HEALTH AND SAFETY MANUAL FOR STUDENT PLACEMENTS

PSHSA.ca Public Services Health & Safety Association

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PURPOSE

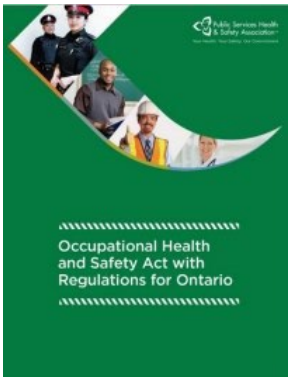
The purpose of this manual is to help students have a safe, positive, and meaningful experience during their work placement. It is designed to teach the importance of health and safety in the workplace, helping students understand potential hazards, recognize and assess them, and respond appropriately. By learning these skills, students will be better prepared to protect themselves and contribute to a safe and respectful work environment.

Health and safety are essential in every workplace because they help protect everyone from harm and ensure a positive, productive environment. The goal is simple: we want everyone to go home safe and healthy. This means recognizing that health and safety are not just the responsibility of one person, it's a shared responsibility. Whether you're a student, supervisor, or coworker, everyone has a role to play in identifying hazards, assessing risks, and taking the necessary steps to prevent accidents. When we all do our part, we create a safer workplace for everyone.

For many students, a work placement is one of their first real opportunities to experience a working environment. It's a valuable step toward becoming part of the workforce and learning how to stay safe on the job is a key part of that journey. Understanding the risks of harm and knowing how to protect yourself not only helps reduce the chance of injury but also builds confidence as you transition into future jobs. By practicing positive safety habits now, students can set a strong example for others and carry those habits into their careers, helping to create safer workplaces for everyone.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES AS A STUDENT

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY ACT (OHSA)



As a student in a workplace placement, it's essential to understand your rights and responsibilities to ensure a safe and respectful work environment. These are outlined in your Work Education Agreement and supported by Ontario's Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA), which ensures your right to a safe work environment.

What is the purpose of the Occupational Health and Safety Act?

- Provide healthy and safe workplaces
- Assign responsibility
    - Promote active participation

THREE BASIC RIGHTS OF WORKERS

Every worker in Ontario, including students on placement, has three fundamental rights: the right to know about hazards in the workplace, the right to participate in keeping the workplace safe, and the right to refuse work they believe is dangerous.

Right to Know

- The right to know about potential workplace hazards to which they may be exposed

- This includes training and information on WHMIS (Chemicals), machinery, equipment, working conditions, processes and handling hazardous substances.

Right to Participate

- The right to identify and resolve health and safety concerns together with the employer

Right to Refuse or Stop Unsafe Work

- The right to refuse or stop work that they believe is dangerous to their health and safety or that of another worker

RESPONSIBILITIES

Everyone in the workplace, including students, supervisors, and employers, has a responsibility to follow the rules set out in Ontario's Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA), because when each person does their part, it helps keep the entire workplace safe and respectful for everyone.

Employer Responsibilities (OHSA Section 25, 26):

An employer shall,

- Instruct, inform and supervise workers to protect their health and safety
- Acquaint a worker or a person in authority over a worker with any hazard in the work
- Provide competent supervision
- Develop and make available written copies of health and safety policies, programs and procedures for everyone to know and to follow
- Provide required training programs to workers and supervisors
- Take every precaution reasonable to protect workers

Supervisor Responsibilities (OHSA Section 27)

A supervisor shall,

- Ensure workers work in a safe manner following policies, procedures and the law
- Monitor each worker to ensure they are using or wearing any equipment and protective devices required by the employer
- Inform workers about hazards and respond to concerns
- Provide workers with written instructions about the measures and procedures to be followed to work safely
- Take every precaution reasonable to protect workers

Worker Responsibilities (This includes students in placement) (OHSA Section 28)

(1) A worker shall,

- Do the work according to the Act and applicable regulations
- Use and/or wear the equipment or protective devices that the employer requires to be used or worn
- Report any missing or defective equipment or protective devices to their supervisor
- Report any potential or actual hazards to their supervisor

- Always work safely

(2) No worker shall,

- Remove or make ineffective any protective device required by the regulations or their employer, without providing an adequate temporary protective device and when the need for removing or m asking ineffective the protective device has ceased, the protective device shall be replaced immediately
- Use or operate any equipment, machine, device or thing or work in a manner that may endanger himself, herself or any other worker
- Engage in any prank, contest, feat of strength, unnecessary running or rough and boisterous conduct.

COMMON WORKPLACE HAZARDS

DEFINITION OF WORKPLACE HAZARD

A **hazard** is a source, situation, or action that has the potential to cause harm, such as injury, illness, or both. Recognizing hazards is the first step in ensuring your own safety and the safety of others in the workplace.

An **occupational injury** is damage or harm done to the body, which can be immediate, gradual on-set or chronic, resulting from a workplace accident or incident.

For example:

- A head injury from falling off a chair
- A broken wrist from slipping on an unsalted walkway
- A burn from carrying a hot pot in the kitchen

An **occupational illness** is a health problem resulting from exposure to a workplace hazard.

For example:

- A maintenance worker develops hearing loss from long-term exposure to loud machinery.
- A custodian develops a skin condition from handling chemicals
- A worker develops cancer from exposure to asbestos in the workplace

PHYSICAL AGENTS

Physical hazards are forms of energy that can cause harm to the body if exposure to these agents occurs.

- Noise
- Vibration
- Temperature extremes
- Radiation

Noise

Noise is unwanted sound. Sound, a form of mechanical energy, originates from vibrating objects. Noise can harm the inner ear organs (cochlea), usually due to prolonged exposure to damaging noise, leading to temporary hearing loss (temporary threshold shift) or permanent hearing loss. Students on work placements may be exposed to noise hazards in various ways, depending on the industry and environment.

