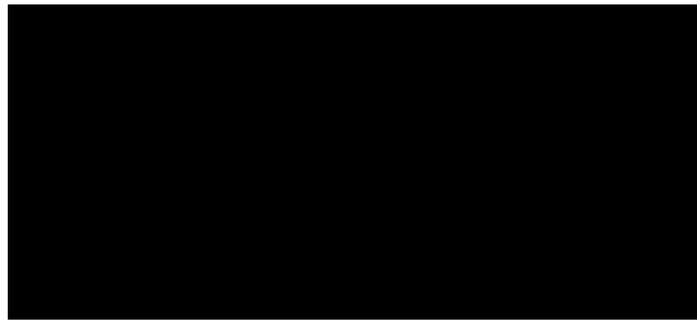


**An Optometrist's  
Guide to  
Occupational Health  
and Safety  
Responsibilities**



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# Introduction

This document has been developed for use by all optometrists in Alberta. It will provide optometrists and their staff with detailed information on the legislated Occupational Health & Safety (OH&S) responsibilities for workplace health and safety. These responsibilities will complement the Alberta College of Optometrists (ACO) Standards of Practice and Guidelines to the ACO Standards of Practice. The complete ACO Standards and Guidelines can be found at [www.collegeofoptometrists.ab.ca](http://www.collegeofoptometrists.ab.ca).

All optometrists and their staff are required to meet Occupational Health & Safety requirements. Should any inconsistency exist between the ACO Standards of Practice and the OH&S legislation, the OH&S legislation is considered paramount.

The Alberta College of Optometrists would like to thank the Government of Alberta and the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta for their assistance, support and guidance in the development of the ACO OH&S manual.



# Part 1 – Occupational Health & Safety Laws

Legislation related to Occupational Health & Safety in Alberta has three separate and distinct parts:

- a) Occupational Health & Safety Act
- b) Occupational Health & Safety Regulation
- c) Occupational Health & Safety Code

## **The Occupational Health & Safety Act:**

- Provides minimum standards to protect and promote the health and safety of workers in Alberta.
- Defines the obligations and responsibilities of employers and workers.
- Establishes the authority and powers of government officials to enforce the law.
- Specifies penalties for breaking the rules.
- Establishes Rules of Procedure for workplace incidents.
- Creates the authority of the OH&S Regulation and Code.

## **The Occupational Health & Safety Regulation:**

- Establishes broad rules and minimum requirements that apply to all Alberta workplaces to ensure worker safety.
- Contains specified administrative processes.

## **The Occupational Health & Safety Code:**

- Contains very specific and detailed technical information for creating safe and healthy workplaces.
- Contains references to other recognized technical standards.

All optometrists are governed by the OH&S Act, Regulation and Code. They must understand, consider and enforce their responsibilities as both an employer and a worker.

Copies of the OH&S Act, Regulations and Code can be purchased from the Queen's Printer at: <http://www.qp.gov.ab.ca> or viewed on-line at <http://employment.alberta.ca>.

**Employer Responsibilities (including but not limited to):**

- Identifying hazards, conducting a written hazard assessment and implementing controls.
- Informing workers of any hazard on the job site.
- Ensuring that workers are aware of their responsibilities and duties under the OH&S Act, Regulation and Code.
- Ensuring that all equipment used at a worksite is properly maintained and safe to use.
- Ensuring that workers completing work are either competent to do so, or are working under the supervision of a worker who is competent.
- Ensuring that workers are trained in the safe operation of equipment.
- Ensuring that workers are trained in the use of safe operating procedures.
- Properly labelling, storing and disposing of dangerous chemicals.
- Ensuring workers perform their duties as required by OH&S legislation.
- Monitoring workers who may be exposed to certain hazards.
- Establishing policies and procedures dealing with storing, handling, using and disposal of biohazardous materials.

