor training showing the date, names of attendees, and topics covered (for example, lockout and WHMIS)
- Inspection reports and records of corrective actions taken to solve problems
- Incident/accident investigation reports and records of corrective actions taken to solve problems
- Records of meetings and crew talks at which safety issues were discussed
- Supervisors' notes and logs of safety contacts

- Records showing use of progressive discipline to enforce safety rules and written safe work procedures
- Joint OHS committee meeting reports showing steps taken to address health and safety issues
- Subcontractor pre-qualification documents
- Equipment logbooks and maintenance records
- First aid records, medical certificates, and hearing tests
- Forms and checklists (for example, confined space entry permits) showing requirements for safe work procedures
- Sampling and monitoring records for work around harmful substances
- Emergency response plan, record of drills, and any resulting improvements
- OHS-related budget items and purchase orders
- Statistics on the frequency and severity of accidents

## **Many people believe that accidents just happen – how can anyone foresee them?**

Accidents are caused by unsafe acts or unsafe conditions, or by a combination of unsafe acts and unsafe conditions. A key activity of an OHS program is to assess hazards to prevent harmful events in the future. This is also a critical factor in the due diligence standard.

You should routinely observe workers to identify and correct unsafe acts and poor

work practices. Poor judgment by workers and poor work practices cause or contribute to many accidents. You may have to supervise some workers very closely or provide additional training to correct poor work habits. In some cases, you may have to discipline workers to ensure that they observe safety rules. Supervisors, managers, and senior managers should also be disciplined for failing to carry out their health and safety responsibilities.

Your OHS program must include activities that prevent the recurrence of accidents. Analysing jobs and work procedures to identify hazards and taking steps to eliminate or reduce hazards are examples of these activities.

Your system of identifying and correcting hazards must include three basic steps:

1. Eliminate hazards posed by equipment and work processes at the source. For example, redesign the work process, substitute a safer chemical for a hazardous chemical, or replace hazardous equipment.
2. If it's impractical to eliminate the hazard, control it to reduce the risk to workers. Machine guards and noise enclosures are examples of controls.
3. If it's impractical to reduce the hazard with the preceding types of controls, protect the worker from the hazard. Methods of protecting workers include providing personal protective equipment and adequate instruction, training, and supervision.

## OHS program elements

The essential elements of an OHS program needed to meet the standard of due diligence include the following:

1. **An OHS policy** that includes a statement of the employer's commitment to the OHS program, the aims of the program, and the responsibilities of the employer, supervisors, and workers
2. **Regular inspection** of premises, machinery, tools, equipment, and work practices to:
  - Identify conditions and unsafe acts with the potential to cause injury or illness
  - Determine necessary corrective measures
  - Prevent the development of unsafe work conditions
3. **Written instructions** (safe work procedures) to guide and direct workers in the safe performance of their jobs
4. **Regularly scheduled management meetings** to review OHS program activities, identify incident trends, and decide how to make improvements
5. **Investigation of incidents, injuries, and diseases** to determine the causes (for example, unsafe conditions, acts, or work procedures) so that corrective actions can be taken to prevent similar incidents

6. **Records and statistics** including:
  - Reports of inspections and incident investigations
  - Records of program activities such as orientation, training, and sampling
  - Trend analyses that may indicate unsafe conditions, acts, or work procedures
7. **Instruction and supervision of workers** such as on-site direction, instruction by supervisors, orientation, crew talks, on-the-job training, and refresher training, to make workers proficient in the safe performance of their jobs

Employers with a small workforce may be permitted to have a less formal OHS program. Refer to the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation, Part 3, sections 3.1 and 3.2.

In addition, the *Workers Compensation Act* requires:

- A joint health and safety committee at workplaces where 20 or more workers are regularly employed
- A designated worker health and safety representative at workplaces where more than 9 but fewer than 20 workers are regularly employed

While the employer is ultimately responsible for the overall OHS program, the committee is responsible for identifying and recommending solutions to health and safety problems in the workplace.

For more information on OHS programs, see the WCB publication *How to Implement an Effective Occupational Health and Safety Program*.

## Can you give an example of how to meet the standard of due diligence?

Consider the example of a piece of equipment that you will be installing in your workplace. Health and safety should be considered in the selection process.

You should do an assessment to determine if special procedures are required for protecting workers who operate or service the equipment. What about noise or vibration — have you chosen the quietest piece of equipment? What about ventilation — will harmful emissions be captured and removed before workers are affected? What about lockout procedures?

If the assessment shows that it will be necessary to lock out the control devices to service or repair the equipment, you should take the following steps to prevent an accident from occurring:

- Install devices that allow locks to be applied.
- Develop written procedures that describe a step-by-step process for locking out all required points on the equipment and checking that the locked-out equipment can't be operated.
- Train workers in the procedures, and document that training.
- Issue personal locks to the workers.
- Post signs on or near the equipment reminding workers that lockout procedures are required for servicing the equipment.
- Observe workers the first time that they use the lockout procedures to ensure that they know how to use them correctly.

- Monitor lockout procedures from time to time to ensure that workers are following them. If you observe any problems, correct them on the spot and give refresher training to workers, if necessary.
- Develop a system of progressive discipline and be prepared to use it when workers, supervisors, or managers deliberately ignore safety rules and regulatory requirements.
- Review your lockout program at least annually to determine its effectiveness.
- Document the review process and the corrective action you take.