Examples include:

- Power tools (e.g., drills, jackhammers, saws) generate high decibel levels.
- Metal fabrication involving grinders, presses, or welding equipment.
- Tractors and harvesters produce continuous engine noise.
- Chainsaws or other forestry equipment during land clearing
- Hospital alarms, ventilators, and monitoring equipment can create a high-noise environment.
- Ambulance bays or emergency departments with sirens and multiple machines.
- Commercial kitchens with blenders, dishwashers, and exhaust fans.
- Band practice with drums, brass, and amplified instruments

Warning Signs:

- Muffled hearing (sounds might seem dull or unclear)
- Ringing in the ears
- Difficulty understanding speech
- Turning up the volume to hear
- Sensitivity to sound

Protecting yourself from harm is essential to ensure your safety, wellbeing, and ability to participate in your learning and work experiences fully.

Considerations:

- Can you use quieter equipment?
- Can you rotate tasks with other students, thereby limiting the amount of time you are exposed to them?
- Are you wearing the proper hearing protection?
- Are you taking adequate breaks?

Vibration

Vibration acts by transferring energy from a source to a target organ.

The three exposure types of vibration are:

- Hand-arm vibration (HAV)
- Foot transmitted vibration (FTV)
- Whole-body vibration (WBV)

Exposure to vibration can cause irreversible damage to the vascular, nervous, and musculoskeletal systems.

Students on work placements can be exposed to **vibration hazards** in various ways, depending on the industry and environment.

Examples include:

- Power tools like drills, grinders or sanders
- Impact wrenches or riveters in automotive or mechanical workshops
- Polishing or buffing machines in manufacturing or detailing
- Working on vibrating platforms or near large industrial machinery
- Standing near vibrating machinery.
- Holding materials being processed by vibrating tools.

Warning Signs:

- Tingling or numbness in fingers, especially after using vibrating tools.
- Loss of feeling or reduced sensitivity to touch or temperature.
- Blanching (whitening) of fingers, especially in cold conditions (also known as "vibration white finger")
- Pain or discomfort in hands, wrists, or arms.
- Reduced grip strength or difficulty holding tools.
- Lower back pain or stiffness after operating heavy machinery
- Fatigue or discomfort after long periods of sitting or standing on vibrating surfaces.
- Muscle or joint pain, especially in the spine or hips.

Considerations:

- Can you use different equipment?
- Can you rotate job tasks with a peer?
- Are you taking adequate breaks?
- Are there mechanisms for damping vibrations?
- Are you wearing the appropriate personal protective equipment?

Extreme Temperatures

Extreme temperatures put the body under stress as it struggles to maintain its normal internal temperature (e.g. 37 °C +/- 1 °C).

Excessive heat can lead to illness, including heat stress-related disorders such as:

- **Heat rash:** caused by a hot, humid environment and plugged sweat glands.
- **Heat cramps** occur from a salt imbalance resulting from failure to replace the salt lost through heavy sweating.
- **Heat exhaustion:** caused by fluid loss and inadequate salt and water intake, causing the body's cooling system to start breaking down (heavy sweating and cool, moist skin). Body temperature over 38 °C.
- **Heat stroke:** body temperature over 40 °C. The body stops sweating. In later stages, a person may pass out and have convulsions.

Extreme cold can:

- Lead to hypothermia (possibly fatal) or dangerous overcooling of the body
- Cause effects such as frostbite or freezing of the exposed extremities

Students on work placements can be exposed to **extreme temperature hazards** in various ways, depending on the industry and environment.

Examples include:

- Construction sites, landscaping, or roadwork during hot weather.
- Agricultural work, such as harvesting or planting, is often done in direct sunlight.
- Commercial kitchens with ovens, grills, and fryers.
- Metalworking shops with furnaces or molten materials.
- Boiler rooms or industrial facilities with poor ventilation.
- Snow removal, construction, or delivery services in freezing temperatures.
- Forestry or environmental fieldwork in remote, cold areas.
- Walk-in freezers or cold warehouses in food service or logistics.

Heat Exhaustion	Heat Stroke (Medical Emergency)	Frostbite	Hypothermia (Medical Emergency)
• Heavy sweating • Weakness or fatigue • Dizziness or fainting • Nausea or vomiting • Headache • Cool, pale, clammy • skin • Muscle cramps	• High body temperature (above 40°C / 104°F) • Hot, red, dry or damp skin • Rapid, strong pulse • Confusion or slurred speech • Seizures • Loss of consciousness	• Numbness or tingling • Pale, hard, or waxy-looking skin (especially fingers, toes, nose, ears) • Skin that feels unusually firm or rubbery • Blisters after rewarming	• Shivering (may stop in severe cases) • Slurred speech or mumbling • Slow, shallow breathing • Weak pulse • Clumsiness or lack of coordination • Drowsiness or confusion • Loss of consciousness

Considerations:

- Can you move inside/outside?
- Can you move to a sheltered area?
- Can the work be done on a different day?
- Are you taking adequate breaks?
- Are you staying hydrated?
- Do you have the appropriate protective equipment?

Radiation

Ionizing Radiation can lead to biological changes. The dose depends on the type of radiation (e.g., alpha or gamma), the duration of exposure, and the distance from the source. Overexposure can damage tissues (such as skin, eyes, bone marrow, and reproductive system) and genetic material within cells (DNA and RNA).

Examples of Ionizing radiation include:

- Medical imaging equipment, industrial inspection tools.
- Nuclear reactors, particle accelerators.

