



# Improving Safety in the Workplace

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## Chapter 1:

# Who is Responsible for Safety in the Workplace?

There are different schools of thought as to who should bear the responsibility for workplace safety. Some believe that the organisation should take ownership of safety and ensure a safe working environment; others think that individuals should hold the responsibility.

Within safety legislation, both sides come into consideration, though there is a greater emphasis on organisational responsibility. Different roles within the organisation have different responsibilities for their own and for others safety in the workplace.

From region to region, there are a lot of similarities between the responsibilities assigned to each role in the workplace. It's important for everyone in the organisation to know who is responsible for what, and what ramifications can result from violations of these responsibilities.

### **Roles, rights, and responsibilities of workplace safety**

Everyone in the workplace has a role to play in health and safety. Depending on your position in the company - owner, employer, supervisor, or employee - your responsibilities differ.

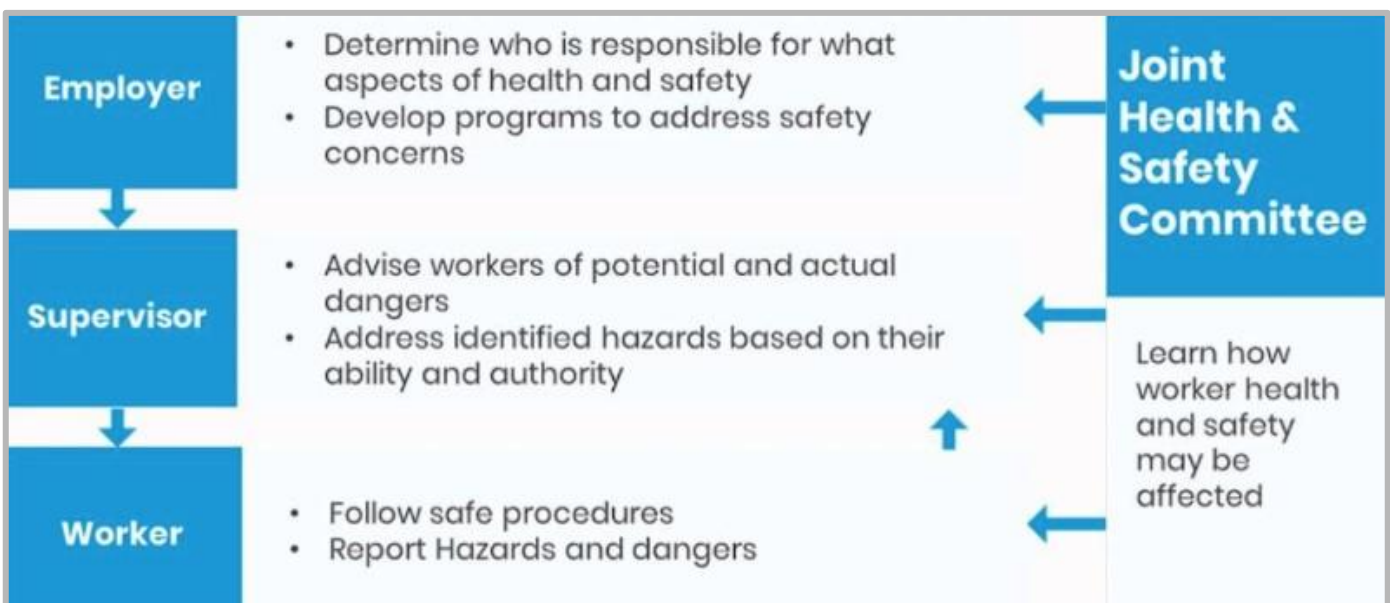


Image from: Occupational Safety Group Inc. (OSG)

## Improving Safety in the Workplace - Chapter 1



Those at the top of this hierarchy, the *owners and employers*, hold the most responsibility. They are legally required to protect their employees, as well as anyone else who may be affected by their business, such as customers, visitors, and contractors.

*Supervisors* have the responsibility to provide a safe workplace, provide relevant training and information, and to supervise work.

*Workers* have the responsibility to perform work in a safe manner and report unsafe conditions. Unlike the other groups, workers also have rights to workplace safety. They have the right to know about unsafe conditions in the workplace and to refuse unsafe work.

*Governments* also hold some responsibility for workplace safety. For example, the OHS Legislation in Canada outlines that the government's role includes responsibilities such as enforcement of OHS legislation,

inspections and investigations, and the promotion of safety training, education, and research. They also hold the authority when it comes to settling OHS disputes.

