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A once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to make a real difference to workplace health and safety

GEORGE GRITZIOTIS
Chief Prevention Officer

I am delighted to be part of the biggest revitalization of Ontario’s workplace health and safety since the Occupational Health and Safety Act came into effect way back in 1979! It’s a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to make a real difference.

Two months on the job, and already I’m overwhelmed by the strong positive support I’m getting from stakeholders, organizations, businesses, unions, individuals.

Tony Dean and the Expert Advisory Panel on Occupational Health and Safety have done much of the heavy lifting. Now it’s time for all of us to implement the Panel’s recommendations quickly and effectively – with the same consensus-building transparency that made the Panel’s work so effective.

I firmly believe – and I’m sure you do, too – that a successful workplace health and safety system is built as much on relationships and partnerships, as it is on legislation.

The unanimous passage in May of Bill 160 illustrates the concern of all members of the Legislature for the health and safety of Ontario workers. “Bill 160” paves the way for leveraging the expertise and knowledge available through our stakeholders, government and the health and safety associations.

It allows us to work together in integrating and improving the health and safety system in Ontario.

A Permanent Prevention Council will soon be appointed to carry on the good work of the Interim Council. Minister Jeffrey will soon be calling for nominations.

In the coming weeks and months I’ll have much progress to report – of that I’m certain.

Prevention Starts Here!

I encourage you to explore our new Prevention web page:
www.ontario.ca/PreventionAtWork
New workplace posters are there in English, French and 10 other languages. We welcome your comments.

There’s a new draft workbook to accompany a new e-learning module. Also, there’s an updated information card about HSA prevention services; it clarifies which organizations provide training and consulting services to various sectors.

And that’s only the beginning. Stay tuned!

A milestone in workplace health and safety

SOPHIE DENNIS
Assistant Deputy Minister, Operations

It’s been a year since the Ontario government accepted recommendations from an expert advisory panel that reviewed the workplace health and safety system.

Since then, the Ministry of Labour has made significant strides in implementing its priority recommendations.

In May, the legislature passed the Occupational Health and Safety Statute Law Amendment Act, the largest revamp of Ontario’s workplace health and safety system in 30 years. It provided us with the legislative framework to move ahead on many of the report’s recommendations. In October, George Gritziotis began his work as Chief Prevention Officer (CPO). He will be focusing his efforts on coordinating and aligning the prevention system.

We also sought the advice of others. An Interim Prevention Council (IPC) of stakeholders was created to advise the Minister. This council has been instrumental on issues such as legislative changes and recruitment of the CPO. Steps are now underway to appoint a permanent prevention council in the new year.

On the compliance front, rest assured, we will continue to provide materials that will help you comply with the Occupational Health and Safety Act. This fall, we’ve released a variety of materials on our website. Watch our new video on diving safety. Read and distribute our new health and safety fact sheets. Peruse our newly released results on blitzes conducted earlier this year.

I want to thank each of you for your continued dedication to protecting workers across our province. Together, we can ensure that we leave no stone unturned in our mission for healthier and safer workplaces.

Ontario’s Occupational Health and Safety Act gives workers rights. It sets out rules for employers, supervisors and workers so they can work together to create workplaces safer

What you can do:
Get involved and make sure you are aware of your health and safety rights. 
• Know about workplace hazards and what to do about them.
• Participate in solving workplace health and safety problems.
• Refuse work that you believe is unsafe.
• Know that employers cannot take action against workers for following the law and raising health and safety concerns.

Workers have the right to:
• Know about workplace hazards and what to do about them.
• Participate in solving workplace health and safety problems.
• Refuse work that you believe is unsafe.
• Know that employers cannot take action against workers for following the law and raising health and safety concerns.

Workers have to:
• Follow workplace health and safety procedures.
• Wear and use safety gear required by your employer.
• Work in a way that you won’t hurt yourself or others.
• Report hazards or injuries to your supervisor.

Employers have to:
• Make sure workers know about hazards and dangers by providing information, instruction and training on how to work safely.
• Make sure supervisors know what is required to protect workers’ health and safety on the job.
• Create health and safety rules for their workplace.
• Make sure workers know these rules and what it means for them.
• Make sure workers know how to work safely, and make sure they follow the law and workplace health and safety procedures.