Non-ionizing Radiation causes molecules it encounters to vibrate and rotate, leading to effects of a thermal nature. The dose depends on the type and intensity of radiation (e.g., ultraviolet, infrared, radiofrequency (RF)), duration of exposure, and distance from the source.

Examples of Ionizing radiation include:

- AM/FM radios, cell phones, Wi-Fi routers, and TV broadcasts.
- Microwave ovens, radar systems, and satellite communications.
- Heat lamps, remote controls, thermal imaging devices.
- Sunlight, light bulbs, and LED screens.
- Power lines, electrical wiring, and household appliances.

Students on work placements can be exposed to **radiation hazards** in various ways, depending on the industry and environment.

Warning Signs:

- Burning sensation or warmth on the skin
- Headaches or dizziness
- Tingling or numbness
- Sunburn or skin irritation
- Eye discomfort or vision changes (e.g., photokeratitis)
- Skin aging or discoloration

Considerations:

- Can you increase your distance from the source?
- Have you been trained on proper handling?
- Are you wearing the appropriate protective equipment?

CHEMICAL AGENTS

A hazardous chemical is any substance or combination of substances that can harm your health or safety. Chemicals can be found in different forms like solids, liquids, or gases and can be elements, compounds, or mixtures.

Chemicals exist in three primary states: **solids**, **liquids**, and **gases**, but they can also be present in various forms, including dust, fumes, smoke, mists, and vapours. They can be inhaled, ingested, injected, or absorbed into the body.

Chemical agents can damage any part of the body, including the lungs, skin, eyes, and mucous membranes.

Routes of Entry:

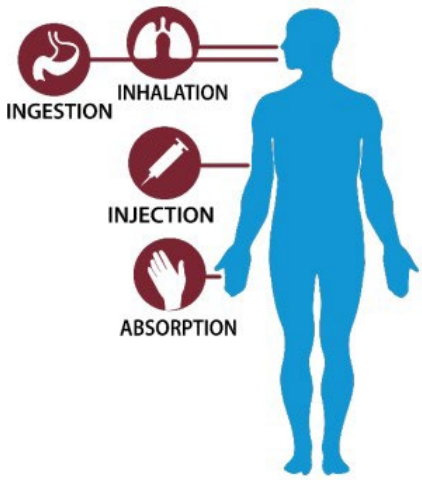
Routes of entry are the ways hazardous chemicals can enter the body, such as through breathing (inhalation), skin contact (absorption), swallowing (ingestion), or through cuts or open wounds (injection).

Inhalation – is when a chemical is breathed through the nose or mouth, travelling through the trachea and into the lungs. This is the most common entry route for most chemical agents.

Ingestion - is when chemicals are consumed when contaminated objects or hands transfer substances to the mouth and subsequently to the digestive tract. This can occur accidentally through the consumption of food or drink.

Absorption – Is when chemicals, particularly those in liquid form, can be absorbed through the skin or eyes.

Injection – This is introduced through the direct introduction of a chemical through a puncture or breach of the skin, such as by a needle, high pressure spray nozzle, metal file, splinter, or insect bite.



Health Effects:

Exposure to hazardous chemicals can affect the body in various ways, depending on how the chemical enters the body and its subsequent interactions.

- **Local effects** occur right where the chemical comes into contact with the body. For example, a chemical might cause a skin rash, a burn, or eye irritation.
- **Systemic Effects** occur when chemicals enter the bloodstream and affect internal organs, like the lungs, liver, or brain.
- **Additive Effects** happen when two chemicals with similar effects combine, and the result is equal to the sum of each one alone.
- **Synergistic Effects** occur when two chemicals work together to cause a much stronger effect than either would on its own.
- **Antagonistic Effects** happen when one chemical reduces or blocks the harmful effects of another.

Health effects can also be:

- **Acute,** meaning they happen quickly after a single exposure (like a burn or headache), or
- **Chronic,** meaning they develop slowly over time from repeated exposure (like lung disease or cancer).

Some effects may not be noticeable right away. This delay is referred to as the **latency period.**

WHMIS:

WHMIS is rooted in the **Hazardous Products Act (HPA)** and its regulations, ensuring consistent and legally required communication about hazardous materials in Canadian workplaces. It's not just a best practice, it's the law.

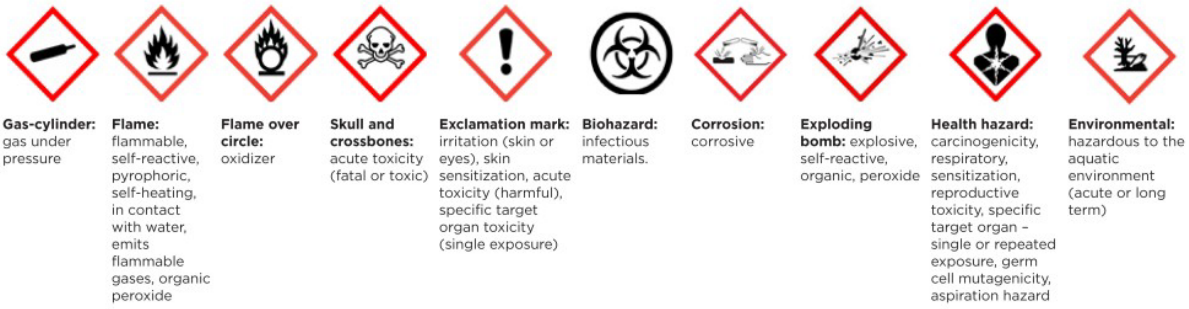
1. Training and Education

- Under WHMIS regulations (e.g., WHMIS Reg. S. 5), employers must provide workplace-specific training so employees can recognize pictograms, interpret labels, use Safety Data Sheets (SDSs), and follow safe handling, storage, and emergency procedures.
- Training must be evaluated (e.g., via tests or demonstrations) and reviewed at least annually, or sooner if hazards or conditions change.
- This requirement stems from the federally enforced "right-to-know" principle within the HPA, ensuring workers understand what substances they're exposed to and how to protect themselves.

