

Psychosocial Hazards Survey Results

A Snapshot of Our Industry and Introduction to AMTA's Psychosocial Hazards Guide

Background

Alberta Motor Transport Association (AMTA) is in the process of releasing a guide on psychosocial hazards in the workplace, a document meant to assist carriers and transportation safety professionals in addressing psychological safety and compliance concerns. We performed a small survey as part of this project, and this bulletin will specifically present the survey's findings ahead of the full release of the guide.

Those curious about how small carriers in Alberta stand in terms of basic psychosocial hazard awareness will be particularly interested in the sections that follow. If you received one of the calls related to this survey, thank you for your participation.



Survey Methods

AMTA conducted a survey in September of 2021 to get an idea of where small- and medium-sized carriers stand in terms of familiarity with psychosocial hazards and their mitigation. The survey consisted of phone interviews with carrier management, owners, and/or safety representatives from carriers throughout Alberta.

The intention of this survey was to provide a small but measurable snapshot of Alberta's trucking industry in the context of psychosocial hazards. As a pilot study, the sample size was kept at 55 to ensure even distribution across the province and enough information to identify potential trends and questions that could be investigated in a larger future study.

AMTA wanted to assess basic familiarity in Alberta's trucking industry with language around psychosocial hazards. Additionally, we wanted to see to what proportion the industry is aware of their occupational health and safety (OHS) legal responsibilities and if practices are being implemented to mitigate psychosocial hazards.

To select carriers for the above interview, the Alberta Transportation Region & District Offices map was used to identify the boundaries of each of the eleven transportation districts in Alberta [1]. To ensure an even distribution of carriers from across Alberta, five carriers were chosen from each district.

Carriers were selected by using Google Maps to identify carriers within each district. The phrases "trucking company", "transportation", and "trucking" were used in Google Maps to find companies. The work of selecting carriers and conducting the surveys took place over the month of September in 2021.

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AMTA wrote the following five questions which were asked of respondents in each interview:

1. Are you familiar with what are psychological hazards and psychosocial hazards in the workplace?
2. Examples of psychological hazards and psychosocial hazards include bullying, harassment, excessive workloads, violence, and poor management practices. Are you aware of the occupational health and safety legal responsibilities of employers for managing psychosocial and psychological hazards?
3. Does your company currently have any practices for reducing the risks related to psychological and psychosocial hazards?
4. Approximately how many employees and contractors does your organisation direct?
5. Approximately how many power units does your organisation direct?

Before asking the above questions, the interviewer would call the company in question, introduce themselves and AMTA, and request that someone in safety and/or management take the time for the phone interview. Once the interviewer was speaking with the appropriate person at the carrier, the interview was introduced as a survey on psychological safety in the trucking industry being done by AMTA to improve future safety programming.

AMTA was then briefly introduced. It was made clear that AMTA was not a representative of any government or law enforcement agency and that all information collected would be kept confidential. No AMTA services or memberships were discussed or advertised during the calls.

The intent of question one was to assess industry's familiarisation with the terminology "psychological hazards" and "psychosocial hazards". Question two was prefaced with examples of psychosocial and psychological hazards so that those unfamiliar with the specific language but still aware of this broad category of hazards could provide answers for the rest of the survey. Its intention was to determine if the carrier in question was familiar with the legal obligations of employers to protect workers from these hazards.

The intent of question three was to see if the carrier believed they had any practices in place for addressing these hazards. Questions four and five were included to determine carrier size for data analysis. For questions one through three, answers were either a "yes" or "no". Questions four and five were numerical values.

Once the five questions were complete, the respondent was told the interview was over and thanked for their participation. If the respondent identified any other information of interest about the trucking industry in Alberta, it was recorded in general terms. For example, sometimes at the end of the interview a respondent would add a comment like "We are concerned about is how hard it is to find Class 1 drivers." In such an example, a note was made stating the carrier was concerned over a shortage of licenced drivers.