### **What happens when safety responsibilities are not followed?**

From a legal standpoint, ramifications for not following safety procedures can include fines and jail time for the individuals involved and fines for the organisation. In 2018, there were over 900 convictions under OSHA, with related fines totalling \$12.6 million. Individuals can see fines ranging from \$250-650 on-the-spot fines to up to \$100,000 fines and/or up to 12 months in jail as a result of court proceedings. Fines for corporations can reach up to \$1.5 million.

*In recent years, health and safety has come to include COVID considerations. Businesses have frequently seen fines in the tens of thousands, but in some cases these fines have increased astronomically to be over \$100K to north of \$250K for COVID violations*

Depending on what happens as a result of a safety incident, such as injury or death of an employee, there can be additional impacts to the business as well.





## Chapter 2: Creating a Culture of Safety

*So what can you do to make your workplace more safe?* Even if your organisation does everything it can to protect workers and provide a safe working environment, an unsafe organisational culture can undermine your efforts.

### **How do unsafe work cultures arise?**

An unsafe work culture may not come out of malicious intent. There are a great many factors that can come into play. For example, employees may be afraid of the consequences of reporting unsafe work, they may not know how to report concerns, or they may believe the risks are normal.

Before beginning the process of creating a safe work environment and changing attitudes, there are a few key questions that employers and owners should ask themselves:

- *Legal duties:* What standards and responsibilities does your jurisdiction outline?
- *Risks and mitigants:* What hazards are present in your workplace, and what measures can be taken to mitigate these risks?
- *Causes of incidents:* What are the primary sources of injury and illness in your workplace? What unsafe actions or environments lead to these accidents?
- *Attitudes and culture:* What is the current state of policies in your workplace and what attitude do employees and managers have towards them?

### Changing attitudes to save lives

Improving safety culture can be difficult. Many companies experience normalisation around rule breaking and cutting corners. Workers and management may have become complacent with how things are, or people view tasks as low risk and do not take as much care. Beyond that, inadequate training or “unwritten rules” can also come into play.

Creating a culture of safety can greatly lower the risk of workplace accidents by undoing this risk normalisation and ensuring the proper emphasis is put on safety and training. In one study, there was a clear correlation between workers' perception of workplace safety and fewer workplace injuries. This means that workplaces that supported safety culture were less likely to experience incidents.



### Workplace safety culture

Workplace culture is influenced by a great many things, including organisational values and policies, work environment, and those who make up the company (both the employees and management). Even if policies and procedures change, there is no guarantee that the work culture will follow.

Four of the greatest factors in creating a culture of workplace safety are:

- *Commitment to safety both at the top and the bottom of the organisation*
- *Discipline for those who do not follow the expectations*
- *Prevention to avoid future accidents and issues*
- *Participation in safety activities and incident prevention from all levels of organisation*

When going about changing safety culture, it is important to ensure that everyone is aware of how their actions influence the safety of themselves and others. When someone does make a mistake, focusing on the error instead of the person ensures that workers know that this is about safety, not

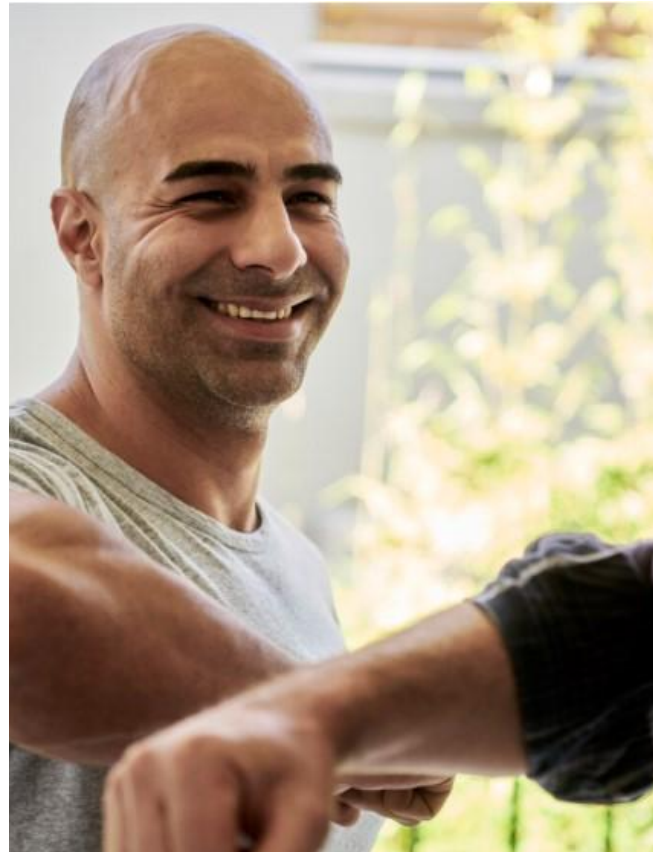
punishment. Plus, they will be more likely to report concerns or issues in the future if they do not fear retribution.