It's important to know that:

- One pictogram can represent several hazard classes (for example, the health hazard symbol can mean a product is carcinogenic, a respiratory sensitizer, or a mutagen).
- One hazard class can also have more than one pictogram, depending on the severity of the risk (such as acute toxicity, which uses different symbols for different levels of danger).

Understanding these symbols helps you make safer choices and respond appropriately in the workplace.



Gas-cylinder: gas under pressure

Flame: flammable, self-reactive, pyrophoric, self-heating, in contact with water, emits flammable gases, organic peroxide

Flame over circle: oxidizer

Skull and crossbones: acute toxicity (fatal or toxic)

Exclamation mark: irritation (skin or eyes), skin sensitization, acute toxicity (harmful), specific target organ toxicity (single exposure)

Biohazard: infectious materials.

Corrosion: corrosive

Exploding bomb: explosive, self-reactive, organic, peroxide

Health hazard: carcinogenicity, respiratory, sensitization, reproductive toxicity, specific target organ – single or repeated exposure, germ cell mutagenicity, aspiration hazard

Environmental: hazardous to the aquatic environment (acute or long term)

2. Labels

- WHMIS mandates supplier labels under the Hazardous Product Act and the Hazardous Products Regulations (HPA/HPR) before products enter the workplace. These labels include standardized elements: product identifiers, hazard pictograms, signal words, hazard statements, precautionary info, supplier details, and supplemental data.
- Workplace labels must be used if a product is decanted or the supplier label is damaged or removed.
- It's illegal to remove or deface supplier labels unless size criteria apply (under 3 mL) or replacement is part of normal use.

3. Safety Data Sheets (SDSs)

- The HPA/HPR requires suppliers to provide a 16-section SDS for each hazardous product.
- SDSs must be kept up-to-date and readily accessible to all workers. They include key information on hazards, first aid, handling, storage, PPE, accidental release measures, stability, and more.

- The SDS is foundational to training, informing workers of real-world safety practices.

Considerations:

- Do you need to be working with this chemical?
- Are you taking adequate breaks?
- Is there proper ventilation?
- Do you know where the safety data sheets are located?
- Do you know how to read the safety data sheets (SDS)?
- Are you aware of the appropriate P.P.E needed to work with this chemical?
    - Do you know emergency response procedures?

BIOLOGICAL AGENTS

Biological agents are living things, or substances made by living things, that can make you sick. These hazards can be found in many different workplaces, even ones you might not expect. It's important to know what they are so you can stay safe. Here are the main types of biological agents:

- **Viruses**: Tiny germs that need a living host (like a person or animal) to grow and spread. Ex. Flu virus, cold virus, hepatitis, rabies, West Nile virus, and COVID-19.
- **Bacteria**: Single-celled organisms. Some are helpful, but others can cause infections. Ex. E. coli, tetanus, tuberculosis, salmonella, C. difficile, Legionella.
- **Fungi**: Organisms like moulds and yeasts that grow in damp places and spread through spores. Ex. Mould (like Aspergillus), yeast, ringworm, athlete's foot.
- **Parasites**: Organisms that live on or inside another living thing (a host) and can cause illness. Ex. Malaria, tapeworms, pinworms, head lice, scabies, and dust mites.
- **Plants and Pollen**: Some plants and their pollen can cause allergic reactions or skin irritation. Ex. Poison ivy, poison oak, ragweed.
- **Wildlife and Insects**: Animals and bugs can carry diseases or cause allergic reactions. Ex. Animal dander, bee and wasp stings, spider and snake venom.

For harm to occur, there must first be exposure to a biological agent. This can happen in many ways.

Routes of Transmission:

Understanding how germs (microorganisms) spread helps you stay safe at work. Here are the six main ways they can move from one place or person to another:

Direct Contact: This occurs when germs are transmitted directly from one person to another through physical contact. Ex. Shaking hands with someone who has an infection.

Indirect Contact: Germs spread when you touch something that has been contaminated with them. Ex. Using shared tools or touching doorknobs, phones, or surfaces that haven't been cleaned.

Droplet Transmission: When someone coughs or sneezes, droplets carrying germs can travel through the air and land in your nose or mouth. These droplets usually don't travel more than 1 metre. Ex. Catching a cold from someone sneezing nearby.

Airborne Transmission: Tiny particles or droplets stay in the air for

a long time and can travel far through air currents. Ex. Breathing in germs from someone with tuberculosis in a poorly ventilated room.

Vehicle Transmission: Germs can spread through contaminated food, water, or objects. Ex. Getting food poisoning from undercooked meat.

Vector Transmission: Insects or animals carry germs and pass them to people. Ex. Getting Lyme disease from a tick or malaria from a mosquito.

Health Effects: Biological agents can pose risks and impact your health in various ways. The effects can range from mild to severe and may include:

Infections: Biological agents can enter the body, multiply, and cause infections that lead to a wide range of illnesses and symptoms, including inflammation, fever, and general malaise.

Allergic reactions: Certain biological agents can trigger an immune response, resulting in symptoms such as sneezing, itching, or, in severe cases, anaphylaxis.

Toxic effects: Certain biological agents release toxins that may lead to organ damage, chronic health conditions or specific cancers.