Survey Results

The answers to questions one through three were placed into a bar graph as seen in Figure 1 where the percentage of respondents who answered “yes” to the question is plotted as a function of each question.

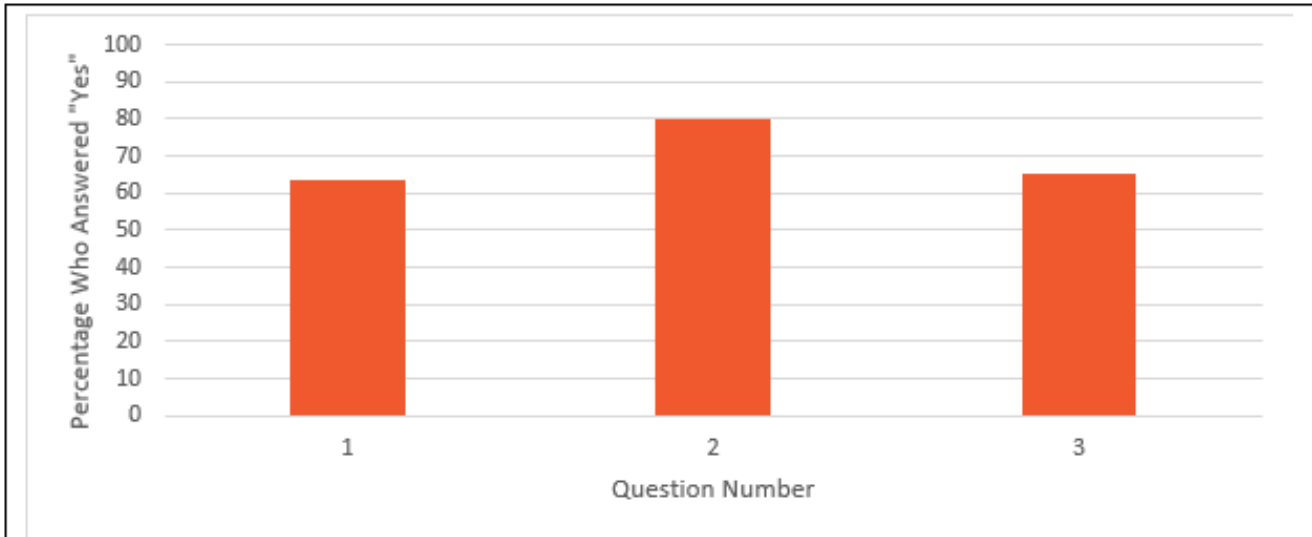


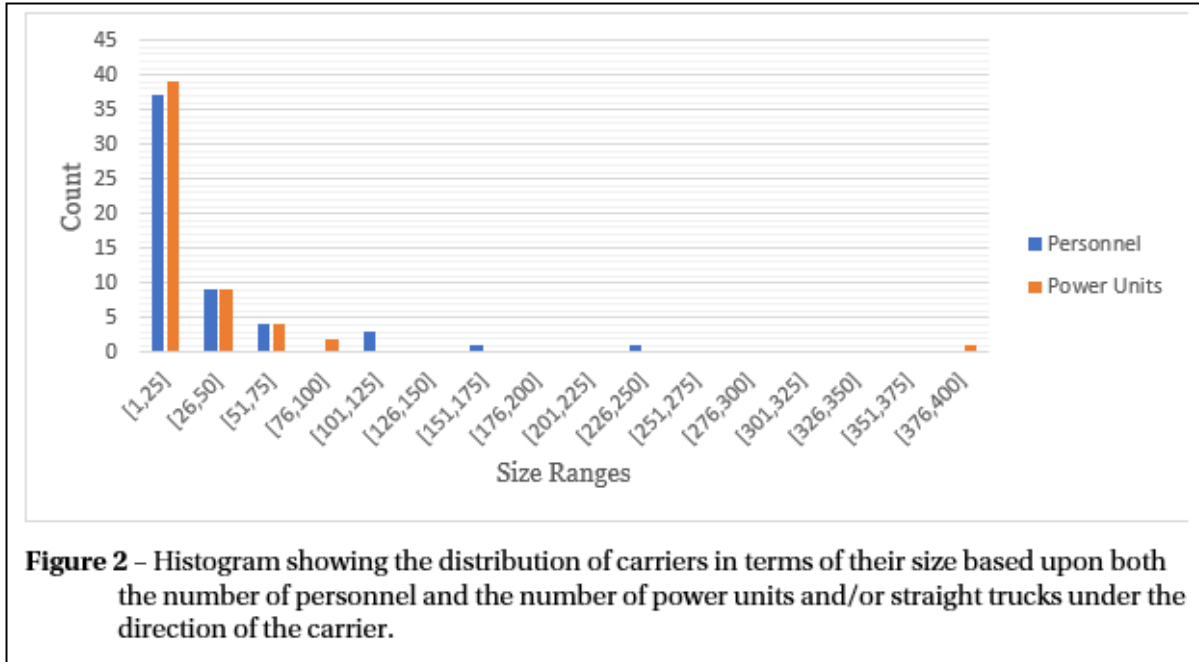
Figure 1 – Percentage of carrier respondents who answered “yes” to the three survey questions. Questions 1, 2, and 3 received a response of “yes” for 63.6 %, 80.0 %, and 65.5 % of carriers, respectively.

