OHSInsider Newsletter

Your easiest path to OHS Compliance in Canada

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This Month's Highlights

This month's newsletter explores key environmental and workplace topics, including spill prevention in emergencies, green purchasing strategies, and using ROI to gain executive support for environmental programs. We also examine why some hazard assessments may be misleading. Visit OHSInsider.com to read the full articles and more.

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Featured in This Edition:

Spill Prevention and Containment in Emergencies

Spill prevention and emergency containment are critical and life-saving components of occupational health and safety (OHS) programs, particularly on accident-prone worksites such as construction sites, manufacturing facilities, agricultural operations, and chemical processing plants. Understanding the risks associated with spills and implementing effective controls can significantly reduce injuries, environmental damage, and regulatory liability.

Spills and the Hazards They Pose

Worksites may encounter a wide range of spills, each presenting unique hazards. Common examples include fuel and oil spills from machinery, chemical releases such as solvents, acids, or pesticides, and bulk material spills like grains, powders, or debris. Even seemingly low-risk substances, such as water or lubricants, can create serious slip and fall hazards if left unaddressed. More dangerous spills, such as corrosive chemicals, flammable liquids, or toxic substances, pose immediate risks to worker health through inhalation, skin contact, or combustibility

Certain types of spills present heightened risks for both employees and employers. Hazardous chemical spills can result in acute injuries such as burns, respiratory distress, or poisoning, and may also lead to long-term occupational illnesses. Flammable spills increase the risk of fires and explosions, especially in confined or poorly ventilated areas. From an employer perspective, failure to properly manage spills can result in regulatory penalties, environmental cleanup costs, production downtime, and reputational damage.

Emergency Containment Protocols

Effective emergency containment is essential to minimize harm. The first priority is always worker safety. This may involve evacuating the area, isolating the hazard, and ensuring only trained personnel respond. Worksites should maintain readily accessible spill kits tailored to the materials on site, including absorbent pads, booms, neutralizing agents, and appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE). Workers must be trained to quickly identify the type of spill and follow established procedures, such as stopping the source if safe to do so, containing the spread using barriers or absorbents, and notifying supervisors or

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emergency responders.

For hazardous substances, containment strategies should align with Safety Data Sheets (SDS) and regulatory requirements. For example, chemical spills may require neutralization before cleanup, while oil spills may need absorbent materials to prevent environmental contamination. Proper ventilation, spill berms, and drainage controls can help limit the spread of contaminants. In all cases, incident reporting and post-incident review are crucial to improve future response efforts.

Failing to contain a spill can have serious consequences. Hazardous substances that spread beyond the immediate area can expose more workers to harm, contaminate soil or water sources, and escalate into larger emergencies. Even non-toxic spills can lead to injuries, as slips, trips, and falls remain one of the leading causes of workplace incidents in Canada. A small, unattended spill can quickly become a significant liability if it results in worker injury or operational disruption.

Preventing Spills

Prevention remains the most effective strategy. Good housekeeping practices play a central role in reducing spill risks. This includes keeping work areas clean and uncluttered, promptly cleaning minor spills, and ensuring proper waste disposal. Equipment should be regularly inspected and maintained to prevent leaks, and storage areas should be clearly labelled and organized to minimize handling errors.

Safe handling practices are equally important. Workers should be trained in proper lifting, transferring, and storage techniques for liquids and hazardous materials. Using appropriate containers, securing lids, and avoiding overfilling can prevent accidental releases. In high-risk environments, engineering controls such as secondary containment systems, drip trays, and automated shut-off valves can further reduce the likelihood of spills.

Ultimately, a proactive approach that combines prevention, preparedness, and training will help OHS managers and HR directors protect workers and maintain compliance. By addressing both everyday risks and high-consequence scenarios, organizations can build safer, more resilient worksites.

Ask the Expert

"Green" Purchasing in the Workplace

Sustainability is becoming an important part of workplace practices, but what does buying "green" actually mean, and how can it impact your organization's performance?

Ensure your organization considers environmentally responsible purchasing decisions that supports workplace health, environmental cognizance, and long-term business success.