Pregnancy risks: Certain agents, such as the rubella virus, can harm maternal health and pregnancy outcomes.

Psychological effects: The threats posed by biological agents or outbreaks can also cause anxiety and stress that can impact mental health and wellbeing

Considerations:

- Are you aware of proper hand hygiene procedures?
- Are you familiar with decontamination and cleaning processes?
- Is there a policy or procedure regarding illness and absence from work?
- Do you have access to appropriate personal protective equipment?

SAFETY HAZARDS

Safety hazards are any workplace conditions or activities that have the potential to cause injury or harm. These hazards can take many forms and may not always be obvious. It's important to recognize and report them to help prevent accidents and keep everyone safe. Common types of safety hazards include:

Machine Hazards – Moving parts, sharp edges, or missing guards on equipment can cause serious injuries.

Energy Hazards – Exposure to electricity, heat, or other forms of energy can be dangerous if not properly controlled.

Fall Hazards – These include working at heights, using ladders, or walking on uneven, wet, or slippery surfaces.

Work Practice Hazards – Unsafe actions or habits, such as improper use of cleaning products, failure to wipe up spills, using tools without guards, or stacking materials unsafely.

Materials Handling – Improper lifting, carrying, or storing of materials can create safety hazards, such as falling objects, blocked walkways, or items tipping over, which may result in immediate injuries, including cuts, bruises, or being struck by objects.

Vehicle and Driving Hazards – Operating or working near vehicles, including forklifts or delivery trucks, can pose risks if safety procedures aren't followed.

Confined Spaces – Working in small, enclosed areas can be dangerous due to limited airflow, restricted movement, or the presence of hazardous substances.

Below is a description of some of the more common safety hazards you may encounter while working at your placement.

Machine Hazards

Any machine can be a hazard, especially those with moving parts that can become entangled in a worker's clothing or come into contact with a worker's body.

Moving or malfunctioning parts can easily lead to entanglement, crush injuries, abrasions, stabbings, punctures, lacerations and amputations.

Look for:

- Missing or broken guards on equipment or mixers
- Faulty or damaged equipment and tools with makeshift repairs (for example, duct tape)
    - Does it move? Can I touch it? Can it hurt me?

Energy Hazards

Energy hazards are found in almost every workplace. Common forms of energy that can result in serious injury include electrical, thermal, hydraulic, pneumatic, kinetic, and potential energy.

Look for:

- Live electrical wires or frayed cords
- Overloaded circuits and outlets
- Sources of steam or heat
- High voltage equipment
- Fan blades and gas cylinders
- Inadequate Lockout/Tag-out Procedures

Fall Hazards

There are two types of fall hazards:

Falls Same Level: Slips, trips, falls and loss of balance while working at ground level. For example, walking on a floor that has a spilled liquid, which causes a slip and fall

Falls From Heights: Slips, trips, falls from staircases, portable and fixed ladders, elevated work surfaces (e.g., scaffolds), or mobile elevated work surfaces. For example, falling from a ladder that was positioned incorrectly.

Look for:

- Unsuitable footwear
- Bulbs that are burned out in stairwells, exit lamps, or near any walkways

- Wet floors, ice build-up or uneven surfaces
- Poorly maintained stairs and ladders
- Cluttered workplaces and open drawers
- Inadequate use of warning signs
- Inadequate fall protection equipment

Unsafe Work Practices

When a workplace fails to establish and enforce safe work practices, it significantly increases the risk of incidents and accidents. Employers are responsible for developing clear, safe work procedures, ensuring they are communicated effectively, enforced by supervisors, and consistently followed by workers.

Unsafe work practices, such as using equipment without proper training, bypassing safety guards, failing to clean up spills, or storing heavy items on high shelves can lead to serious injuries or property damage. A strong safety culture depends on everyone understanding and following these procedures.

MUSCULOSKELETAL DISORDERS

Musculoskeletal Disorders (MSDs) are injuries and disorders of your musculoskeletal system (MS). MSDs may be caused by or aggravated by various hazards and/or risk factors in the workplace. Injuries may involve muscles, tendons, tendon sheaths, nerves, bursa, blood vessels, cartilage, spinal discs, and ligaments.

Some examples of how high school students might be exposed to **musculoskeletal disorder (MSD) hazards** during their workplace placements:

- Lifting and/or carrying heavy items
- Repetitive Tasks
- Poor ergonomic workstations
- Standing for long periods
- Awkward postures
- Using tools or equipment improperly
    - Pushing or pulling loads

Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) can lead to a variety of injuries, especially when students are exposed to poor ergonomics, repetitive tasks, or heavy lifting during their placements. Some common injuries caused by MSDs include:

- Strains and sprains
- Tendinitis
- Carpal tunnel syndrome
- Lower back injuries
- Rotator Cuff injuries
- Bursitis
- Repetitive strain injuries

Three Primary Risk Factors:

1. **Repetition:** Doing the same movement or task over and over again within a short period, like lifting, reaching, or using your hands or arms repeatedly during an activity. Repetitive tasks can put stress on your muscles and joints, especially if there are no breaks or changes in movement.
2. **Force:** The amount of work or effort exerted by your muscles and degree of strain on tissue, for example, lifting, lowering, carrying, pushing, pulling and gripping. Excessive, sustained and unexpected forces have the potential to cause injury.
3. **Awkward Posture:** A body position that puts extra strain on muscles, tendons, or joints, especially when joints move away from their natural, neutral position is considered awkward and can increase the risk of injury.

Signs and Symptoms:

It's essential to report any signs or symptoms to your supervisor promptly, as early detection helps prevent the injury from worsening and allows for prompt action to mitigate further risk.