**Worker Responsibilities (including but not limited to):**

- Take reasonable care to protect the health and safety of themselves and other workers while performing their duties.
- Not perform work they are not competent to do unless they are under the supervision of a competent worker.
- Immediately report to their employer any equipment that is unsafe or not functioning properly.
- Follow health and safety work procedures developed by their employer.
- Participate in and apply training provided by the employer regarding safe operations of equipment or harmful substances they may be exposed to.
- Wear personal protective equipment required by their employer.
- Refuse to do work that may put them or another worker in “imminent danger”.

OH&S Officers are employees of the Government of Alberta. They are authorized to conduct inspections and/or investigations. They may enter any work site at any reasonable time, interview persons at the work site, require the production of records, take samples or take photographs at the work site. OH&S Officers are also authorized to write orders, stop work or stop the use of equipment if any unsafe or unhealthy conditions exist at any work site.

# Part 2 – Identification, Assessment and Control of Hazards

Hazard identification, assessment and control are a requirement under the OH&S Code. A hazard is defined as any situation, condition or thing that may be considered dangerous to the safety or health of workers.

The hazard identification and assessment is not a one time process. It must be performed whenever a new work process is introduced and at reasonable intervals to prevent the development of potential unsafe or unhealthy working conditions. Hazards can be divided into four main categories:

- a) **Physical Hazards** – Lifting or handling loads, repetitive motions, slipping or tripping hazards, equipment, fire, electricity, excess noise, inadequate lighting, extreme temperatures, vibration, ionizing radiation, workplace violence, lasers, saws, sharps or cautery equipment.
- b) **Chemical Hazards** – Chemicals, sterilizing agents, bleach, dusts, smoke, fumes, mists, gases, formaldehyde, mercury, liquid nitrogen, hydrogen peroxide or latex.
- c) **Biological Hazards** – Viruses, fungi, bacteria, protozoa's, moulds, blood or body fluids, body tissues, sewage, anthrax or respiratory airborne pathogens.
- d) **Psychosocial Hazards** – Working conditions, stress, fatigue, shift work, working alone, workplace violence and working with stressful patient types or conditions.

A hazard assessment is usually conducted by walking around the worksite, asking questions on how all work is performed, asking your workers on what they may consider unsafe practices, review what could possibly go wrong and conducting a review on equipment specifications, chemical handling, best work practices and general safety precautions.

It is the responsibility of the employer to identify and eliminate all potential hazards; or, if this is not possible, control the hazard to a level that does not pose a risk to worker health.

An eLearning Program on Hazard Identification, Assessment and Control can be found at: <http://employment.alberta.ca>.

If a hazard cannot be completely eliminated, the OH&S Code, part 2, Section 9 lists the preferred hierarchy of controls:

### **1<sup>st</sup> Choice**

- Try to eliminate the hazard completely. This can be accomplished by removing trip hazards from the floor, disposing of unwanted chemicals, disposing of outdated equipment, etc.
- If it is not practical to eliminate the hazard completely, try to substitute it with something safer, such as using a less toxic chemical, ordering supplies in smaller packages for easier lifting, etc.
- Isolate the hazard: for example, use sound proof barriers to reduce noise levels, shield from radiation, use remote control systems to operate equipment, etc.
- Use mechanical lifts to move heavy loads.
- Ensure adequate ventilation air exchanges are appropriate to the work activity and that local exhaust ventilation is in place where needed.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> Choice**

- Use safe work procedures.
- Provide proper training and supervision for workers.
- Ensure regular maintenance of machinery and equipment.
- Limit exposure times by using a job rotation.
- Start and maintain a staff immunization program.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Choice**

- Ensure that the right type of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as gloves, hearing and eye protection, protective clothing, respirators, proper footwear and face shields, etc. are available for applicable activities and environments.
- Ensure that the PPE fits properly and is comfortable to wear.
- Ensure that workers are trained in the need for PPE, its limitations and proper maintenance.
- Ensure that workers are fit tested for use of respiratory protective equipment where required based on the hazard assessment.