Supervisors have to:
• Tell workers about hazards and dangers, and respond to their concerns.
• Show workers how to work safely, and make sure they follow the law and workplace health and safety procedures.
• Make sure workers wear and use the right safety gear.
• Do everything reasonable to protect workers from being hurt or getting a work-related illness.

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Winter – it’s that time of the year

RENU KULENDRAN
Director, Occupational Health & Safety Branch

As winter officially begins, it’s important that we remember to be extra vigilant when at the workplace. Icy and snowy conditions can lead to motor vehicle accidents. Slips, trips and falls can happen anywhere. Flu season is in full swing.

In this issue, we’ve produced a special section on workplace health and safety during the winter. Our first piece outlines how to protect yourself and your workplace from the influenza virus, also known as the flu. The second article focuses on specific winter hazards in various sectors and precautions that can be taken.

With the New Year approaching, it’s also a reminder that once again our ministry will be reaching out and holding stakeholder consultations. These are held each year to further improve our enforcement strategy. It’s an opportunity for us to learn from our partners, obtain feedback on how the program is working and identify areas for improvement. They are held with employers, labour representatives and specialists from industries and sectors across Ontario.

I also invite you to tune in to our new health and safety podcasts. Our ministry has created quick, radio-style messages, which outline workplace rights and duties, and best practices. Have a listen on our website, or on the go using your smartphone or MP3 player.

We want to continue adopting new channels of communications to reach new audiences to ensure everyone knows their workplace rights and responsibilities. We hope you enjoy this issue of Safe At Work Ontario TODAY.

Protect workers from the flu

As winter gears up, the flu season is already in full swing. From October to February, thousands of workers in Ontario become sick with flu viruses. Workers with the influenza virus who continue to work could potentially transmit the virus to others.

Most people who contract the flu recover within one to two weeks without requiring medical treatment. But, in the very young, the elderly and those with serious medical conditions, infection can lead to severe complications leading to pneumonia and even death.

Workers have the right to work in a healthy and a safe environment. Employers have responsibilities under the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) to protect their workers from infectious diseases.
How do you know you have the flu?

Influenza is a viral infection that mainly affects the nose, throat, bronchi and, occasionally, lungs. The infection usually lasts for about a week and is characterized by sudden onset of high fever, aching muscles, headache and severe malaise, non-productive cough, sore throat and rhinitis – the inflammation of the mucous membrane that lines the nose.

How does it spread?

The influenza virus spreads mainly from person to person by the droplets and small particles that are produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. People can also become infected by touching objects or surfaces with flu viruses on them and then touching their eyes, mouth or nose.

How do you prevent the flu?

The Ministry of Labour’s Chief Physician, Dr. Leon Genesove, advises that the best way to protect yourself and others is by being immunized yearly and practicing good hand hygiene.

“How hand hygiene is the simplest, most effective measure for preventing infections,” said Dr. Genesove. Use a hand sanitizer or wash your hands thoroughly and frequently.

Immunization helps strengthen your body’s natural immune response against the flu by building antibodies against the virus. Consider getting immunized annually and early in the season. Everyone over six months of age should be immunized. It is especially important for those with weakened immune systems, pregnant women, young children, the elderly and people who take care of these groups.

Also, cough and sneeze into a shirt sleeve rather than the hands. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth, and keep common surfaces and items clean. Finally, stay home when you are ill.

Your workplace health and safety rights

Workers have the right to work in a safe and healthy environment. A flu outbreak does not change that.

Workers:

Workers have the right to know about potential hazards, including the exposure risk to influenza and how to protect themselves. They also have the right to be involved in identifying and resolving health and safety concerns, and the right to refuse unsafe work.
If you believe your workplace is unsafe because of a communicable disease, explain your concerns to your supervisor or joint health and safety committee representative. Staff at the ministry and workplace health and safety associations can provide guidance.

Employers:

Employers must consider worker health and safety during flu season. A flu outbreak does not change their responsibilities. They have a duty to take every reasonable precaution to protect the health and safety of their workers.

Employers must:

- enact measures needed to protect workers from infectious diseases, including the flu virus
- inform, instruct and supervise workers to protect their health and safety.

Your employment standards rights

Employees have rights under the Employment Standards Act in relation to unpaid leave or sick leave. Please visit the ministry’s website for more information: http://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/hs/pubs/ib_flu.php.