Some Signs and Symptoms Include:

Signs	Symptoms
• Swelling • Discoloration • Decreased Range of Motion • Muscle Wasting • Muscle Spasm • Impaired Nerve Conduction	• Pain, ache • Burning • Cramping • Weakness, fatigue • Tingling • Numbness

Considerations:

- Is there an option to use voice-activated software?
- Have you been trained on proper lifting techniques?
- Have you received training on the proper use of equipment?
- Are you wearing appropriate footwear?
    - Are you taking adequate breaks?

PSYCHOSOCIAL HAZARDS

Psychological hazards encompass both physical and non-physical risks that can impact the health of workers. These may come from organizational or job-specific factors or stressors.

Psychological harm occurs when there is exposure to occupational stressors that result in an adverse impact on a worker's mental health and wellbeing.

Employers can help prevent psychological harm and foster a psychologically safe environment by promoting open communication, supporting mental health initiatives, addressing workplace bullying, and ensuring employees feel respected, valued, and heard.

A psychologically safe workplace is a workplace where the employer has taken every reasonable effort to protect the mental health of their employees.

Sources of psychological harm could include:

- Little autonomy or decision-making power.
- Ambiguity in job expectations or responsibilities.
- Inconsistent, unclear, or absent communication from leadership.
- Excessive demands, tight deadlines, or chronic understaffing.
- Verbal abuse, intimidation, exclusion, or discrimination.
- Micromanagement, favouritism, or lack of empathy.
    - Frequent disputes or tension among team members.

It's important to regularly reflect on what it looks and feels like when you are mentally healthy. Consider your mood, attitude, physical health, and social wellbeing to help you recognize early signs of change; by understanding your indicators of wellness, you can more easily identify when you may be shifting along the mental health continuum from healthy to reacting, injured, or ill.

Below is a table outlining the mental health continuum, with examples of how you might feel or what you might notice when you are in a healthy, reacting, injured, or ill state; remember that everyone has a different baseline, so what feels healthy for one person may not be the same for another, this is why it's so important to reflect on what you need to stay mentally well.

Mental Health Continuum Model

	Healthy	Reacting	Injured	Illness
Mood	Normal mood fluctuations Calm & takes things in stride	Irritable/impatient Nervous Sad	Anger Anxiety Pervasively sad/hopeless	Angry outbursts/aggression Excessive anxiety/panic Depressed/suicidal
Attitude & Performance	Good sense of humour Performing well In control mentally	Displaced sarcasm Procrastination Forgetfulness	Negative attitude Poor concentration Poor decision-making	Overt insubordination Can't perform duties, control behaviour or concentrate
Sleep	Normal sleep patterns Few sleep difficulties	Trouble sleeping Intrusive thoughts Nightmares	Restless disturbed sleep Recurrent images Recurrent nightmares	Can't fall asleep or stay asleep Sleeping too much/little
Physical Health	Physically well Good energy levels	Muscle tension Headaches Low energy	Increase aches and pains Increase fatigue	Physical illness Constant fatigue
Social Well Being	Physically and socially active	Decreased activity Reduced socializing	Avoidance withdrawal	Not going out or answering the phone
Substance Use & Gambling	No or low-risk use of alcohol/ cannabis/gambling/ gaming	Alcohol/cannabis/ gambling/gaming increasingly used to relieve tension/ cope with stress	Difficulties limiting use of alcohol/cannabis/ gambling/gaming	Unable to control use of alcohol/ cannabis/gambling/ gaming

Source: Adapted from the Canadian Department of National Defence

Understanding psychological safety and sources of psychological harm is essential for students entering the workforce because it helps them recognize supportive versus harmful environments, communicate

effectively, and maintain their mental wellbeing. It also prepares them to handle workplace challenges, set healthy boundaries, and build habits that support long-term career success. By understanding what mental wellness means to them personally, students can better recognize when they're struggling and take steps to maintain their health.

Considerations:

- Do you understand your roles and responsibilities as well as what is expected of you during your work placement?
- Do you feel comfortable discussing your concerns with your supervisor?
- Do you feel safe and encouraged to report any hazards you identify?
    - Is the environment positive and encourages you to learn from mistakes?

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

Everyone has the right to work in an environment free from violence and harassment, including students on work placements, and it is the responsibility of all parties involved in the workplace to ensure that this right is respected and upheld.

Your safety is the top priority—students are not expected to manage violent or aggressive behaviour; if you ever feel unsafe, trust your instincts and immediately seek help from a worker or supervisor.

Defining Workplace Violence and Harassment:

Workplace Violence (OHSA s. 1(1)) is defined as:

- The exercise of physical force against a worker in a workplace, that causes or could cause physical injury to the worker
- An attempt to exercise physical force against a worker, in a workplace, that could cause physical injury to the worker
- A statement or behaviour that it is reasonable for a worker to interpret as a threat to exercise physical force against a worker, in a workplace, that could cause physical injury to the worker

Workplace Harassment (OHSA S. 1(1) is defined as:

- Engaging in a course of vexatious comment or conduct against a worker in a workplace, including virtually through the use of information and communications technology, that is known or ought reasonably to be known to be unwelcome, or workplace sexual harassment

Workplace Sexual Harassment is defined as:

- Engaging in a course of vexatious comment or conduct against a worker in a workplace, including virtually through the use of information and communications technology, because of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, where the course of comment or conduct is known or ought reasonably to be known to be unwelcome, or
- Making a sexual solicitation or advance where the person making the solicitation or advance is in a position to confer, grant or deny a benefit or advancement to the worker and the person knows or ought reasonably to know that the solicitation or advance is unwelcome.