## **Additional Legislation Applicable to Biological Hazards**

Biohazardous material means a pathogenic organism, including a bloodborne pathogen, that, because of its known or reasonably believed ability to cause disease in humans, would be classified as Risk 2, 3, or 4 as defined by the Medical Research Council of Canada, or any material contaminated with such an organism.

An employer must:

- Provide sharps containers and ensure that they are located as close as reasonably practical to where sharps are used.
- Ensure that a sharps container has a clearly defined fill line and is sturdy enough to resist puncture under normal conditions of use and handling.
- Establish policies and procedures for storing, handling, using and disposing of biohazardous material.
- Ensure that workers are informed of the health hazards associated with exposure to the biohazardous material.
- Ensure that worker exposure to biohazardous materials is kept as low as reasonably possible.
- Establish policies and procedures for the post-exposure management of workers exposed to biohazardous material.

A worker must:

- Use the sharps container provided to dispose of used sharps immediately and safely.
- Not fill sharps containers more than two-thirds full or above the manufacturer's fill line.
- Not recap waste needles.
- Dispose of needles and syringes together in one piece.
- Not pass sharps directly from hand to hand and try to keep handling at a minimum.

Additional information can be found at <http://cdc.gov/sharpsafety/index.html>.

## **Additional Legislation Applicable to Radiation Hazards**

The Alberta Radiation Protection Act and Regulation provides the legislative framework for a comprehensive system to protect workers and the public from overexposure to radiation. The registration of designated radiation equipment in private and public facilities is available on the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta website.

### **The Radiation Protection Act:**

- Specifies that certain radiation equipment designated in the Radiation Protection Regulation require registration certificates prior to use.
- Requires owners of radiation equipment to investigate radiation incidents or overexposures and take corrective actions.
- Requires owners to establish and implement a quality assurance program and a regular preventive maintenance program for their diagnostic x-ray equipment.
- Authorizes radiation health officers to conduct inspections of radiation facilities or radiation equipment.
- Authorizes the Minister to issue written directives prohibiting the use of radiation equipment or a radiation facility until it is in compliance with the Act and Regulations.

### **The Radiation Protection Regulation:**

- Specifies maximum exposure limits for ionizing and non-ionizing radiation.
- Requires employers to ensure that radiation workers are provided with and use a dosimeter to monitor their personal exposure to ionizing radiation.
- Specifies that diagnostic or therapeutic x-ray equipment, cabinet x-ray equipment and Class 3B or 4 lasers require a registration certificate prior to use.
- Requires owners of radiation equipment to ensure that shielding is adequate to ensure that the maximum exposure limits for ionizing radiation are not exceeded.
- Requires that the installation and use of medical diagnostic x-ray equipment must comply with Health Canada's Safety Code 20A "X-Ray Equipment in Medical Diagnosis Part A: Recommended Safety Procedures for Installation and Use".
- Requires that the installation and use of lasers in a health care facility must comply with Canadian Standard Association Z386-08 "Laser Safety in Health Care Facilities.

The Radiation Protection Act and Regulations do not apply to the installation and use of diagnostic ultrasound equipment; however, Health Canada has published a guideline on the safe use of ultrasound. It can be accessed at [www.hc-sc.gc.ca](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca).

Alberta Radiation Protection legislation is available at:

<http://employment.alberta.ca/cps/rde/xchg/hre/hs.xsl/292.html>.

# Part 3 – Investigating and Reporting Incidents and/or Injuries

Section 18 of the OH&S Act stipulates that, if a serious injury or accident occurs at a work site or if any other serious injury or other accident that has the potential of causing serious injury to a person occurs at the work site, the employer shall:

- Report it to the Government of Alberta Workplace Health and Safety Department.
- Carry out an investigation into the circumstances surrounding the serious injury or accident.
- Prepare a report outlining the circumstances of the serious injury or accident and the corrective actions, if any, undertaken to prevent the recurrence of the serious injury or accident.
- Ensure that a copy of the report is readily available to inspection by an officer.
- Retain the report for 2 years.