Question

What does buying "green" mean in an OHS and workplace sense, and how does it help my company's bottom line?

Answer

Buying "green" at work and outside of work means selecting goods and services that have minimal environmental and health impacts throughout their lifecycle. This includes considering how products are made, the materials used, how they are transported, and how they will be disposed of.

Adopting green purchasing practices can help your company's bottom line by reducing operating costs, lowering waste disposal expenses, and extending the lifespan of equipment and materials. Resource-efficient products often consume less energy and require less maintenance, leading to long-term savings. Organizations may benefit from improved compliance, reduced legal and insurance costs, and a stronger corporate image.

Explanation

Organizations that implement green purchasing programs often gain better control over their supply chains and improve relationships with suppliers, which can lead to operational efficiencies. These programs can also help attract and retain employees, as many workers prefer to work for companies that demonstrate a commitment to environmental and social responsibility.

Green products typically use fewer resources and generate less waste and pollution over their lifecycle. These practices also contribute to broader socio-economic benefits by supporting healthier communities, responsible production, and sustainable economic growth.

Environment

How to Use Return on Investment to Win Executive Support for Your Environmental Program

Most for-profit companies want to make as much money as possible for their shareholders. As an Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) coordinator, you must accept this reality and use it to your advantage by demonstrating that environmental compliance isn't just a moral obligation but an investment that directly contributes to positive financial performance. More precisely, you must show that the dollars your company invests in the EHS program will have a positive return on investment (ROI).

What Is ROI?

ROI is a measure that CFOs use to determine if spending money on a project makes financial sense. In addition to making go/no go decisions, ROI is used for comparing investment options to each other, such as deciding between buying new machines and retrofitting old ones. A positive ROI means that the benefits yielded by the investment are greater than the amount of the original investment. A negative ROI means the opposite. Although there are different variations, the basic ROI equation is:

$$\text{ROI} = \frac{\text{Net Benefits}}{\text{Costs}} \times 100\%$$

Net benefits: The difference between an investment's benefits and the costs associated with the benefits.

> *Example: If spending $100,000 on a new scrubber system is expected to generate $150,000 per year in reduced claims, the net benefit would be $50,000 ($150,000 - $100,000).*

Costs: The total costs needed to generate the benefits from the investment.

Time period: Companies typically measure recovery of investment over a unit of time. Some companies want to know if they can recover their investment costs of the in the first calendar or fiscal year. Others use an ROI formula that spreads out the benefits on a weighted average over the lifetime of the project.

ROI, EHS Programs, and Proposal Building

Be sure you know which ROI formula your own company uses.

Questions to ask:

- Are net benefits calculated before or after taxes and depreciation?
- At what ROI level does the company generally approve non-EHS investments?
- How immediate must ROI be?

Impact on EHS Program

ROI works best when benefits are easy to identify, measure, and manage. Back-end or "trailing" indicators, such as numbers of reportable spills, that EHS coordinators have traditionally used to measure the success of their programs may not work well with some ROI models. Thus, you might have to adopt "leading" indicators that are more predictive of spills and incidents to make the business case for the EHS investment you're advocating.

Why Your Hazard Assessment is Lying to You

Most organizations believe their safety systems are effective because hazard assessments have been completed, controls documented, and workers trained. On paper, everything appears in place. However, when serious incidents occur, the issue is rarely an unidentified hazard. Instead, it is often a known hazard where the defined control is no longer functioning as intended. The real risk lies not in what organizations don't know, but in what they assume is still working.

Over time, hazard assessments drift away from reality. These assessments are created at a specific point, reflecting conditions and expectations at that moment. But workplaces are dynamic. Equipment changes, production pressures shift, workers develop shortcuts, and environmental conditions evolve. Individually, these changes may seem minor, but collectively they alter how work is performed. This leads to "known hazard drift," where the hazard remains recognized and controls exist on paper, but in practice those controls are modified, bypassed, or inconsistently applied.