Vexatious means: Behaviour or actions that are deliberately annoying, distressing, or intended to cause frustration or upset. In the workplace, vexatious conduct may include repeated unwelcome comments,

actions, or demands that serve no legitimate purpose and contribute to a hostile or uncomfortable environment.

Some types of work, work environments, or specific job conditions can place workers—including students—at a higher risk of workplace violence, particularly in roles that involve interaction with the public, such as clients, customers, patients, or strangers.

Examples of Workplace Violence Include:

- **Physical assault**: Hitting, pushing, or threatening physical harm.
- **Verbal threats**: Aggressive language or threats of violence.
- **Intimidation**: Using gestures, posture, or tone to instill fear.
    - **Incidents involving the public**: Aggressive behaviour from clients, customers, or patients.

Examples of Workplace Harassment Include:

- **Bullying**: Repeated, targeted behaviour meant to belittle or isolate someone.
- **Sexual harassment**: Unwelcome sexual comments, jokes, gestures, or physical contact.
- **Discriminatory remarks**: Offensive comments based on race, gender, religion, disability, or other protected characteristics.
- **Spreading rumours**: Damaging someone's reputation through gossip or false information.
- **Exclusion**: Deliberately leaving someone out of meetings, conversations, or team activities.

Employer Responsibilities under the OHSA

Under the law, everyone in the workplace has a role to play in preventing and eliminating violence at work, with employers having the ultimate responsibility for ensuring a safe and healthy work environment. Employers have both a legal duty and a moral obligation to provide a safe workplace, preventing loss of life and injuries, and limiting financial losses and potential liability.

Employers need to:

- Protect workers against violent acts and threats of physical violence, and create an atmosphere in which workers feel free to come forward with concerns or complaints
- Handle complaints of harassment or bullying seriously, and deal with the behaviours.
- Deal seriously with complaints of negative behaviours.
- Address the factors that discourage workers from reporting workplace violence, such as apathy, ineffective reporting mechanisms, poor documentation (Rippon, 2000), peer pressure not to report, ambiguity in defining violence, and a perception that violence is part of the job (McKoy & Smith, 2001).

The student's **workplace supervisor** is responsible for explaining the workplace's violence and harassment policy, including how to recognize inappropriate behaviour and the proper steps for reporting any incidents or concerns.

Considerations:

- Do you know where the emergency exits are located?
- Have you received training on policies and procedures related to preventing and addressing violence and harassment?
- Do you know who to contact in case of an emergency, and do you know how to contact them?
- Do you know how to report incidents of violence and harassment?
    - Are there any instances where you'll be working alone?

HAZARD IDENTIFICATION AND REPORTING

Even when employers and supervisors have implemented safety measures to control hazards, there is still a risk of harm. If you notice something unsafe, stop work immediately and report it to your supervisor to help prevent injury to yourself or others.

RECOGNIZING HAZARDS

As a student, you can recognize potential hazards by staying alert, using your senses—looking, listening, and even smelling — for anything unusual, and being aware of problems or concerns that arise. Being familiar with common hazard categories and the specific risks in your workplace is also key. To help guide your awareness, try asking yourself some of the following questions while observing your surroundings and engaging with coworkers to stay informed and safe.

- Are there any moving parts or machinery I could get caught in?
- Is there anything I could trip over, slip on, or bump into?
- Are there any sharp edges, hot surfaces, or exposed wires nearby?
- Is there a clear emergency exit, and do I know the procedure in case of an emergency?
- Are there any chemicals, fumes, or dust I could be exposed to? (if related to biological agents like mould, bacteria, etc.)
- Am I exposed to bodily fluids, waste, or other potentially infectious materials?
- Are there any chemicals, fumes, or dust I could be exposed to?
- Am I using any substances that require special handling or ventilation?
- Is there a risk of violence, harassment, or aggressive behaviour in this environment?
- Do I feel safe and supported by my coworkers and supervisors?
- Am I under excessive stress or pressure in this role?
- Am I lifting, carrying, or moving anything that could strain my body?
- Am I working in awkward or repetitive positions for long periods?
- Is there proper lighting in my work area?
- Are there any loud noises, vibrations, or temperature extremes I should be aware of?

REPORTING HAZARDS

It is essential to report any hazards or concerns about potential hazards to your work supervisor immediately; if you do not feel safe or comfortable doing so, you must raise the issue with your school placement supervisor and explain why you feel unsafe reporting it at work. Consider whether you know how to report, if your employer has informed you about the hazard, or if your concerns have been dismissed.

Remember, under the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA), we all share the responsibility to report hazards as part of the Internal Responsibility System. This is how you contribute to a safer workplace for everyone.

RIGHT TO REFUSE UNSAFE WORK

If you ever feel that your work environment or task is unsafe, remember that under the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA), you have the right to refuse work if you believe it poses a risk to your health and safety. This right applies in three specific situations:

- When any equipment, machine, device, or thing you are using may endanger you or another person (e.g., a missing guard on a table saw);
- When the physical condition of the workplace itself may endanger you (e.g., a non-functioning fume hood while chemicals are being handled), and
- When there is a risk of workplace violence (e.g., a client throwing a chair at a worker), you also have the right to refuse work if any equipment or condition violates the Act or its regulations (e.g., a ladder with a broken rung).

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (P.P.E.)

WHAT IS PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT?

Personal Protective Equipment (P.P.E.) is any clothing or gear designed to protect you from workplace hazards(such as gloves, safety glasses, hard hats, or steel-toed boots) and is essential for minimizing your risk of injury. Even if others around you are not wearing the appropriate P.P.E., you must follow all P.P.E. requirements and recommendations to keep yourself safe and demonstrate responsible workplace behaviour.