Additional resources

Coping with the flu:

For more information about the flu, please visit:

Municipal Public Health Units:

Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care:
http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en

Protecting the Health Care sector:

MOL’s Health and Community Care webpage:
www.ontario.ca/HealthWorkerSafety
www.ontario.ca/securite-travailleurlasante

Health Care and Residential Facilities Regulation [O. Reg. 67/93 – Note that the requirements for reporting work-related illnesses in workplaces regulated can be found in subsection 5(5)].

Public Health Ontario
http://www.oahpp.ca/

Public Services Health & Safety Association:
http://www.healthandsafetyontario.ca/PSHSA/Home.aspx
Contact the Ministry of Labour’s Health and Safety Contact Centre between 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday to Friday if you have any additional general questions about health and safety at 1-877-202-0008. Reporting of critical injuries, fatalities, work refusals or suspected unsafe work conditions may be done by calling this number at any time.

Winter hazards

Ice, wet conditions and lack of light – these are only some of the winter conditions that could pose as workplace hazards. Winter hazards can appear in any sector, whether it’s construction, mining, health care or industrial.

Learn how to protect yourself and your workers from winter hazards by taking certain precautions. Here are some safety tips and best practices:

Construction

Less light during the day presents two challenges, one of which is physiological. Our bodies struggle to maintain its circadian rhythm. As natural light deceases, our bodies internally begin slowing down to prepare for sleep. This translates to an increased difficulty in maintaining focus.

Workers should spend extra time ensuring they have adequate light to work, and adjust their sleeping patterns to coincide with the change in natural light. They should also ensure they receive enough rest each day. Employers can plan shift work at consistent times rather than shifting it throughout the day to help workers acclimatize. Adequate breaks can also reduce the risk of accidents caused by exhaustion.

The other challenge is environmental. Heavier clothing restricts movement and provides an additional chance for being caught on protruding hazards. Employers should plan their work zones carefully, remove protruding nails and cover exposed reinforcing steel (commonly known as rebar).

Wet conditions – combined with darkness – also increases the chance of slips and falls on a construction project. The accumulation of mud on work boots not only impedes walking, but can increase the likelihood of slips when using ladders. Workers can also become fatigued from the increased weight on their boots throughout the day.

All of these issues can be dealt with by preplanning, providing clean-up areas for workers, and ensuring access points are well lit and maintained in a slip-free environment.
Health and safety news
Monthly news from the Ministry of Labour
Subscribe to What’s New, a monthly e-newsletter, featuring the latest ministry news on workplace health and safety, employment standards and labour relations. Keep up-to-date on ministry legislation, operations and resources – all directly from your email inbox. http://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/resources/subscribe/index.php

Industrial
Weather conditions can be unpredictable, placing extra demands on your vehicle and your driving skills. Ensure you are well prepared for winter roads. Always adjust your driving speed to existing conditions.

For more information:
Ontario Ministry of Transportation – Winter driving – Be prepared, be safe! http://www.mto.gov.on.ca/english/safety/winterdrive/winterdrive.shtml


Slip, trip and fall hazards can also be prevalent at industrial workplaces during the winter. Read the autumn issue of Workplace Safety North’s Every Worker Magazine, which focuses on how to protect yourself from such hazards, from proper footwear to proper year-round and special winter housekeeping measures. http://www.healthandsafetyontario.ca/WSN/Newsletters.aspx

Mining
Icy conditions and lack of daylight could also lead to hazards in the mining sector during the winter.

Here are some safety tips and best practices:

- When climbing on or off equipment, remember to use the “three points of contact.”
- Walkways and parking lots with snow and icy conditions should be maintained appropriately.
- Material to prevent slips and falls should be available in areas accessible to workers.
- Set an expectation that each worker has a role and responsibility to help prevent slips and falls (i.e., spreading sand on an icy walkway).
- With shorter daylight hours, ensure that walkway lighting is adequate, especially at times of peak travel. Lights on timers help.
- Slips, trips and falls can also be hazards. Be careful when walking on icy surfaces, and remember to slow down.
- How you shovel snow can result in back injuries. Please see tips below.

Shoveling snow

- Using improper body mechanics when shovelling snow can result in back injuries. These injuries may be a muscle strain, or could be a more serious herniated disc or disc degeneration. When shovelling snow, remember to:
- Choose a shovel with a curved, or adjustable, handle length, and one with a small, lightweight plastic blade to reduce the weight.
• Warm up and stretch.
• Wear clothes that are easy to move in.
• Take frequent breaks and move smaller amounts of snow at once.
• Bend at the hips and knees, not your back. Keep your back straight, and pivot the whole body when moving snow to a new location.

