

# ***JOINT INDUSTRY AND GOVERNMENT STRATEGY ON WORKPLACE SAFETY***



**A Draft Strategy**

submitted to

**The Honourable Clint Dunford  
Minister of Human Resources and Employment**

by the

**Provincial Strategic  
Working Group on Workplace Safety**

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Honourable Minister Dunford:

As members of the *Provincial Strategic Working Group on Workplace Safety*, we are pleased to provide a draft *Joint Industry and Government Strategy on Workplace Safety*.

This draft Strategy is the culmination of our efforts to outline a series of objectives and actions to achieve the target of 2.0 lost-time claims per 100 person years by 2004 and move toward the realization of the vision of Alberta having a **“healthy and injury-free work environment”**. This document reflects the input provided by over one hundred and thirty participants at the May 8, 2002 Workplace Safety 2.0 Forum held in Edmonton as well as the contributions of each of the members of our Working Group. Key leaders from a cross-section of industries and labour organizations, safety associations, and government have helped prepare this Strategy.

This Strategy signals a shared commitment to workplace health and safety. It recognizes that both industry and government have an important role to play in ensuring that Alberta workers are safe and healthy and encourages leadership and joint action by employers, workers, industry and labour organizations, government and the public.

Alberta has an opportunity to be a leader in workplace health and safety. Working together to create a healthy and injury-free work environment will contribute to the overall health of Albertans and promote economic development. You have challenged us by establishing an aggressive lost-time claims target. We believe that this Strategy responds to your challenge.

**Patty Whiting, Chair, Provincial Strategic Working Group on Workplace Safety**

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## OVERVIEW

Why do we need a long-term workplace health and safety strategy? To help stop Albertans from getting ill or hurt as a result of their work. In the year 2000, 118 workplace fatalities occurred in Alberta, an average of more than two deaths per week. Another 2,600 workers became permanently disabled. In the same year, 38,500 injuries and illnesses extending beyond the day of the incident were reported. These statistics do not include the injuries and illnesses sustained by the one-quarter of Alberta workers who are exempt from Workers Compensation Board coverage.

Workplace injuries and illnesses impose high personal and family costs on those Albertans directly affected. In addition, there are societal costs associated with workplace injuries and illnesses. Lost wages and output, and medical and other costs resulting from workplace incidents are estimated at roughly \$3 billion annually in Alberta, more than 2% of the province's annual gross domestic product. Healthier and safer workplaces benefit everyone. Workers enjoy better health. Employers benefit as employees work more productively. Society benefits from a more prosperous economy, with a reduction in demand for public health and social services.

Alberta's workplace health and safety record has improved over the past ten years and is close to the Canadian national average. There are many examples of effective industry and government workplace health and safety programs in Alberta. Nevertheless, more can be done to prevent workplace illnesses and injuries.

The *Joint Industry and Government Strategy on Workplace Safety* proposes a range of initiatives to improve workplace health and safety in Alberta. The Strategy recognizes that employers, employees, associations, government and the public have a role to play in promoting workplace health and safety. The Strategy aims at achieving the short-term target of a 40% reduction in Alberta's lost-time claim rate by 2004.

While the Strategy includes a short-term target, it's overall focus is on the achievement of the following longer-term vision: **Alberta has a healthy and injury-free work environment.**

A set of six inter-related objectives supports the Strategy's short-term goals and longer-term vision. The objectives are equally important and mutually supportive of building a positive workplace health and safety culture in Alberta. The objectives relate to increasing awareness of workplace health and safety in the province, expanding and strengthening partnerships, making changes to Alberta's workplace health and safety regulatory framework, providing new incentives, strengthening enforcement, expanding training and education in workplace health and safety, and placing more emphasis on research.

A series of thirty-two recommended actions are identified under the six objectives. Like the objectives themselves, the actions are inter-related and mutually supportive.

There are no "silver bullets" when it comes to improving workplace health and safety. The reduction and eventual elimination of workplace injuries and illnesses in Alberta will depend on the implementation of many actions by all stakeholders: employers, employees, associations, government and the public.

The Strategy calls for intensive activity on several fronts. The implementation plan for the Strategy proposed by the Working Group recommends specific tasks that should be undertaken immediately to drive Alberta's lost-time claims rate down to 2.0 by 2004.

## **The Vision:**

Alberta has a healthy  
and injury-free work environment.

## **The Goals:**

Implement a workplace health and safety  
strategy that will:

- lead to safe workplaces;
- progressively improve workplace safety;  
and
- achieve positive short-term results,  
including a 40% reduction in the  
lost-time injury rate (2004 target of  
2.0 per 100 person-years worked).

## **Guiding Principles**

- Workplace health and safety incidents  
are predictable and preventable.
- Initiatives should focus on prevention.
- Leadership and joint action by all parties  
(employers, workers, industry and labour  
organizations, government, and the  
public) is required to provide a healthy  
and safe workplace.
- Workplace safety is enhanced through  
continuous efforts toward improvement.
- A combination of short and long-term  
targets and strategies is required.
- Workplace safety investments yield  
positive returns for employers,  
employees and society.

# OBJECTIVES



**OBJECTIVE I**  
**INCREASE AWARENESS OF WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY AND THE NEED FOR**  
**REDUCED INJURIES.**

**Recommended Actions**

1. Introduce workplace health and safety awareness concepts into the K-12 education system with initial targeting of junior and senior high school students.
2. Develop and implement joint public awareness-building initiatives and communication campaigns, including widespread advertising of the Workplace Health and Safety Call Centre number. These campaigns should personalize the implications of workplace injury and illness and include the responsibilities of the public at large for workplace safety.
3. Develop and implement joint initiatives to increase employer and worker awareness of workplace health and safety issues and employer/employee roles and responsibilities, with initial targeting of new employers and employees. Promote the benefits of successful workplace health and safety programs to employers and employees.
4. Encourage industry leaders in safety performance to promote health and safety programs within and beyond their industries.