This issue is common even in well-developed safety systems. The failure is not in identifying hazards, but in assuming they remain controlled over time. Many systems emphasize completion—whether assessments were done, procedures written, and training delivered. While important, these are backward-looking measures. They confirm past actions, not whether controls are currently effective. As a result, organizations may appear compliant but lack visibility into how work is actually performed, leaving them operationally blind.

Regulators across Canada are increasingly focused on this gap between documentation and reality. Inspectors now compare written procedures with observed work and worker feedback. If controls are not functioning as described—such as missing machine guards or inconsistent lockout practices—the issue becomes one of failed implementation, not missing documentation. This exposes weaknesses in training, supervision, and overall system integrity.

Serious incidents often follow a predictable pattern: a hazard is known, a control is defined, and work initially follows the correct process. Over time controls are adapted for efficiency or convenience and become normalized, especially if nothing goes wrong. Supervisors may not intervene, and eventually, changing conditions expose the weakness in the altered control, leading to an incident.

Hazard drift occurs continuously, driven by day-to-day changes in operations. By the time a scheduled review happens, assessments may already be outdated. Effective systems treat hazard assessment as an ongoing validation process rather than a one-time task.

Supervisors play a critical role in managing this risk. Positioned closest to actual work, they can observe how tasks are performed and identify deviations from procedures. However, they are often not held accountable for verifying control effectiveness. When organizations empower supervisors to actively monitor and validate controls, hazard drift becomes visible earlier and can be addressed before it leads to incidents.

Worker Safety in Waste Management

Waste Management Hazards

Sharp objects present a significant hazard. Improperly disposed materials such as broken glass, metal scraps, or needles can cause cuts and puncture wounds. These injuries are especially concerning due to the potential for exposure to infectious diseases. Slips, trips, and falls are also common, often caused by wet surfaces, loose debris, or uneven terrain at disposal sites and transfer stations.

In addition to physical injuries, waste workers face exposure to biological and chemical hazards. Biohazard risks include contact with bacteria, viruses, and fungi found in household waste, medical waste, or organic materials. This can lead to infections, respiratory issues, or skin conditions. Workers may also encounter hazardous chemicals which can cause burns, poisoning, or long-term health issues.

Harm Prevention and Safe Work Procedures

Preventing harm in the waste management industry requires a combination of engineering controls, administrative measures, and proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE). PPE is essential and should be selected based on the specific tasks and hazards present. At a minimum, workers should wear cut-resistant gloves, steel-toe boots with slip-resistant soles, high-visibility clothing, and protective eyewear. In environments with airborne contaminants or dust, respiratory protection may be required. For handling potentially infectious materials, additional protection such as disposable gloves, coveralls, and face shields may be necessary.

Safe work practices are equally important. Workers should be trained in proper lifting techniques and encouraged to use mechanical aids, such as bin lifters or carts, whenever possible. Clear traffic management plans can help reduce the risk of vehicle-related incidents. Regular housekeeping at waste facilities can significantly reduce slip and trip hazards.

Biohazards

Biohazard exposure can be minimized through proper hygiene and handling procedures. Workers should avoid direct contact with waste whenever possible and use tools instead of hands to handle materials. Handwashing facilities or sanitizing stations should be readily available, and workers should be trained to wash hands thoroughly before eating, drinking, or touching their face. Vaccinations may also be recommended for workers in high-risk roles.

Geographically Specific Concerns

Across Canada, waste workers should remain vigilant for region-specific hazards. In colder climates, icy conditions increase the risk of slips and falls, while extreme heat during summer months can lead to heat stress or dehydration. Wildlife encounters, such as with rodents, raccoons, or insects, may also pose risks, particularly in rural or landfill settings. Additionally, the improper disposal of items like lithium-ion batteries has become an emerging hazard, as these can ignite and cause fires in collection vehicles or facilities.

Month-In-Review

A roundup of new legislation, regulations, government announcements, court cases, and arbitration rulings. Visit OHSInsider.com for the complete Month-In-Review. Now available by jurisdiction to keep you focused on what's been happening in your area including legal alerts, law announcements, and recent cases.