**Inspection blitzes**

*Safe At Work Ontario*, the Ministry of Labour’s health and safety strategy, takes a proactive approach to health and safety. In February and March, the ministry will continue inspection blitzes to improve the health and safety culture at workplaces.

**MSD Blitz (February 2012):**

Musculoskeletal Disorders are the most commonly reported injuries in Ontario. In the past, the ministry has launched two high-profile MSD inspection blitzes that focus on hazards leading to the onset of MSDs. These types of injuries were also a component in other ministry blitzes.

In a February 2012 blitz, the ministry will focus on manual material handling (MMH) at workplaces in the Industrial, Construction, Health Care and Mining sectors. The ministry selected MMH because of the high proportion of MSD lost-time claims that are related to overexertion, and its prevalence in every sector. The body part most commonly injured is the back, often a result of manual handling tasks.

The ministry expects employers and workplace parties to identify the presence of MSD hazards and to take reasonable precautions to control the hazard.

Stay tuned for further information about the MSD blitz on the ministry’s website.

**Construction trade-specific blitz (March 2012)**

In March, the ministry plans to conduct a trade-specific blitz. The ministry will focus on a trade that has historically had a much higher than average lost-time injury rate, or has shown poor performance or negative growth in the reduction of lost-time injuries when compared to other trade or construction sectors.

By using data mined from the WSIB, the ministry’s Construction Health and Safety Program hopes to focus its efforts on work practices that are unsafe and those that contribute to the majority of accidents in that trade.

The focus on specific trades is expected to continue as a planning tool, as the ministry enhances its ability to identify safety problems within the construction sector. It will also allow the ministry to focus its resources most effectively on these problems.

As of late November, planning was ongoing for this blitz. It is expected that the trade for this blitz will be identified by the end of this calendar year.
Blitz results

Although we announce blitzes in advance, individual employers receive no warning of proactive inspections. The ministry tracks each sector to determine if the blitzes result in a long-lasting increase in compliance and decrease in injuries. The results are then posted on the ministry’s website.

Recent posts:

Improving Safety in Pits and Quarries, July 2011

New and Young Workers, May 1- August 31, 2011

MOL Radio debuts

Ministry launches podcasts on workplace rights and duties

A series of audio podcasts that helps Ontario workers and employers learn about health and safety, and employment standards is now available for listening – anytime, anywhere.

The new podcasts, produced by the Ministry of Labour, provide short and easily digestible information that Ontarians can use and return to – on their smartphones, MP3 players or computers – to learn their workplace rights and responsibilities. One podcast focuses on health and safety; the other, employment standards. New episodes for both podcasts are produced every two weeks.

These podcasts are also aimed at those who are visually impaired and at listeners with low literacy skills. The episodes are downloadable through the ministry’s website, iTunes or other podcast clients. They are also available for streaming.

Episodes to date include:

• Protecting workers from falls
• Musculoskeletal disorders
• Hours of work
• Overtime pay

The podcasts are another communications channel that the ministry has adopted – along with Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and e-newsletters – to ensure all Ontarians understand their workplace rights and duties.

http://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/podcasts/index.php
QUICK FACT

• The ministry has also produced 14 videos to date – on YouTube and its website – depicting what inspectors and officers look for during workplace inspections.

Proposed regulation concerning reprisal complaints

The Occupational Health and Safety Act prohibits employers from dismissing, disciplining or penalizing a worker for complying with the act, regulations or orders, or seeking enforcement of the law.

The Ministry of Labour is proposing a new regulation under the act that would prescribe the functions of the Office of the Worker Adviser (OWA) and the Office of the Employer Adviser (OEA) with respect to reprisal complaints under the act’s Section 50.

Proposed OWA function

The proposed functions of the OWA would be to educate, advise and represent non-unionized workers who may be making reprisal complaints to the Ontario Labour Relations Board (OLRB), or who may be referred by a ministry inspector to the OLRB. The OWA would provide such services free-of-charge.

Proposed OEA function

The proposed functions of the OEA would be to educate, advise and represent employers with fewer than 50 unionized or non-unionized employees in respect to reprisal complaints and referrals to the OLRB. The OEA would also provide such services, free-of-charge. Legal representation services would be limited to proceedings before the OLRB.

