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THE WORKPLACE SAFETY SOURCE FOR OHS MANAGERS AND HR PROFESSIONALS

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# Ontario unleashes OHS enforcement blitz

*Province targets young, new workers in summer safety campaign*

| BY SYLVIE GUILBERT |

**THE SAFETY** of young and new workers is the focus of a four-month occupational health and safety enforcement blitz across Ontario beginning in May 2010. Is your workplace ready?

The blitz is part of the Ontario government's Safe at Work Ontario strategy aimed at increasing workplace safety, enhancing productivity, avoiding the costs associated with workers' compensation and reducing the strain on the health-care system.

## Which workplaces are likely to be targeted?

Prior to the current blitz, Ontario's health and safety compliance strategies have tended to focus on workplaces with higher than average lost-time injury rates and claim costs. The criteria applied to identify workplaces targeted for inspection included injury rates and associated costs; compliance history; hazards inherent to the work; and specific events or accidents.

The new criteria for identifying workplaces are broader, including the traditional factors listed above,

but also whether the business is new; the size of business and the presence of new and/or vulnerable workers. The result is the identification of workplaces that may not have a record of injury or enhanced risk.

By targeting workplaces where young and new workers are known to be employed, the Ministry of Labour has publically stated the current blitz will focus on manufacturing, logging, farming and services, with particular emphasis on retail stores, wholesalers, restaurants and vehicle sales. In addition, the ministry has confirmed it has developed annual sector-specific plans for each of the industrial, health care, construction and mining sectors.

## 'Young' and 'new' workers

"Young worker" includes an individual between the ages of 14 to 24. "New worker" means a worker aged 25 and older who has been on the job for less than six months or who has been reassigned to a new position.

This means that any newly hired or assigned temporary, full-time or part-time employee, including in a supervisory role or with experience in the industry, may be the subject of a blitz.

## What are inspectors looking for?

Although the scope of an inspector's work is not limited to specific hazards and dangers, particular attention will be paid to whether young and new workers:

- are of minimum working age
- have received appropriate orientation and training
- are appropriately supervised
- are protected by appropriate safety measures, including personal protective equipment, guarding of electrical hazards, proper ergonomics and fall prevention equipment
- are protected from violence and harassment in the workplace.

Inspectors have also been instructed to ensure health and safety representatives or Joint Health and Safety Committees are in place where appropriate and are functioning as required.

## Don't wait: Prepare now

The prevention of workplace injury should be a top priority for every employer. Compliance with occupational health and safety laws is an important component of workplace safety. Failure to comply with health and safety laws in Ontario can result in a fine against a corporation up to \$500,000, and against an individual up to \$25,000 and/or imprisonment of up to 12 months.

Every workplace should consider how it can put itself in the best position to respond to the current health and safety blitz — or any safety blitz, regardless of jurisdiction.

The first step is to revisit and, if necessary, amend any and all health and safety policies and practices with particular emphasis on those focused at orientation, training and supervision. If you find these policies and practices are already up to standard, all that may be required is refresher training for workers and supervisors who are affected.

Employers should also ensure policies and documentation are readily available for inspection should they be required to be presented as part of an inspector's workplace investigation.

It is never too late to review and enhance health and safety. Workplaces that wait until an inspector is at the door, or worse will have waited too long.

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### ■ BY THE NUMBERS

## Young workers hurt, killed on the job

**ACCORDING TO** the Ontario government, 27 young workers age 15 to 24 were killed and 466 critically injured on the job between 2004 and 2009. Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) statistics show that from 2004 to 2008, young workers sustained 57,871 lost-time claims with workers age 15 to 19 accounting for 29 per cent (16,980) and workers age 20 to 24 accounting for 71 per cent (40,891).