## **OBJECTIVE II**

### **EXPAND AND STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS AMONG EMPLOYERS, WORKERS AND GOVERNMENT IN HEALTH AND SAFETY PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND INJURY PREVENTION.**

#### **Recommended Actions**

1. Conduct industry-specific workshops with key stakeholders to address high-incident hazards and to undertake injury and illness root cause analysis. Develop new consultation options to identify health and safety issues and preventive measures and to disseminate best practice information, with initial targeting of high-incident sectors.
2. Evaluate the effectiveness of current partnership programs. Support positive aspects of current programs and eliminate or change negative aspects.
3. Support safety associations to evaluate and strengthen their existing training and outreach programs, implement injury and illness prevention programs, and undertake root cause analysis and best practice research. Encourage information sharing among safety associations.
4. Develop approaches for reaching industries and companies not currently represented by safety associations and increasing employer participation in existing associations. Explore partnerships with other organizations to promote workplace health and safety.
5. Improve inter-industry, inter-association, and inter-company cooperation and information sharing in injury and illness cause and prevention.
6. Encourage the development of employer-employee health and safety partnerships and committees within workplaces.

**OBJECTIVE III**  
**STRENGTHEN THE WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY LEGISLATIVE AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK AND DEVELOP IMPROVED SAFETY STANDARDS.**

**Recommended Actions**

1. Review the Occupational Health and Safety Act and relevant explanation guides to ensure that employers' and workers' rights and responsibilities are clearly defined and easily understood. Review the Act to enhance accountability for, health and safety by owners and prime contractors and clarify responsibilities for temporary workers.
2. Review legal options for addressing substance use that affects safety performance at the workplace. Clarify employers' and workers' responsibilities and strengthen accountabilities. Disseminate related information and guidelines to employers and workers.
3. Conduct research to identify areas where new standards should be developed (e.g., ergonomics). Industry and government should work collaboratively to define and implement industry-based standards.
4. Remove industry and occupational exemptions (e.g., farming and ranching) under the Occupational Health and Safety Act.
5. Increase fines (maximum and minimum) and penalties under the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

# **OBJECTIVE IV**

## **IMPROVE WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY COMPLIANCE THROUGH NEW INCENTIVES AND ENFORCEMENT INITIATIVES.**

### **Recommended Actions**

#### **INCENTIVES**

1. Institute public reporting of safety performance (including best and worst performers and workplaces) and make the public, current and potential employees, owners, and customers aware of their right to be provided with this information.
2. Institute public awards for exceptional and innovative safety initiatives.
3. Link Workers Compensation Board premium rates to participation in programs designed to improve health and safety (e.g., training, prevention work).

#### **ENFORCEMENT**

4. Introduce alternative penalties and sentencing for prosecutions under the Occupational Health and Safety Act (e.g., participation in awareness campaigns, progressive penalties). Earmark revenues from penalties associated with prosecutions for health and safety public awareness initiatives.
5. Increase workplace health and safety inspections. Target poor performers, high incident industries, and new employers and employees for inspections and compliance visits.
6. Strengthen enforcement activities through the effective use of tools such as stop-work orders and prosecutions, aimed at individuals and organizations.
7. Assess the potential effectiveness of adopting a system of administrative fines in which the level of fine reflects the severity of the infraction and the employer's previous safety record.

## **OBJECTIVE V**

### **EXPAND TRAINING AND EDUCATION IN WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY.**

#### **Recommended Actions**

1. Assess the adequacy of current health and safety training in post-secondary and apprenticeship programs. Promote the inclusion or strengthening of workplace health and safety training in programs, targeting high-risk occupations and industries.
2. Industry and safety associations to develop and incorporate health and safety business planning and cost-benefit components into programs. Provide supports to businesses in developing the business case for health and safety programs.
3. Develop and implement action plans to establish on-the-job mentoring programs for workers-at-risk (e.g., new workers).
4. Expand information and tools on government, industry and safety association websites, particularly with regard to best practices, root cause analysis, and successful preventive programs. Develop a clearinghouse of web-based workplace health and safety information and tools.
5. Develop competency standards and hazard assessment tools for safety-critical tasks, with employees actively involved in this process.
6. Develop health and safety programs that support continuous, life-long learning and awareness for managers, supervisors, and employees.

## **OBJECTIVE VI**

### **IMPROVE WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY RESEARCH AND PERFORMANCE REPORTING.**

#### **Recommended Actions**

1. Enhance the capabilities of industry, associations and government to develop, gather, analyze and disseminate timely and meaningful health and safety data. Utilize data to target health and safety initiatives where they will have the greatest impact and to measure and compare performance across industries and over time.
2. Extend the public reporting of health and safety performance to the province as a whole by integrating workplace health and safety performance measures within the Government of Alberta's performance measurement system. Promote workplace health and safety as a component of the Alberta Advantage. Encourage Alberta employers to reflect their commitment to workplace health and safety in their corporate vision and goals.
3. Track Workers Compensation Board claims by workplace location as well as by employer and project owner.
4. Refine injury and illness reporting definitions and improve reporting on health and safety performance measures.

## **IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

In addition to developing a draft *Joint Industry and Government Strategy on Workplace Safety*, the Working Group was responsible for developing a suggested plan for its implementation.

The Working Group has reviewed and prioritized each of the actions outlined in the draft Strategy and identified a number of key initiatives that it recommends be given immediate priority because of their potential to support the achievement of the short-term goal of reducing Alberta's lost-time claims rate to 2.0 by 2004.