Implementing the priority recommendations of the Expert Panel

The proposed regulation is part of the broader initiative to implement recommendations from the Expert Advisory Panel on Occupational Health and Safety. The ministry is seeking input on the proposed regulation. More information is available on Ontario’s Regulatory Registry: http://www.ontariocanada.com/registry/view.do?postingId=8162&language=en

You are invited to send written comments by January 31, 2012 on the regulatory proposal to webhspolicy@ontario.ca, or by mail to:

OWA/OEA Proposed Regulation
Ontario Ministry of Labour
Health and Safety Policy and Program Development Branch
400 University Avenue, 12th Floor
Toronto, Ontario, M7A 1T7
Protecting workers at nuclear generating facilities

Canada and Ontario are working together to protect workers at Ontario's Bruce, Darlington and Pickering nuclear generating facilities.

On July 12, 2011, the federal government's Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission (CNSC) and the Ontario Ministry of Labour (MOL) signed a Memorandum of Understanding for co-operating on a range of enforcement issues.

Background

Canada and Ontario share responsibility for regulating workplace health and safety at Ontario’s three nuclear generating facilities.

1. The federal Nuclear Safety and Control Act (NSCA) and its regulations include provisions relating to:
   • protection of people (including the public and workers) from risks associated with nuclear energy and nuclear substances
   • protection of the environment from risks associated with nuclear energy and nuclear substances.

2. Ontario’s Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) and its regulations govern:
   • employers’ duties (e.g., the general duty to take every reasonable precaution in the circumstances), and
   • a worker’s general right to refuse unsafe work.

Jurisdiction

The Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission administers and enforces the NSCA and regulates all nuclear activities at Ontario’s nuclear generating facilities, including their licensing and radiation protection programs. It reports to Parliament through the Minister of Natural Resources Canada.

The Ontario Ministry of Labour enforces the OHSA, dealing with all health and safety matters at provincially regulated workplaces, including the Bruce, Darlington and Pickering nuclear generating facilities. It investigates work refusals, worker complaints and incidents, including hazards involving falls, personal protective equipment and ergonomics.

In addition, the ministry is solely responsible for enforcing and investigating all radiation matters involving X-rays under Ontario’s Regulation Respecting X-Ray Safety.

Shared Role

MOL will work closely and cooperatively with the CNSC when investigating health and safety matters involving possible worker exposure to nuclear radiation.
Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

The MOU formally establishes the co-operative working relationship of the ministry and CNSC at Bruce, Darlington and Pickering nuclear generating facilities.

Canada and Ontario will:

• Support each another in fulfilling their respective mandates
• Offer each other training on their respective legislation and regulations
• Co-ordinate enforcement activities, including joint workplace inspections
• Conduct joint planning and consultation on policies and programs
• Facilitate entry into workplaces under joint jurisdiction
• Share information, health and safety data and technical expertise where authorized
• Notify each other of incidents that may affect their respective legislative responsibilities and mandates.

More information

Fact Sheet:  

Links to key resources

• Ministry of Labour home page:  
http://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/

• Health and Safety FAQ:  

• Occupational Health and Safety Act:  
http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/english/elaws_statutes_90o01_e.htm

• A Guide to the Occupational Health and Safety Act:  

• Court bulletins:  

• Safe At Work Ontario:  
http://www.ontario.ca/SafeAtWorkOntario

• Inspection Blitzes, Announcements and Results:  

• Sector Plans:  

• Young Workers:  
http://www.ontario.ca/YoungWorkers
• Health and Community Care:  
  www.ontario.ca/HealthWorkerSafety

• Construction Safety:  
  http://www.ontario.ca/ConstructionSafety

• Mining Safety:  
  http://www.ontario.ca/MiningSafety

• Prevention:  
  www.ontario.ca/PreventionAtWork

• Workplace Violence Resources:  
  http://www.ontario.ca/WorkplaceViolence

• Interim Prevention Council:  

• Slips, Trips and Fall Hazards Resources:  
  http://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/hs/topics/falls.php

• Musculoskeletal Disorders /Ergonomics Resources:  
  http://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/hs/topics/pains.php

• MOL on Twitter:  
  http://twitter.com/#!/OntMinLabour

• MOL on Facebook:  

• Workplace Safety & Insurance Board:  
  http://www.wsib.on.ca/en/community/WSIB