To report incidents or concerns call the Workplace Health and Safety Contact Center at:

- 780-415-8690 (Edmonton & area)
- 1-800-415-8690 (remainder of Alberta)
- [www.worksafely.org](http://www.worksafely.org)

The requirements for reporting injuries or accidents to OH&S are separate from the requirements for reporting injuries and accidents to the Worker's Compensation Board (WCB). For more information on WCB requirements, go to [www.wcb.ab.ca](http://www.wcb.ab.ca).

An eLearning Program on incident investigation can be found at:

<http://employment.alberta.ca>.



# Part 4 – First Aid

First Aid means “the immediate and temporary care given to an injured or ill person at a work site using available equipment, supplies, facilities or services; including treatment to sustain life, to prevent a condition from becoming worse or to promote recovery”. A person supplying first aid must weigh their decision on how hazardous the work is, how hazardous the work environment is, how long it would take to reach the closest hospital or health care facility and the number of workers on each shift.

First Aid requirements are outlined in Part 11 and Schedule 2 of the OH&S Code.

Employers are responsible for:

- Providing first aid services, supplies and equipment in accordance with Schedule 2 of the OH&S Code.
- Ensuring that the services, supplies and equipment are located near the work site and that they are maintained, available and accessible during all working hours.
- Communicating first aid information, protocols and responsibilities to workers.
- Ensuring arrangements are in place to safely transport injured or ill workers from the work site to the nearest health care facility.
- Ensuring that first aiders are appropriately trained and readily available.
- Ensuring that injuries and acute illnesses are reported to the employer and OH&S, and that all records are kept confidential.
- Ensuring that first aid records are maintained and available for 3 years.

A list of approved first aid training agencies is available at: <http://employment.alberta.ca>.

Information on Developing a First Aid Plan can be found at:  
[http://employment.alberta.ca/documnets/WHS/WHS-PUB\\_fa012.pdf](http://employment.alberta.ca/documnets/WHS/WHS-PUB_fa012.pdf).

# Part 5 – Emergency Response

Part 7 of the OH&S Code requires employers to establish an emergency response plan for response to an emergency that may require rescue or evacuation. An emergency is defined as “any situation or occurrence of a serious nature, developing suddenly and unexpectedly, and demanding immediate attention”. The plan must be written and must include:

- The identification of potential emergencies (based on the hazard assessment).
- Procedures for dealing with the identified emergencies.
- The identification of, location of and operational procedures for emergency equipment.
- The emergency response training requirements.
- The location and use of emergency facilities.
- The fire protection requirements.
- The alarm and emergency communication requirements.
- The first aid services required.
- Procedures for rescue and evacuation.
- The designated rescue and evacuation workers.

The Alberta Emergency Management Agency can be contacted at:

<http://www.aema.alberta.ca>



# Part 6 – Preventing Workplace Violence

The potential for violence in the workplace is increasingly recognized as a hazard at healthcare offices and facilities in Alberta. Employers must:

- Consider workplace violence when conducting their hazard assessment.
- Develop a policy and procedures for potential workplace violence.
- Ensure workers are instructed in the recognition, reporting and response to workplace violence.

Workplace violence may fall into one of the following categories:

- Stranger violence (such as robbery).
- Patient or customer violence.
- Co-worker or supervisor violence.
- Violence related to domestic issues.

The incidence of workplace violence may be increased by:

- Working alone or working in isolated / remote areas.
- Working between the hours of 11 p.m. and 6 a.m.
- Working with unstable or violent individuals in certain healthcare settings or facilities.
- Working at or near a site targeted by protestors or action groups.
- Having controlled substances on-site.
- Working in high crime areas.
- Working with persons where domestic violence is a concern.
- Visiting patients in their homes.

Employers must ensure workers who are working alone have a means of communication to obtain assistance if required. This can be accomplished through telephone, radio or other electronic means, or, by contacting (or visiting) the worker at intervals appropriate to the nature of their work and the environment they will be in.

