

Internal responsibility system

Why it's important

Every year in Ontario, forestry workers are seriously injured or killed because hazards in the workplace were not recognized, assessed and controlled. One of the ways that everyone in the workplace can work towards eliminating these injuries and illnesses is to be on the lookout for hazards in the workplace. Provincial legislation gives the responsibility to all workplace parties to recognize workplace hazards.

How to control the hazards

- One of the purposes of the Ontario Occupational Health and Safety Act is to promote an Internal Responsibility System (IRS).
- Several sections of the OH&S Act encourage the IRS by:
 - Giving workers three basic rights (know, participate, refuse)
 - Giving each workplace party specific responsibilities
- IRS is based on the principle that people in the workplace are in the best position to recognize health and safety hazards, assess them and develop controls because they have the most knowledge about the equipment, the processes and the hazards involved.
- Internal self-monitoring is also important because the MOL inspectors cannot possibly be everywhere at once. They do not have the resources, the time, or the people to administer and enforce health and safety for each workplace in the province.
- The basis of the IRS is communication among workers, supervisors, employers and owners.
- The IRS promotes a co-operative, company-wide approach to health and safety—not because co-operation feels good but because it produces practical, measurable results.
- IRS was developed as a way of showing everyone in the workplace that many unsafe practices and conditions are not isolated incidents but the direct

consequence of poor policies, procedures, planning and communications.

- Communication regarding health and safety hazards must travel up and down the lines of a firm -- everyone should be telling everyone else about health and safety hazards that have been encountered and supervisors and employers have the duty to report what was done to control those health or safety hazards. When it comes to health and safety, everyone in the company depends on everyone else.

Show and tell

- Talk about how everyone in the workplace can help to maintain a safe workplace – by looking for any workplace health or safety hazards and reporting them to their supervisor.
- Employers are required by law to keep a healthy and safe workplace.
- The Internal Responsibility System is all about information moving up and down the line: A worker spots a potential concern or comes up with a suggestion for a safety improvement and reports it to the supervisor. The worker and supervisor ask other workers to look at the situation, or they pass the suggestion up to a middle manager and onward, for rewards or recognition and policy changes. Unresolved problems also get reported up, and additional cooperative work takes place.

Notes:
