



Health and Safety Handbook

For BCGEU OH&S representatives



Throughout its history, the BCGEU has worked hard to protect its members from injury, illness and death on the job. Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) is an important issue for the union. The cornerstone of good health and safety practice in British Columbia is the joint Occupational Health and Safety committee.

The work of a BCGEU OH&S representative is very important. BCGEU OH&S representatives help prevent injuries and illness and save lives.



Joint OH&S Committees are the Law!

Joint OH&S committees are one of the most important ways for the union to ensure that the employer's are meeting their health and safety obligations. The union's right to participate in health and safety is written into WCB legislation and BCGEU collective agreements.

Division 4 of the Workers' Compensation Act (WCA) provides the legislative requirements for the joint OH&S committee and in smaller workplaces a worker representative. The law gives real power to health and safety committee members and worker representatives.

This handbook will refer to the joint OH&S committee but keep in mind that under the WCA the worker representative has all the same rights and responsibilities as a joint OH&S committee.

Make sure the committee is set up properly

WCA Division 4 Sections 125-129 ensures the right of workers to participate in workplace safety by requiring employers to have a joint OH&S committee in workplaces with more than twenty workers and in smaller workplaces with ten to nineteen workers to have a worker OH&S representative.

According to collective agreements all BCGEU OH&S committee representatives and worker representatives must be appointed by the union. They are appointed for a three year term.

WCA Section 127 requires a minimum of four representatives, two employer and two worker. In larger workplaces there may be a need to have a larger number. Employers can never outnumber the workers on the committee.

Co-Chairs

Section 127 states that all joint OH&S committees must have two co-chairs: one selected by the employer representatives and one selected by the worker representatives.

Serving as a co-chair requires extra commitment:

- ensure the committee meets monthly
- prepare and distribute the agenda
- co-chair the meeting
- assist the committee to develop terms of reference
- keep the meeting on schedule and on agenda
- ensure accurate, action-oriented minutes are taken and posted
- forward written recommendations to the employer



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Committee Roles and Responsibilities: Your Job Description

Section 130 sets out the duties of the joint OH&S committee.

- jointly develop terms of reference
- identify situations that may be unsafe or unhealthy and advise on how to address them
- address concerns and complaints related to the health and safety of workers
- consult with workers and the employer on improvements to health and safety
- make recommendations to the employer and workers
- make recommendations to the employer on education and training
- advise the employer on programs and policies
- monitor the effectiveness of employer training, programs and policies
- advise the employer about changes in the workplace that may affect health and safety, and

- ensure that incident investigations and regular inspections are carried out

These are minimum requirements and the committee may be required to go beyond these activities. For example, in order to address worker concerns about the use of a toxic chemical the committee may be involved in research, worker surveys, consultation with experts and worker training plans.

Section 131 requires that the OH&S committee meets once a month.

Solving Health and Safety Issues

Health and safety issues are usually solved as they arise either by workers or by supervisors. If a problem cannot be resolved then workers should report to their OH&S committee representatives. If it is an urgent issue the committee may need to meet.

Use basic problem-solving techniques:

- identify and define the problem
- discuss the cause or causes of the problem
- brainstorm solutions
- decide on action to be taken

Committee Recommendations

While health and safety issues can be resolved through discussion, some serious issues may require a more formal written recommendation. Sections 132 and 133 set out a formal process for the committee to make recommendations to the employer.

Committee sends a written recommendation to the employer requesting a written response.

The employer must respond in writing within 21 days agreeing with the recommendation, asking for more time to respond or explaining the reasons for disagreeing with the recommendation.

If the committee is not satisfied with the employer's response, a co-chair of the committee can contact the WCB for assistance in resolving the matter.

Employer Supports to the Committee

Sections 134-136 set out the requirements for the employer to provide support for the work of the joint OH&S committee.

Paid time for committee work.

The employer must give the committee reasonable paid time away from work to perform their duties including attending meetings,

conducting workplace inspections and incident investigations.

Paid time for educational leave.

Section 135 states that each member of the committee is entitled to eight hours of annual educational leave to take OH&S courses. Those members covered by the Master Agreement are entitled to sixteen hours within six months of their appointment to the committee. Check your collective agreement as education entitlements vary.

Administrative support to the committee.