Federal

Infectious Illnesses: Amendments to the Human Pathogens and Toxins Act (HPTA) passed in December received Royal Assent and took effect. The HPTA regulates use and possession of human pathogens and toxins across all sectors, including research at universities and hospitals, vaccine development in the pharmaceutical industry, and quality control in the food industry.

Alberta

Environmental: A new agreement-in-principle with Ottawa would allow Alberta to continue regulating methane under its existing system while achieving a 75% reduction from 2014 levels by 2035. Methane emissions in Alberta have already dropped by more than 50% under the made-in-Alberta system and technology. Without an equivalency agreement, both federal and provincial rules would apply in Alberta.

British Columbia

PPE: Newly effective changes to OHS Regulations require operators and passengers on all-terrain vehicles, snowmobiles, and motorcycles to wear headgear meeting: i. CSA CAN3-D230-M85, Protective Headgear in Motor Vehicle Applications; ii. British Safety Institution Standard BS5361.1976; iii. Snell Memorial Foundation 1995 Standard for Protective Headgear; or iv. US Federal Standard for Motorcycle Helmets.

Manitoba

Housekeeping & Hygiene: Amendments to WSH Regulations require employers and prime contractors at certain construction project sites to ensure that hot water for handwashing is provided, effective April 1, 2027. The rules apply to industrial, commercial, or institutional buildings greater than 600 square metres or three-storeys-high, where more than 25 workers are on site at any one time.

New Brunswick

Transportation Safety: Vehicle registration stickers are no longer required in New Brunswick for passenger, commercial, and off-road vehicles as of April 1st. Customers who have valid stickers on their licence plates don't need to remove them, but new stickers will no longer be issued. Drivers are still required to renew their vehicle registration each year.

Newfoundland and Labrador

Environmental: The Newfoundland Assembly passed Bill 7 on March 17th, tripling minimum fines for violating the Endangered Species Act to $3,000 for a first conviction, $6,000 for a second, and $12,000 for a third. The maximum fine for a third conviction also increases from $200,000 to $250,000. The legislation also gives the province more time to respond to designation recommendations.

Northwest Territories

Electrical Safety: Technical Safety Act (Bill 33) amendments establishing safety requirements for elevators and lifts, boilers and pressure vessels, electrical systems, and gas equipment received Royal Assent and will take effect this summer. Northwest Territories thus becomes the fifth jurisdiction to regulate all electrical-mechanical fields under one 'umbrella' Act. The others are Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario, and Québec.

Nova Scotia

Environmental: Nova Scotia and the federal government agreed to implement a one-project, one-review environmental impact assessment system eliminating the need for project proponents to seek separate clearances from both governments. Projects currently requiring federal and provincial review include energy transmission lines that cross interprovincial boundaries, airports, marine terminals and ports, pipelines, and some mining projects.

Nunavut

New Laws: The Minister of Fisheries announced the completion of a new small craft harbour in Clyde River, Nunavut capable of accommodating 72 small craft vessels. Built under a $38 million contract awarded to Pilitak Enterprises Ltd. of Iqaluit, the new harbour contains breakwaters, a fixed wharf, dredging, a launch ramp, and floating wharves for safe docking.

Ontario

PPE: Newly proposed OHS regulations would require workers at construction project who are exposed to risk of side impact to wear Type 2 protective headwear that meets CSA Z94.1, ANSI Z89.1, or another standard providing at least equivalent protection. The headwear must also have chin straps or other means of retention if there's risk of dislodgement.

Prince Edward Island

Machine Safety: A worker was recently killed after getting pinned between a dump truck's raised box and vehicle chassis. Contributing factors cited by the Workers' Compensation Board (WCB): i. the dump box was raised and not blocked or secured from lowering; and ii. the worker was positioned in the crush point between the raised box and chassis.

Québec

Airborne Contaminants: New draft OHS regulations require employers to report health and safety information about specific contaminants and hazardous materials in their workplace to the Commission des normes, de l'équité, de la santé et de la sécurité du travail (CNESST) every three years. The agency would then share that data with other government agencies to advance public safety.

