



OH&S STEWARDS BULLETIN

Identifying “risk control” principles

When a workplace health or safety hazard has been identified, one of the roles of the OH&S steward on the joint occupational health and safety (JOHS) committee is to recommend corrective actions to be taken (**WCB Act Part 3, Division 4, 130 – Duties and functions of joint committee**).

When a health and/or safety hazard has been identified and OH&S stewards are investigating potential solutions, it's important to understand the **principle of risk control**.

The first and ideal level of risk control is to eliminate the risk. Whether looking at a risk of injury/illness due to a musculoskeletal injury (MSI), violence, exposure to chemical or biological hazards, etc., the WCB regulations state that the employer must eliminate the risk.

It is only when it's not possible to eliminate the risk that the employer can consider other measures (in the following order):

- **Engineering controls** are the physical work environment, equipment or materials. For example, mechanical lifts are an engineering control that can reduce the risk of an MSI to health care workers when transferring patients/clients/residents, proper hood fans to protect pharmacy workers from exposure to chemo drugs, ergonomically designed work stations for clerical workers, etc.
- **Administrative controls** include the use and scheduling of resources and staff to improve how the work is organized and controlled. This may mean an increase in staff or a change of schedule to improve how the work is organized and performed. For example, organizing the work so that highly physically demanding or repetitive tasks are broken up throughout the work day with less demanding/repetitive tasks.
- **Personal protective equipment** may only be used as a control measure if other methods of risk control are not practicable or in addition to other controls. Personal protective equipment includes gloves, gown, masks, goggles, etc.

When evaluating the controls and making recommendations to the employer, keep in mind that if a health and safety risk cannot be eliminated, then you want to find a control that will best reduce the extent, duration and frequency of exposure.