

Psychosocial Hazards in Alberta's Trucking Industry

A high-level review of the language and compliance requirements
surrounding psychological safety for carriers

Background

Trucking is an industry of growth and advancement. As safety regulations have increased and new measures have been imposed upon trucking to help protect other road users, truck drivers, and trucking company workers, trucking has learned to adapt.

Psychological safety is an area where further adaptation is needed. Whether Provincially-regulated or Federally-regulated, all carriers need to address psychosocial hazards in their occupational health and safety (OHS) programs.



This bulletin will discuss some of the language commonly used to describe the class of hazards that pose a risk to an organisation's psychological safety (psychosocial hazards). It will also provide a brief overview of the compliance requirements for Alberta-based trucking companies in addressing the psychological safety of their workers and introduce the place of psychosocial hazards in Alberta's OHS Prevention Initiative.

Psychosocial Hazards and Psychological Safety – The Language

Generally, “psychosocial hazards” and “psychological safety” are terms that relate to mental health. Here are definitions of terms commonly used in discussing this topic:

Psychological- of, affecting, or arising in the mind; related to the mental and emotional state of a person [1].

Psychological hazard- elements of the work environment, management practices, or organizational practices that pose a risk to mental health and well-being [2].

Psychological safety- the absence of harm and/or threat of harm to mental well-being that a worker might experience [3].

Psychosocial- a term indicating the combination of psychological, environmental, and societal factors that affect an individual's psychological well-being.

Psychosocial hazard- a hazard related to the way work is designed, organized, and managed, as well as the economic and social contexts of work [4].

Whether words like “mental health hazard”, “psychological safety hazard”, or “psychosocial hazard” are used to describe this OHS topic, the intention of the language is the same: to draw attention to the health and safety hazards that negatively affect the mental health of workers and workplaces.

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Sometimes this topic is described solely in terms of bullying, harassment, and workplace violence.

Examples of hazards in this class include [5]:

- Stress
- Uncertainty
- The threat of violence
- Harassment
- Bullying
- Job demands that do not allow for a home/life balance
- Being treated without respect
- Unclear expectations for work performance
- Lack of control over one's work
- A lack of trust
- Fear for one's physical safety when at work
- Harassment, workplace violence, and bullying
- Unrealistic workloads
- Discrimination and cultural insensitivity
- Poor management practices that contribute to one or more of these hazards

The compliance requirements for carriers now follows.

Carrier Compliance Requirements

The occupational health and safety requirements for Provincially-regulated carriers in Alberta are stated in Alberta's Occupational Health and Safety Act. In the Act, the maintenance of worker psychological and social wellbeing is listed as a purpose of the Act [6]. In the Act and OHS Code, requirements exist to specifically address psychosocial hazards like working alone and harassment [7], and "psychological injury or harm" is included in the Act's definition of "violence" [8]. While not every type of psychosocial hazard is listed, it is obvious that a safety program lacking any psychological safety measures is inadequate.

Federally-regulated carriers follow Part II of the Canada Labour Code and the applicable regulations for their OHS requirements. Under Part II of the Federal Code, preventing "psychological injuries and illnesses arising out of, linked with or occurring in the course of employment" is a stated purpose of the legislation, and the definition for "harassment and violence" includes "psychological injury and illness to an employee" [9]. Federally-regulated carriers must somehow address psychological safety in their safety programming.

Alberta's OHS Prevention Initiative

The Government of Alberta (specifically, Alberta Labour) is currently midway through their OHS Prevention Initiative (PI). The OHS PI is a program where Alberta OHS focuses on workplaces and workers where there is increased vulnerability and has three priority areas. These areas are:

1. Slips, trips, and falls;
2. Musculoskeletal injuries, and;
3. Psychosocial injuries and illnesses. [10, 11]

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AMTA supports Alberta OHS by creating resources for carriers to address these priority areas. Examples include our micro-learn video library [12] and targeted safety bulletins (like this one).

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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