Saskatchewan

Industry Challenges: The new provincial budget provides for a five-year extension of the Saskatchewan Chemical Fertilizer Incentive, the non-refundable, non-transferable 15% corporate income tax credit on capital expenditures valued at $10 million or more for newly constructed or expanded eligible chemical fertilizer production facilities in the province.

Yukon

OHS Enforcement: Under its new policy, the Yukon Workers Safety and Compensation Board (WSCB) will impose administrative monetary penalties (AMPs) from $1,000 to $20,000 for OHS violations depending on seriousness of the offence and whether it's a first, second, or third/subsequent violation. The agency will also publish names of company who receive AMPs. Effective date: June 1.

Case Alerts

Infectious Illness: COVID Vaccination Refusal Is Just Cause to Fire Airline Worker

WestJet fired an aircraft maintenance employee for disobeying its mandatory COVID-19 vaccination policy. The Canada Industrial Relations Board ruled that the policy was a reasonable safety measure and that WestJet had just cause to terminate. The federal court dismissed the employee's appeal, finding that the Board's ruling was reasonable and the hearing was fair [*Henrikson v. Westjet*, 2026 FCA 39 (CanLII), February 24, 2026].

Action Point: Dealing with vaccine refusals, whether COVID-19, influenza, measles, or any other pathogen, is very tricky even in health-sensitive settings. Find out how to take the right steps if workers defy your mandatory vaccination policy.

Material Handling: Casino Fined $70,000 for Not Securing Loose Lockers to a Wall

A casino worker suffered serious injuries after being struck and pinned by falling lockers. OHS inspectors determined that the casino operator was aware that the lockers weren't secured to a wall. As a result, it was fined $70,000 after pleading guilty to failing to eliminate or control a hazard that it identified during a hazard assessment [Cold Lake First Nations Casino Corporation, *Govt. Press Release*, March 25, 2026].

Action Point: Falling equipment and materials are a frequent source of serious injury and OHS orders and penalties. Find out how to implement an effective Materials Stacking Safety & Compliance Game Plan at your workplace.

Due Diligence: Company's OHS Safety Training Program Isn't Up to Snuff

A countertop production company was fined $67,435 for failing to provide proper safety training and supervision to a 22-year-old worker who suffered a partial amputation of two fingers while operating a table saw at one of its plants. The British Columbia Workers' Compensation Appeal Tribunal (WCAT) upheld the penalty and rejected the company's due diligence defence. Exhibit A: The firm's OHS manual contained a page for the company's president to sign and date but the spaces for both signature and date were blank. The company's recent record of being on the receiving end of several WorkSafeBC OHS orders, including for having an inadequate OHS program, didn't help its case [*A2201154 (Re)*, 2026 CanLII 21304 (BC WCAT), February 3, 2026].

Action Point: One of the morals of this case is that a company's executive leaders must be involved in the OHS program—and that involvement must be documented—to establish due diligence. Use the OHSI Due Diligence Scorecard and accompanying Case Summaries to draw other important lessons that you can use to assess whether your own OHS program meets the standards of due diligence.

Respiratory Protection: Carbon Monoxide Poisoning Results in Multiple OHS Charges

The Newfoundland OHS Division charged an electrical/plumbing/HVAC contractor with eight OHS violations in connection with an incident in which a worker suffered serious injuries as a result of being exposed

to carbon monoxide. The charges include failure to provide adequate training, PPE, safe work procedures, and ensure that the hair of workers using tight-fitting respirators doesn't interfere with the facepiece's effective seal. A supervisor has also been charged with failing to ensure workers' proper use of PPE [Skir Enterprises Inc., *Govt Press Release*, March 12, 2026].

Action Point: Don't let this happen to your workers! Find out how to implement an effective Respiratory Protection Equipment Compliance Game Plan at your site.