For question one, “Are you familiar with what are psychological hazards and psychosocial hazards in the workplace?”, 63.6 % of carrier respondents said yes, indicating the majority had some level of familiarity with the terms “psychosocial hazards” and “psychological hazards”. The depth of this familiarity was not assessed.

For question two, “Are you aware of the occupational health and safety legal responsibilities of employers for managing psychosocial and psychological hazards?”, 80.0 % of carrier respondents said yes, indicating the majority were aware to a degree of some legal responsibility of their company in terms of managing psychosocial hazards. The depth of this awareness was not assessed.

For question three, “Does your company currently have any practices for reducing the risks related to psychological and psychosocial hazards?”, 65.5 % of carrier respondents said yes. The depth or validity of these practices was not assessed.

Questions four and five were concerned with measuring the size of the carriers surveyed. Figure 2 shows the distribution of carriers in terms of their size. The majority of carriers were either 75 or fewer in terms of personnel and/or power units/straight trucks under the direct control of the carrier.



Basic data analysis was done to determine the numbers in Table 1. The difference between the average and the median carrier size, both for personnel and power units/straight trucks, shows that while there was a large spread between the sizes of the largest and smaller carriers surveyed, the largest carriers were outliers.

Of all the 55 surveys conducted, nine carriers brought up concerns about Alberta’s trucking industry at the end of the survey. This information was not requested, but some respondents provided their opinions. Table 2 shows the ranking of these concerns in terms of how many times an individual carrier brought up the same concern.

Measurement	Personnel	Power Units and/or Straight Trucks
Sample size = 55		
Average Carrier Size	27.5	31.5
Median Carrier Size	12	13
Largest Carrier	380	250
Smallest Carrier	1	1

Table 1 – Additional data describing the distribution of carriers selected for the phone survey.

Ranking	Industry Concern
1	Shortage of work (related to oil and gas)
2	Cannot find enough licenced drivers to fill positions
3	Cannot employ licenced but inexperienced drivers (due to insurance reasons)

Table 2 – The top three industry concerns mentioned by carrier respondents. None of this information was requested, but when carriers offered information related to concerns about Alberta’s trucking industry, the responses were collected and ranking in terms of the number of times the same type of concern was mentioned.

Survey Discussion

The first point to discuss about the survey data is the small sample size ($n = 55$). At this sample size, it is not possible to claim any sort of statistical significance when analysing trends. Furthermore, from Figure 2 and Table 1 it is obvious most carriers interviewed were small-sized carriers, meaning this data is more indicative for small-sized carriers instead of medium-sized ones.