It's important to understand that P.P.E. is considered the last line of defense against hazards in the workplace. According to the Hierarchy of Controls, P.P.E. is the lowest level of protection, used only after higher-level controls—such as elimination, substitution, engineering controls, and administrative controls—have been implemented or are not feasible. This means that while P.P.E. is critical, it should never replace efforts to remove or reduce hazards at their source.

TYPES OF PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

Personal Protective Equipment (P.P.E.) is designed to suit specific jobs and protect workers from hazards they may encounter in the workplace. It is essential that P.P.E. fits properly to ensure it functions as intended and provides the necessary protection. Even if others are not wearing the appropriate P.P.E., you must follow all requirements and recommendations to keep yourself safe and reduce your risk of harm. Under the Working for Workers Six Act (Bill 229), the Occupational Health and Safety Act has been amended to include a new employer duty under Section 25(1)(b.1), requiring that all P.P.E. provided in Ontario workplaces is both appropriate for the task and a proper fit for the worker.

Here are some examples of commonly used Personal Protective Equipment (P.P.E.); for a more extensive list and additional details, please refer to the resources section at the end of this document.

- Safety glasses or face shields
- Hearing protection
- Steel-toed boots

- Chemical-resistant gloves or aprons
- Nonslip footwear
- Hard hats
- Fall arrest harness
- High visibility vests
- Seat belts
    - Respirators

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

An emergency procedure is a clearly defined plan that outlines how to respond to sudden or unexpected situations in the workplace. These procedures are essential because they help prevent injuries and fatalities, reduce damage to property and equipment, protect the environment and surrounding community, and support a quicker return to normal operations.

Emergency response procedures outline specific steps to manage the event and mitigate its consequences. Being prepared and familiar with these procedures enables you to stay calm and confident during emergencies, which can significantly impact how effectively the situation is managed.

Common types of emergencies include:

- **Natural disasters** include floods, earthquakes, tornadoes, and snow or ice storms.
- **Structural issues** such as fires, explosions, or building collapses.
- **Utility failures**, such as power outages, water supply loss, or communication breakdowns.
- **Hazardous materials**, such as chemical spills, toxic releases, or radiation exposure. Fire safety and evacuation plans

Considerations:

- Do you know who to contact in an emergency?
- Has your work supervisor gone over emergency procedures with you?
- Do you know how to locate the emergency exits?
- Are you trained in first aid, or do you know how to find out who is at the organization?
- Do you know where to find emergency equipment?
    - Do you know the evacuation routes and meeting points?

TIPS FOR STAYING SAFE ON THE JOB

Your safety at work starts with being informed, aware, and proactive. Here are some key tips to help you stay safe while on placement:

- **Ask Questions** – Never hesitate to ask your supervisor or a more experienced worker if you're unsure about how to do something safely. It's better to ask than to risk injury.
- **Be Observant** – Look around your workplace. Are there safety signs posted? Are workers wearing P.P.E.? These are signs that safety is taken seriously.
- **Know the Procedures** – Familiarize yourself with the workplace's safety rules and emergency procedures. Ask for a copy if one isn't provided.

- **Stay Aware of Your Surroundings** – Pay attention to what's happening around you. Situational awareness helps you identify hazards before they escalate into incidents.
- **Use Equipment Properly** – Only use tools and equipment you've been trained to use. Follow all instructions and never take shortcuts.
- **Take Breaks** – Fatigue can lead to mistakes. Take your scheduled breaks to stay alert and focused.
- **Trust Your Instincts** – If something feels unsafe, it probably is. Speak up. You have the right and responsibility to report unsafe conditions.
- **Learn About Hazards** – Know how to read WHMIS symbols and understand Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) for any chemicals you may work with.
- **Wear Your P.P.E. Correctly** – Make sure your personal protective equipment fits properly and is worn as required.
- **Report Symptoms Immediately** – If you feel unwell—such as dizziness, headaches, or skin irritation—tell your supervisor right away. These could be signs of overexposure to a chemical or another hazard.
- **Know Your Rights** – You have the right to refuse unsafe work, and your employer cannot penalize you for doing so. If you're ever unsure about the safety of a task, speak to your supervisor or school placement coordinator.

See Appendix C for a list of questions to ask your workplace supervisor.

SOURCES

1. Personal protective equipment fit requirements | ontario.ca
2. Occupational Health and Safety Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. O.1 | ontario.ca
3. CCOHS: Personal Protective Equipment
4. CCOHS: Tips for Young Workers
5. CCOHS: Emergency Planning
6. Emergency Response Planning Guide

APPENDIX C: KNOW BEFORE YOU GO: QUESTIONS FOR A SAFE AND SUCCESSFUL PLACEMENT

As a new worker, it's important to remember that you have the right and the responsibility to advocate for your health and safety. Asking the right questions helps you understand your role, recognize potential hazards, and ensure that your employer is providing a safe work environment. Being informed not only protects you but also shows that you are engaged and responsible. Below are some key questions you can ask your new employer or supervisor to help you feel confident and prepared as you begin your placement.

1. What are the dangers of my job?
2. Are there any specific hazards I should be aware of?
3. What safety training will I receive?
4. Is there any personal protective equipment that I'll be expected to wear?
5. Will I receive training on how to use the P.P.E., and will it be provided?
6. When will I be trained on emergency procedures?
7. Where are the fire extinguishers, first aid kits, emergency exits, emergency shutoffs, or any other emergency equipment that I should be aware of?
8. Who do I ask if I have a safety question?
9. What do I do if I get hurt on the job?
10. Will I ever be working alone?
11. Is there a policy on violence and harassment?
12. Is there anything else I should know to help protect my safety and the safety of others?