

Policies, Procedures, and Psychosocial Hazards

An introduction to a best practice for addressing psychosocial hazards in the workplace

AMTA and Psychosocial Hazards

Alberta Motor Transport Association (AMTA) is working to draw attention to the problem of workplace psychosocial hazards in the trucking industry. We have published a [guide on addressing psychosocial hazards](#) meant to provide best practices small- and medium-sized carriers can put into place. This bulletin presents one of the best practices from the guide: implementing policies and procedures.

Certain negative behaviours are unacceptable in a workplace, and trucking companies need to have policies and procedures in place to address them.

These policies then require not only enforcement from company leaders but require modeling. All individuals in the organisation need to know the policies, see them enforced, and see people in positions of authority acting in accordance with them. The sections below will describe the role of policy in greater detail and identify organisations that can offer additional help in this area.



Policies and Procedures – An Overview

Before policies and procedures can be written, implemented, and enforced, the highest authorities in the carrier need to make it clear they support the health and safety system. Management commitment is important; no health and safety system will be able to bring about its best possible safety results without it. Occupational health and safety research consistently link true management commitment to positive safety outcomes [1, 2, 3]. As a result, carrier leadership must be seen as aligned with the goals of the safety program and all of its policies; if it isn't obvious management stands behind their policies then the policies become lip service.

Behaviours like harassment are not permissible in the workplace. Under the Canada Labour Code, it is specifically stated that federally-regulated employers must take steps to prevent, respond to, and investigate incidents of harassment [4]. For provincially-regulated employers in Alberta, employers, supervisors, and workers all have specific obligations related to the prevention of workplace harassment [5]. Harassment is also specifically listed in Alberta's Occupational Health and Safety Code as a hazard that must be addressed as part of the employer's requirement to identify and address workplace hazards [6].

To adequately address a psychosocial hazard like harassment, a company needs a policy telling workers that harassment is not tolerated in the workplace. The policy should also outline what action the employer will take in response to an incident of harassment; a specific procedure can then be used to explain the steps involved. A carrier should also understand how competent it is in performing harassment, violence, and bullying investigations; some may be beyond the competencies of the carrier and require professional help [7].

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Harassment is just one topic that a policy can help address. Policies and procedures are best practices that, for many organisations, form the foundation of a health and safety program. If an organisation is lacking adequate policies and procedures, this may be the right place to start.

Benefits

Policy writing is a flexible task. It doesn't need to be expensive if the organisation chooses to write their own policies and procedures and, in doing so, create a policy framework unique to their own operational needs. On the other hand, an organisation may elect to outsource this task. A combination of internal and external resources could be best.

There is also no shortage of free or low-cost help available to guide a carrier in policy and procedure writing. Health and safety organisations like AMTA offer training in this skill [8]. The Government of Alberta even offers free policy templates organisations can use as a starting point [9].

Having clear policies and procedures also helps address psychosocial hazards related to uncertainty. According to GuardingMinds@Work [10] and the CSA Standard for psychological healthy workplaces [11], clear leadership and expectations are one of the 13 factors linked to occupational psychosocial wellbeing. Policies and procedures that help workers understand what is expected of them will help positively address this factor.

Challenges

The availability of free policy templates and the low cost associated with writing policies internally can make it easy to produce a policy that is far too simple and generic to be of much value to a carrier. Free templates are starting points only and rarely meant to address a specific carrier's needs.

If the owners and management of a carrier know they will never actually enforce or follow aspects of a policy, there is little value in writing it. The organisation needs to have the will to follow through with action that supports the policy, so if it is unlikely this will exist, the carrier needs to address other internal problems before policy will be of any value in addressing psychosocial hazards.

Carriers must also understand that certain psychosocial hazards require specialised training to investigate and handle properly. Incidents of bullying, harassment, and sexual misconduct should not be investigated and handled by someone not competent to do so; for privacy reasons, they should also not be investigated by the health and safety committee (if the carrier has one).

More Help

The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS) offers guidance on writing OHS policies [12]. They are an excellent resource for carriers looking for help. For provincially-regulated carriers in Alberta [9], free templates can be accessed as starting points and may also be applicable to federally-regulated employers as well (carriers will need to do their own assessment of the template to make sure it meets the legislated requirements that apply to them).

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

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