OHS Inspection: Mere Possibility of Crane Collapse Not Enough to Justify Compliance Order

OHS inspectors issued a Stop-Work and five Compliance Orders to an excavation subcontractor after determining that the excavation work was too close to a tower crane at the site. The subcontractor appealed the Order to comply with the requirement to "ensure that a utility pole, building or other structure is provided adequate support or removed if the utility pole, building or other structure may become unstable because of excavation or trenching activity." The Labour Board set aside the Order along with the $500 Administrative Monetary Penalty, reasoning that the risk of the crane's collapsing, while possible, wasn't probable. Now it was the government's turn to appeal. But the Nova Scotia high court ruled that the Board's decision wasn't erroneous and disallowed the appeal [*Nova Scotia (Occupational Health and Safety) v. DJ Excavation Inc.*, 2026 NSCA 24 (CanLII), March 17, 2026].

Action Point: This is a noteworthy case because courts and tribunal typically defer to OHS enforcers and prosecutors in interpreting the terms of OHS regulations. That's why employers lose OHS appeals far more frequently than they win them. While it deals with technical excavations issues, the principles in this case in terms of inspector discretion would also apply to other enforcement situations. Use the OHSI Excavations Compliance Game Plan to avoid excavation and trenching violations at your site.

Material Handling: Maintenance Contractor Fined $80,000 for Failure to Brace Furnace Pipe

A worker hired to perform maintenance at an industrial facility got injured after being hit by a pipe that fell during a furnace installation operation. The victim's employer was fined $80,000 after pleading guilty to failing to ensure that every part of the project, including a temporary structure, was adequately braced to prevent any movement that could affect the pipe's stability or cause its failure or collapse [Trade-Mark Industrial Inc., *MOL Press Release*, March 30, 2026].

Action Point: Falling equipment and materials are a frequent source of serious injury and OHS orders and penalties. Find out how to implement an effective Materials Stacking Safety & Compliance Game Plan at your workplace.

Handling Pesticides and Herbicides Safely

Personal protective equipment (PPE) is a key control measure when working with pesticides and herbicides. The specific PPE required will depend on the product's hazard classification and the recommendations outlined in its Safety Data Sheet (SDS) and label instructions. Common PPE includes chemical-resistant gloves, coveralls or protective clothing, goggles or face shields, and appropriate respiratory protection where inhalation risks exist. Waterproof boots and head protection may also be necessary in certain applications. It is essential that PPE is properly fitted, maintained, and inspected regularly to ensure effectiveness. Workers must also be trained on correct donning and doffing procedures to avoid contamination.

Understanding how pesticides and herbicides are used is equally important for safe handling. These substances may be applied using handheld sprayers, backpack sprayers, boom sprayers, or aerial application methods, depending on the scale and environment. Mixing and loading operations often present the highest risk of exposure, as workers handle concentrated forms of the chemicals. Dilution must be performed carefully, following manufacturer instructions, and using designated mixing areas with appropriate containment measures. Wherever possible, closed transfer systems or pre-mixed solutions should be used to reduce exposure.

Proper Handling and Application

Proper handling practices begin with thorough training and clear procedures. Workers should always read and follow product labels, which are legally binding documents in Canada and provide critical information on safe use, application rates, and required PPE. Chemicals should be stored in clearly labelled, secure areas away from incompatible substances, heat sources, and unauthorized personnel. Containers must be kept sealed when not in use, and secondary containment systems should be used to prevent leaks or spills from spreading.

During application, workers should be mindful of environmental conditions such as wind speed, temperature, and precipitation, all of which can influence chemical drift and effectiveness. Establishing buffer zones and restricting access to treated areas can help protect other workers and the public. After application, equipment should be cleaned in designated areas to prevent contamination, and wash water should be managed according to regulatory requirements.

Addressing Emergencies

Emergency preparedness is another critical aspect of pesticide and herbicide safety. Worksites should have spill response procedures, first aid measures, and emergency contact information readily available. In the event of exposure, immediate action such as flushing affected skin or eyes with clean water can reduce the severity of an injury. All incidents should be reported and investigated to prevent recurrence.

Preventing pesticide and herbicide harm requires training, PPE, safe handling, and proactive oversight.