Despite these shortcomings, the survey results are valuable. It was not the intention of AMTA to conduct a thorough and rigorous study of the Albertan trucking industry in terms of psychosocial hazard management; instead, the goal was to investigate, at a high level, the state of the industry in terms of general awareness and management of psychosocial hazards. The results from this survey could serve as a starting point for a larger, more in-depth study.

The first point of discussion is the discrepancy between the percentages of carriers that answered yes when asked if they were aware of their legal obligations to manage psychosocial hazards (80.0 %) and those which answered yes when asked if they have any practices to reduce the risks posed by psychosocial hazards (65.5 %). There is a 14.5 % difference between the results of questions two and three (see Figure 1 above). Due to the small sample size, we did not assess whether or not this difference is statistically significant, but it is nevertheless a trend worth exploring in greater detail should a future study be conducted.

At this point, we could hypothesise that roughly 80 % of carriers have a basic awareness of their legal obligations to address hazards while also predicting that a statistically significant number of these carriers operate without any practices in place to address these hazards. We can also predict that a large proportion (i.e. approximately 40 %) of small-sized carriers in Alberta are unfamiliar with the specific language used to describe psychosocial hazards. A more detailed survey could then be used to test these predictions using a larger sample size.

It is worth noting that it is a reasonable prediction more small-sized carriers are operating without practices to manage risk from psychosocial hazards than the 65.5 % indicated in the survey. Some carrier respondents may have felt they did not have practices in place to address psychosocial hazards but answered yes anyways. This could have been because they did not want to admit to any non-compliance. Others may also not have trusted their responses would remain confidential and perhaps have associated AMTA with a regulatory body capable of reprisal against them.

Out of all 55 carriers that were interviewed, nine brought up concerns unrelated to the survey content. These concerns were mainly centered around two themes: insufficient labour and insufficient levels of work (see Table 2 above). Carriers complaining about insufficient levels of work were all involved in the oil and gas segment of the trucking industry, and none of these carriers specifically mentioned being challenged by a lack of labour. While the sample size and impromptu nature of this collected data is such that no strong conclusions can be drawn, it does suggest that trucking companies involved in oil and gas operations are presently more concerned about reduced workloads than they are recruiting licenced commercial drivers.

Given the inclusion of the phrase “psychological and social well-being” in AMTA’s Certificate of Recognition (COR) COR Auditor’s Guidelines [2], it is also a fair assumption that COR-holding carriers are more knowledgeable with regards to psychosocial hazards than non-COR-holding carriers. A future direction this research could go would be exploring the impact of the COR program specifically on practices implemented to address psychosocial hazards in carriers of any size.

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The main takeaway from this Alberta-specific industry survey is this: small-sized (and likely medium-sized) trucking companies in Alberta are generally not highly knowledgeable with regards to managing psychosocial hazards in their operations. There is room for improvement in terms of providing carriers with practical, actionable tools they can use to address these hazards in their organisations.

Summary

This survey represents some of the work done by AMTA in the creation of its psychosocial hazards guide. At the time of this bulletin’s release, the guide is nearing completion and will be released in the coming weeks. As we move forward as an industry, AMTA will work with carriers and transportation safety professionals to help them manage the psychological aspects of their safety programs and increase the awareness of mental health in trucking and busing.

Need Help? Contact AMTA

AMTA can provide carriers with guidance on the information presented in this bulletin. If you have any questions, please contact AMTA and our experienced staff will be happy to help. For your safety and compliance questions, please email Workplace Support Services (WSS) directly at wss@amta.ca.

For more updates like this on a variety of topics related to the trucking industry, please [sign up for our eNews](#).

References

- 1 - Province of Alberta. “Alberta Transportation Region & District Offices.” Map. 2019. Accessed throughout the survey and most recently on November 8th, 2021, from <https://www.alberta.ca/assets/documents/transportation-offices-contact.pdf>.
- 2 - Alberta Motor Transport Association. 2019. “Element 2: Hazard Identification and Assessment.” COR Auditor’s Guidelines. Accessed November 22nd, 2021, <https://amta.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/2019-COR-Guidelines.pdf>.