### **How employers can promote safety in the workplace**

Resistance to change can be found throughout the organisation. The best safety cultures arise out of an overarching commitment, and so it is important for the employer to recognize the impacts that they themselves can have on their organisation's culture.

Some other ways that an employer can promote workplace safety includes:

- *Ensuring job descriptions and training includes all appropriate safety responsibilities and procedures*
- *Provide a written Health and Safety policy, and ensure that both supervisors and workers are aware of any hazards that may be present*
- *Establish a Health and Safety committee consisting of people from all levels of the organisation, and ensure that the entire company knows who is a part of it*



When changing negative attitudes, showing that the employer cares about safety is incredibly important. Engagement from the top level helps encourage workers to change and to participate in a culture of safety.

Safety in the workplace is important for so many reasons: employee health, organisational financials, and perception of the business, to name a few. When going about improving safety in the workplace, considering the culture around safety is going to play a big part in making any necessary changes and improvements.

## Chapter 3:

# Using Feedback Loops to Improve Safety

When it comes to rolling out new safety processes or implementing existing ones, getting uptake from workers can be challenging. In some cases, they may be purposefully resistant. In other situations, the workers may just be unconsciously following a habit. In the case of the second scenario, there is a process of unlearning and relearning that has to take place before this unsafe habit is replaced with a new, safer habit.

A safety system must be robust, clear, and well communicated. However, the safety system is only going to be as effective those following it allow it to be. Human behaviour can derail any safety plan. And since habits make up 40% of human behaviour, looking at how habits comply with safety standards will help ensure that workers and the business are protected.

### How feedback influences habits

When it comes to unsafe habits, balancing feedback loops are required to adjust them. A balancing feedback loop seeks to resist further change in one direction (the existing unsafe habit) and counter it with a change in the opposite direction (the new safe habit). Balancing feedback loops work from both sides of the issue, both tackling the bad habit and promoting the good habit.

### The importance of immediate feedback for learning

When using feedback to negate existing unsafe habits and promote new safe habits, it is most effective when the feedback is provided as soon as possible. When feedback is received immediately after an action or event, workers are more likely to have superior comprehension of the

**A safety system must be robust, clear, and well communicated**



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feedback and are also more likely to retain the information learned in the feedback.

When done in the moment, this also makes the learning of a new skill or habit active, instead of passive. Additionally, it provides the opportunity to the worker to correct mistakes more quickly and therefore increase the efficiency of learning. In order for feedback to be effective, several conditions need to be met:

- *Consistent:* the same feedback needs to be received each time a task is performed in order for the worker to learn the new process
- *Descriptive and easy to understand:* the feedback needs to be clear and well defined
- *Based on data and credible:* the feedback given must have objective basis and the alternative provided must be realistic

### How can you implement immediate feedback in your organisation?

The first step to encouraging feedback is acknowledging that the reason that it is not happening is because people do not know how or are uncomfortable



providing feedback. Taking a look at the overall culture of the organisation and the attitude towards feedback will help inform the work that needs to be done.

It is important to encourage an environment of open communication. That way, employees and supervisors will be more willing to provide important safety feedback to one another, and allow for issues to be addressed in the moment.

In some circumstances, other workers or supervisors may not be present or be aware that an action is incorrect or unsafe. In these circumstances, safety technology can be used to provide immediate feedback to employees.

Employing multiple tactics to improve safety habits through feedback - be it recognition from a supervisor, a reminder from a colleague, or an alert from safety technology - will increase the speed of learning and more quickly improve overall safety in the workplace.

# Resources

## References

The Importance of Immediate Feedback in Learning  
Why Giving Instant Feedback is Important for Effective Learning  
The Effects of Immediate Feedback on Reading Achievement  
Reinforcing feedback loop  
Build Better Feedback Loops to Reinforce Good Habits  
The Habit of Safety  
Tips for changing negative attitudes to safety  
Welcome to WSPS Resource Hub  
Changing Workplace Culture For Improved Safety Performance  
Workplace Culture: What It Is, Why It Matters, and How to Define It  
Evaluation of safety climate and employee injury rates in healthcare  
Changing attitudes towards health and safety  
Changing the Hidden Safety Culture  
Roles, rights & responsibilities

Employer Responsibilities  
Who Is Responsible for Workplace Health and Safety?  
Welcome to WSPS Resource Hub  
OH&S Legislation in Canada  
Who is Responsible for Health and Safety in the Workplace?  
US Department of Labor's OSHA Announces \$3,930,381 In Coronavirus Violation  
Business Fined for Not Following COVID-19 Safety Guidelines

## More from Proxxi

Near Misses and Self-Reporting  
How to Use the Hierarchy of Hazard Control  
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