Section 136 states that the employer must provide:

- meeting space
- equipment, and
- clerical support
- information requested by the committee on health

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and safety hazards at the workplace, experiences and safe practices in similar industries, and order, penalties or prosecutions related to health and safety at the workplace

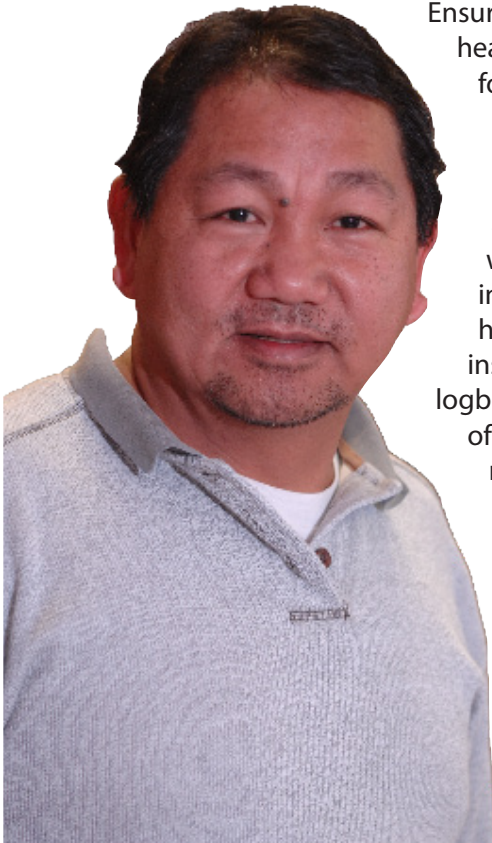


Posting information.

Section 138 requires the employer to post:

- names and work locations of committee members
- minutes of the last three committee meetings
- any WCB orders received in the past year

Ensure that the employer has a health and safety bulletin board for posting OH&S information



Records. The employer must keep records of worker and supervisor training, workplace inspections, incident investigation reports, hazard reports, equipment inspection and maintenance logbooks, first aid reports. All of these documents must be made available to the committee upon request.

Tips for being a great BCGEU OH&S Committee Representative or a Worker Representative

Ensure that you have been appointed by the BCGEU (this is a collective agreement requirement, the employer should not appoint BCGEU OH&S representatives)

Know your rights and use them

- right to know about workplace hazards
- right to participate in workplace health and safety
- right to refuse unsafe work
- right to no discrimination

Attend OH&S educational courses and learn about the roles and responsibilities of the joint OH&S committee. The WCA and your collective agreement ensure that you have the right to OH&S training.

Attend the monthly committee meetings

Become a health and safety activist

- take the lead on safety solutions
- participate in workplace inspections and incident investigations
- mobilize co-worker's support on union health and safety issues
- insist that the employer implement committee recommendations
- call the WCB if necessary

Talk to members: You have been chosen by the BCGEU to represent your co-workers on health and safety matters

- make sure that members know the BCGEU OH&S committee representatives
- consult with co-workers on health and safety issues
- encourage members to report concerns to the committee
- act on members concerns as soon as possible and let them know when a solution has been put into place
- brag about the good work of the committee

Talk to the Union

- inform others about the work of the committee, including: stewards, local and component officers, staff representatives and the BCGEU OH&S Officer
- ensure the union is informed of any changes in the union committee representatives

Where to get Information:

BCGEU

Sheila Moir
Occupational Health & Safety Officer
sheila.moir@bcgeu.ca
(604) 291-9611

BCGEU Direct

www.bcgeu.ca
(604)-215-1499

WCB

www.worksafefbc.ca

BC Federation of Labour

www.bcfed.ca
(604) 430-1421

Registering for OH&S Courses

Government Members:

To register for OH&S courses go to www.bcpublicservice.ca/courses

Non-Government Members:

To register for OH&S courses contact your local area office

BCGEU Area Offices

Victoria	(250)388-9948	1-800-667-1033
North Island	(250)338-7774	1-800-667-1997
Lower Mainland	(604)215-1499	1-888-238-0239
Fraser Valley	(604)882-0111	1-800-667-1103
Kamloops	(250)372-8223	1-800-667-0054
Cariboo	(250)392-6586	1-800-667-9244
Okanagan	(250)763-6405	1-800-667-1132
East Kootenay	(250)489-4361	1-800-667-1203
West Kootenay	(250)365-9979	1-800-667-1061
Peace River	(250)785-6185	1-800-667-0788
Prince George	(250)563-1116	1-800-667-8772
Northwest	(250)635-9126	1-800-665-1664