By following a similar process in all your work activities, you will be more likely to meet the due diligence standard of care.

## **If there is a record that a worker attended a training session, why should the employer be held responsible if the worker has an accident?**

Evidence that a worker *attended* a training session doesn't necessarily mean that the worker *understood* the training, nor does it mean that the worker intended to apply the training. You must take reasonable steps to ensure that the worker understood the training and is able to apply it successfully on the job. You should routinely monitor workers and correct unsafe work methods with instruction or refresher training as needed.

## Shouldn't workers be expected to use their common sense to recognize hazards?

Never assume that a worker will be aware of a hazard because "it's common sense." You must bring every risk — even if it seems obvious — to the attention of the workers you supervise. An effective system of supervision is a key part of the due diligence standard.

The employer must also know about a worker's right to refuse hazardous work. Workers also need to be aware of this right. You must be familiar with the steps to follow when a worker refuses to carry out unsafe work. (See Part 3, section 3.12 of the Occupational Health and Safety Regulation.)

## How can employers feel confident that they are taking all reasonable precautions?

If you can answer yes to the following questions without hesitation, you should feel confident that you have met the test of due diligence:

**Yes**   **No**

- Do you know and understand your health and safety responsibilities?
- Do you have systems in place to identify and control hazards?
- Have you integrated health and safety into all aspects of your business?
- Do you set objectives for health and safety just as you do for quality, production, and sales?

**Yes No**

- Have you committed appropriate resources to health and safety?
- Have you assigned health and safety responsibilities to workers?
- Have workers been given sufficient training so they can successfully discharge their health and safety responsibilities?
- Do you hold managers, supervisors, and workers accountable for health and safety just as you do for productivity?
- Do you keep records of your program activities and improvements?
- Do you keep records of the training each worker has received?
- Do your records show that you take disciplinary action when necessary?
- Do you review your OHS program at least once a year and make improvements as needed?

## **Need more information?**

- For more information on OHS programs or answers to other health and safety questions, contact your local WCB officer or the Prevention Information Line at 1 888 621-SAFE (7233) or 604 276-3100.
- For information on presentations and courses on OHS programs, contact your local WCB office. See listing at the back of this pamphlet.
- To order WCB publications and videos, contact the Publications and Videos Section at 604 276-3068 or 1 800 661-2112, local 3068.

# WCB Offices

Visit our Web site at [www.worksafebc.com](http://www.worksafebc.com)

## Abbotsford

2774 Trethewey Street  
V2T 3R1  
Phone 604 276-3100  
1 800 292-2219  
Fax 604 556-2077

## Burnaby

450 – 6450 Roberts Street  
V5G 4E1  
Phone 604 276-3100  
1 888 621-7233  
Fax 604 232-5969

## Coquitlam

104 – 3020 Lincoln Avenue  
V3B 6B4  
Phone 604 276-3100  
1 888 967-5377  
Fax 604 232-1946

## Courtenay

801 – 30th Street  
V9N 8G6  
Phone 250 334-8745  
1 800 663-7921  
Fax 250 334-8757

## Cranbrook

100 – 7th Avenue S.  
V1C 2J4  
Phone 250 417-7934  
1 800 663-4912  
Fax 250 417-7972

## Kamloops

321 Battle Street  
V2C 6P1  
Phone 250 371-6003  
1 800 663-3935  
Fax 250 371-6031

## Kelowna

110 – 2045 Enterprise Way  
V1Y 9T5  
Phone 250 717-4313  
1 888 922-4466  
Fax 250 717-4380

## Nanaimo

4980 Wills Road  
V9T 6C6  
Phone 250 751-8040  
1 800 663-7382  
Fax 250 751-8046

## Nelson

524 Kootenay Street  
V1L 6B4  
Phone 250 352-2824  
1 800 663-4962  
Fax 250 352-1816

## North Vancouver

100 – 126 East 15th Street  
V7L 2P9  
Phone 604 276-3100  
1 888 875-6999  
Fax 604 232-1500

## Prince George

1066 Vancouver Street  
V2L 5M4  
Phone 250 561-3700  
1 800 663-6623  
Fax 250 561-3710

## Surrey

100 – 5500 152nd Street  
V3S 8E7  
Phone 604 276-3100  
1 888 621-7233  
Fax 604 232-7077

## Terrace

4450 Lakelse Avenue  
V8G 1P2  
Phone 250 615-6605  
1 800 663-3871  
Fax 250 615-6633

## Vernon

3100 – 35th Avenue  
V1T 8Y8  
Phone 250 545-1125  
1 800 663-4452  
Fax 250 558-5243

## Victoria

4514 Chatterton Way  
V8X 5H2  
Phone 250 881-3418  
1 800 663-7593  
Fax 250 881-3482

## Head Office / Richmond

*Prevention:*  
8100 Granville Avenue  
Phone 604 276-3100  
1 888 621-7233 (621-SAFE)

*Administration:*  
6951 Westminster Highway  
Phone 604 273-2266  
1 800 661-2112

*Mailing Address:*  
PO Box 5350 Stn Terminal  
Vancouver BC V6B 5L5

## After Hours

**Health & Safety Emergency**  
604 273-7711  
1 866 922-4357 (WCB-HELP)

