



Occupational Health  
Clinics for Ontario  
Workers Inc.



## Clinic Services for Joint Health Safety Committees

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## What is OHCOW

Throughout the 1970's and 1980's workers in Ontario became increasingly aware of the toll of injury and disease caused by dangerous and unhealthy working conditions. A groundswell of opinion demanded more effective diagnosis of work-related health problems and effective prevention strategies. The Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers (OHCOW) was established in 1989 by the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) and is funded by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB). The first clinic opened in 1989 in Hamilton, with subsequent clinics opened in Toronto, Windsor, Sudbury and Sarnia.

Each OHCOW clinic provides comprehensive occupational health services and information in five areas:

- An inquiry service to answer work-related health and safety questions
- Medical diagnostic services for workers who may have work-related health problems
- Group service for workplace health and safety committees and groups of workers
- Outreach and education to increase awareness of health and safety issues, and promote prevention strategies.
- A research services to investigate and report on illnesses and injuries.

OHCOW is governed by a twenty-one person volunteer Board of Directors. At the local level each of the five clinics has a Local Advisory Committee (see clinics) . The management of OHCOW is comprised of the managing director, financial manager and the executive directors of the five clinics.

## Our Mission

The mission of the occupational health clinics for Ontario Workers Inc. (OHCOW) is to prevent occupational illnesses and injury, and to promote the highest degree of physical, mental and social well-being of all workers.

We strive to accomplish this through the identification of workplace factors which are detrimental to the health and well-being of all workers, through the distribution of excellent occupational health, hygiene, and ergonomic information to increase knowledge among workers, employers and the general public; and through the provision of services designed to produce changes to improve workplaces and the health of workers.

The Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers (OHCOW) can provide a variety of services to members of Joint Health and Safety Committees (JH&SC's). These services are based on the expertise of the health and safety professionals employed by OHCOW including:

- Ergonomists
- Occupational Hygienists
- Occupational Health Coordinators
- Occupational Health Nurses
- Occupational Health Physicians

Using an inter-disciplinary team approach to health and safety concerns, OHCOW has been able to address the needs of JH&SC's. The following is a list of the type of services that OHCOW can provide to JH&SC's.

### **Walk Through Tours**

Walk through tours are designed to respond to both specific and general concerns. They address specific health and safety concerns and could involve any of the following:

- Observations of the process of concern
- Questions, measurements for noise, air speed, or gas, and
- Simple work-station measurements'

The objectives of the walk through tour are to identify causes of the health or safety concerns, and to suggest directions for further investigations if solutions are not obvious. Additional

concerns identified during the tour are also brought to the JH&SC's attention.

### **Medical Guidance**

Medical questions can be addressed by OHCOW's occupational medical staff. Their extensive experience with workers helps them provide medical education and advice which is relevant to the workplace. JH&SC's have asked for advice in:

- Medical surveillance programs required by designated substance regulations
- Developing hearing conservation programs
- Interpreting biological monitoring results
- Addressing concerns about occupational cancer
- Investigating the work-relatedness of unusual medical conditions

The objective of OHCOW's services for JH&SC's is to help the JH&SC's to understand the complicated medical aspects of occupational health. This is accomplished by providing objective medical advice based on sound scientific information and practical knowledge of the workplace.

### **Occupational Hygiene Advice**

Suggestions regarding the controls of hazards in the workplace are an integral part of the walk-through report. OHCOW's hygienists often evaluate the need for engineering controls such as ventilation or noise control measures. OHCOW can also provide a sampling service and help in interpreting industrial hygiene sampling reports and help with the design of sampling strategies. Alternate methods of workplace evaluation have been developed using computer programs based on consumption figures and to evaluate exposure data using statistical methods.

During a walkthrough tour, the OHCOW occupational hygienist will:

- watch how the work is done

- question workers about their symptoms
- take limited measurements (for example, noise and air flow)
- make recommendations to improve workplace conditions

### **Ergonomic Consultations**

A number of JH&SC's have requested ergonomic advice from OHCOW to address the high frequency of musculoskeletal injuries. Working with the JH&SC, OHCOW Ergonomists look at physical risk factors that can lead to injuries and will develop strategies to reduce the risk of injury.

During a walkthrough tour, an OHCOW Ergonomist will :

- watch how the work is done
- interview workers to understand their concerns and their discomfort
- measure the dimensions, forces, repetitions and postures of a workstation
- make recommendations to improve conditions

### **Information Service**

An inquiry service to answer workplace health and safety questions. OHCOW staff will answer your questions about workplace health and safety issues. Examples include:

- the substances you work with
- common diseases in your industry
- ways to reduce or eliminate the hazards you face
- the latest medical and scientific articles

The OHCOW website <http://www.ohcow.on.ca> also contains a list of a variety of online resources on a variety of occupational health issues.

### **Education**

OHCOW staff will speak to your group about health and safety issues. Our goal is to make you aware of health hazards in your workplace so you can avoid illness or injury. We also want to

make you aware of all of OHCOW's services in case you need them. Sometimes we work together with community groups or with other health and safety groups to promote safe workplaces. OHCOW also helps to educate doctors, medical students, nurses and nursing students so they are more aware of workplace health issues.

OHCOW has developed workplace specific information programs to educate JH&SC's about specific health hazards and control strategies. These sessions can either be done in combination with a work site visit regarding a specific or on their own. A list of sessions can be requested from the clinic nearest you.

### **Research**

A research service to investigate and report on illnesses and injuries. OHCOW has been involved in research studies on several different topics. We collect statistics on different diseases and on the substances workers are exposed to that may cause these diseases. We will use our extensive library and search for the latest scientific literature on your question. We will use this information to write a report that compares your workplace situation to that of other workers we have studied.

If you need further assistance, call the  
**Occupational Health Clinic for Ontario Workers Inc.**  
Closest to you.

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